

# The Sales Letter Plan

*“The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex and overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one.”*

Mark Twain

## The Purpose Of A Plan

Anxious to get started writing your sales letter? Good. I strongly urge you to begin with a plan. With a simple plan or outline in place, you'll be armed with all the essentials you need to create a powerful and persuasive piece.

It doesn't matter what your writing project is – book, report, or sales letter. Planning makes life easier. It organizes your thoughts. It gives you a roadmap to follow so you're never stuck at a dead end. A sales letter plan forces you to think things through up front -- before you write -- making the actual writing much easier and giving it a smoother flow.

Planning facilitates productivity. It forces you to think clearly and focus on the important areas, while providing an overview of the project. There's no question - a sound plan does work in your favor.

When you get right down to it, a sales letter plan helps you:

- Gather Important Information
- Organize and Assess All Available Data
- Assemble Key Sales Letter Components
- Prioritize Benefits Based On Their Appeal To Prospects
- Confirm That The Important Ingredients Are All Present Before You Begin

A sales letter plan simplifies the actual writing. It gives you concrete material from which to work. It naturally dictates the direction you take, and it enables you to follow along a roadmap to the successful completion of your sales letter.

The more detailed your plan, the easier it is to write compelling sales copy. With a plan, you're never left wondering what to write next. All the essential information is right before your eyes -- making it quicker and easier to form interesting and persuasive copy.

*“When it comes to writing copy, far too much attention is paid to the actual writing and far too little is paid to ferreting out facts about that which the copywriter is trying to sell.”*

Gary Halbert

Planning isn't just a means to an end, however. Yes, having a completed sales letter plan in front of you is very important. But the hidden value of your plan lies in the thinking processes that go into completing it. As even the most basic of plans takes shape, you'll discover valuable ideas, key points, and concepts to employ. A plan literally forces you to think things through ahead of time.

After you've used this method to write a few sales letters, you'll see how getting it all recorded on paper helps you tremendously.

Crafting a sales letter plan does take time -- perhaps this is why so few do it. But the time and effort expended always pays a worthwhile dividend. A plan gives you direction, power, and focus. It puts you on a straight path towards your goal.

## **Identify Your Goals and Objectives**

Step one of your sales letter plan is to state your goals and objectives.

What are your priorities? What kind of measurable results do you desire and how do you plan to get there?

Getting clear about what it is that you want is an important first step. When you're clear about the target, reaching it is much easier. Knowing what it is you seek gives you a target to aim for -- a large, stationary target. When you're not crystal clear about your goal, it's an uphill battle. It's as though you're trying to hit a moving target, and you're never quite sure where you stand.

Choose a number. Not just any number... but a figure you feel is attainable. Since your sales efforts are an ongoing process rather than a one-shot campaign, you can set your sales goals by the month or year.

As an example, you might choose 100 sales per month, or 1200 per year. With a \$97 product, that's \$9,700 in monthly sales... or \$116,400 for the year.

Set a target for both sales and the percentage of conversions. You'll have many times more visitors than actual buying customers. Not everyone buys, in fact, most don't. To generate one sale, you might need to attract 10, 50, or 500 visitors to your sales page – depending on the variables involved. Converting one in ten represents a conversion percentage of 10% -- one in five hundred means your conversion rate is .2%. The lower the number of visitors you require to achieve your goal, the higher your conversion ratio and the better it is for you.

Using the example above...

If you could sell one out of every ten prospects (a 10% conversion rate), you would need 1000 visitors each month to reach a monthly target of \$9700. A conversion rate of 1%, would require 10,000 visitors, while a .2% response means you'd need 50,000 visitors to achieve the same result.

Now that you've decided the kind of results you want, it's time to get clear as to how you're going to achieve it. Consider the following question...

What's the one action you want readers to take after reading your letter?

Are you going for a direct sale... or merely asking prospects to raise their hands in an expression of interest? It's important to decide your strategy early on. You need to know the specific outcome you want.

Whether your letter is designed to generate leads or close sales, your objective should be to foster good vibrations and positive feelings. You want to create a comfortable, pleasurable environment where prospects take away nothing but good feelings about you, your product, and your company.

Since closing sales and building profits is ultimately what it's all about, this book will focus on sales letters that go for the sale every time.

## **Define Your Market**

First, find a hungry market. Then, shape your offer to satisfy this already existing hunger. That's the logical way to do business. But unfortunately, most people get it all wrong. They find themselves in a particular industry out of habit. Or, they've acquired the rights to a product guaranteed to be the next 'pet rock'. Problem is... they've done so before clearly identifying a plentiful, hungry market that would do almost anything to get this hot new product into their own hands.

*Identifying and fully understanding your target market is a crucial prerequisite to business success. Knowing the type of individual you're aiming for and understanding their habits, preferences, interests, and lifestyle, makes it much more likely that you'll be able to reach them with your message of importance.*

Who exactly is your ideal customer? Can you describe this kind of individual? Start by listing some basic demographic information that typically defines your prospects and customers. Consider details such as age, geographic location, spoken language, occupation, association or group memberships, outside interests, income, hobbies, and preferred reading material. Try to get as realistic a picture of your typical prospective customer as you possibly can.

After you've compiled your basic demographic information, begin to develop a psychological profile. What thoughts, worries, anxieties, or problems, weigh heaviest on your prospect's mind? What does he want? Think in terms of having, doing, being, earning or acquiring and try to isolate the deepest desires of your prospective customer – desires that your product can fulfill. Look at how these people make purchases and consider the likelihood of them buying from your website.

Creating both a demographic and psychographic profile enables you to piece together an actual 'sketch' of your prospects and customers. Assembling basic information about those you wish to reach gives you a composite of the target – someone you've defined as being the right prospect for your offer.

When you can picture a living, breathing individual with problems to solve and desires to fulfill, it's much easier to craft a message that gets noticed -- and acted on.

*"If you can't turn yourself into a customer, you probably shouldn't be in the ad writing business at all."*

Leo Burnett

## **Identify Your Competitors Strengths and Weaknesses**

The next step is to review current and potential competitors. Get to know the other players in the game. Anticipate the arrival of new competing forces as the web continues to grow and word of your success spreads.

Study known competitors – both online and offline. Visit their websites and observe their marketing material and processes. Look at what they offer now and compare current offers to previous proposals. How do competitors entice prospects? What special incentives do they use?

Take a good hard look at competing products. Dissect them – one by one. Take a look inside to see what makes them tick. Evaluate their strengths and identify potential weaknesses.

Examine the various guarantees offered by others. Do these guarantees help to encourage additional sales from unsure prospects? Does any guarantee stand out among the rest by completely favoring the prospect – in effect, making the proposal entirely risk free?

How are your competitors perceived in the marketplace? What reputation do they have? How deeply entrenched is their brand on the psyche of the prospective customer?

Assessing the competition gives you an understanding of your opponents before you step into the ring. Not only will you have a better idea of the challenges facing you, but you'll also be able to create a more appealing offer and a stronger guarantee, giving you an advantage right off the bat.

## **Get To Know Your Own Product Inside-Out**

Become an expert on your own product. Chances are, you already have some in-depth knowledge... you may even have created it on your own. But now is the time to break it down and look at it with fresh eyes -- as any prospect would.

Write down every physical attribute -- every feature -- you can think of, anything that describes or defines the product itself.

*“There’s no secret formula for advertising success, other than to learn everything you can about the product. Most products have some unique characteristic, and the really great advertising comes right out of the product and says something about the product that no one else can say. Or at least no one else is saying.”*

Morris Hite

If your product was a book, your feature list might include things like:

- Number of pages
- Printing format – single sided or double sided
- Typeface style and size
- Width of columns
- Page layout

- Average number of words per page
- Type of cover
- Type of binding
- Size and shipping weight
- Publisher/ copyright holder
- Number of chapters or main sections
- Table of contents, index, and appendices
- Major topic and sub-topics covered
- Available formats – hard copy or digital
- How product is shipped
- Order packaging and fulfillment
- Bonus items included with order
- About the author
- Recommended resources

In short, you want to write down every conceivable component or feature of your product. Don't overlook this step thinking you have all this information tucked away in the back of your mind. Get it down on paper or open up a new file on your computer.

The next step is to take each of the features listed and convert it into an appealing benefit to the buyer. One exercise I like to do when tackling a new sales letter project is to get out a fresh sheet of paper, and draw a line down the page from top to bottom. On the left side, write "FEATURES" – on the right, "BENEFITS". You can use the Features and Benefits Chart included at the end of this chapter.

Features are all about products. It's all about the physical thing the customer gets in exchange for his money. A feature is any specific product detail.

Benefits, on the other hand, are about prospects and customers. Features are about products and benefits are about people. Therefore, benefits matter most. They represent the true value in the customer's eyes. Benefits are the primary reason prospects become buying customers. It's what having the product will do for them.

Now go through your list of product features and turn each into at least one benefit.

Continuing with our example above...

If your book was a lengthy tome of some, 300+ pages, you can transform that fact into an appealing benefit...

*“You get 347 full-size pages jam-packed with hundreds of “secret” strategies, tips, and little-known tactics you can use today to shoot your web traffic through the roof!”*

On the other hand, if your product was a short ebook or tips booklet that consisted of a mere 16 pages of information, you can still use ‘size’ as a major benefit to your prospect.

*“You get no filler and no fluff – just 16 pages of hard-won, time-tested, extraordinarily-effective strategies you can put into action within minutes... and start reaping the rewards of an overflow of web site traffic immediately.”*

Every feature has at least one inherent benefit. And it’s up to you to find this benefit and bring it to the forefront. After all, if you don’t uncover the benefit and make it obvious to your prospect... essentially, it doesn’t exist. And it won’t help you make the sale either. What you want to do is solve your prospect’s problem and help him fulfill a dream. But he won’t know your product is capable of helping if you don’t bring it to his attention.

Okay... so now you have a long list of features and their accompanying benefits. Good. The next step is to prioritize your benefits. Rank them in order from most appealing to least – from your potential customer’s point of view.

You want to deliver your biggest bang up front. It’s this top benefit that’s most important -- therefore, you need to unveil it first. Arrange your advantages in an inverted pyramid format – starting with the benefit that best fulfills a major ‘want’. Find the benefit that almost instantly solves the prospect’s problem -- the benefit that delivers a ‘magical’ solution. That’s your strongest marketing weapon – one that needs to be exposed with maximum power and enthusiasm.

Jotting down a full list of benefits makes the task of writing a compelling sales letter much less daunting. It gives you a great foundation from which to craft attention-grabbing headlines, compelling bullet points, and intriguing sub-headings.

## **Determine Your Strongest, Most Unique Selling Advantages**

What sets you apart? Whatever it is that makes buying from you more advantageous – that’s what you need to bring to the forefront. Distinct, highly

valued advantages give you an edge over anyone else offering competing products.

**Why should prospects do business with you? How are they greater advantaged in doing business with you vs. any other competitor?**

These are key questions -- worthy of reflection. You want to uncover or create an overwhelming edge... something that will give you an almost unfair advantage over everyone else selling anything even remotely similar to your goods.

When you've articulated your main unique selling advantage, work at making it a foundational principle of your business -- one that is talked about, or at least thought of, whenever your business or product category is mentioned. Consistently communicate what it is that makes your product a much better purchase for the buyer.

Your unique advantage is your most effective tool in drawing first-time customers to you. It establishes an original perspective and position in the minds of prospective customers.

Your unique selling advantages are what sets you apart from anyone else -- even those who happen to be marketing the exact same products to the exact same crowd. It gives your business distinction in any competitive marketplace. Your original and exclusive benefits help to position you favorably in the eyes of your market.

The key to capitalizing on a distinctive advantage is to make that advantage clearly and unmistakably known to your prospects. Make it easy for people to grasp your advantages. That's why free samples, test drives, and trial offers work so well -- they give the prospect a 'hands on' experience -- in effect, an actual demonstration of the advantages.

Think of your *Unique Selling Advantage* as a ten-second commercial for your business. *What can you say in ten seconds that gives you superior positioning in the eyes of your target prospects?*

Unique benefits are your strongest and most compelling sales statements because they separate you favorably from everyone else.

Actively promoting your distinct advantages, as opposed to your company name, (which everybody else does because they don't know any better) gives you the most valuable exposure of all. It actually means something to prospects and gives them a reason to respond to you, first. Prospects relate and respond because a strong benefit or

**advantage appeals specifically to the innermost wants of those prospects.**

**Your unique advantages tell the marketplace what you offer that others don't. It's about being different from everyone else. It's about clearly and succinctly communicating what you do for customers to make you the decisive choice over all other options -- including doing nothing.**

## **Create An Irresistible Offer**

An offer comprises much more than your main product. It's the full package including your product, multiple bonus items, and any extra premiums or incentives all rolled into one. It's everything your buyer gets in exchange for payment.

Your product may have dozens... even hundreds of positive attributes. It could be the hottest how-to program ever devised... or the greatest thing since the Internet. But, it's still just a product. You need to make it into something larger – something worth 5, 10, 20, – even 100 times more than the asking price.

An offer makes the product much more appealing. That's the key. You want to stack the plusses on your side, making the decision to buy a 'no-brainer' because of all the extra value the buyer gets. You want to encourage those people considering a purchase to decide in favor of action. To do otherwise would be to miss out on the glorious opportunity that's theirs for the taking right now.

Creating a powerful offer is about putting together a collection of value-added enhancements – additions to the main product that make it even more useful or valuable to own. It's also about minimizing the risks, making it easier for prospects to go ahead and buy because they have a safety valve in place, should they be dissatisfied for any reason.

Here's an example of an offer – one I've used for some time to sell my headlines package:

- Great Headlines Instantly Manual (Main Product)
- Best Headline Words And Phrases -- Reference Guide
- 7 Quick & Easy Headline Formulas – Special Report
- The Ultimate, Idea-Inducing Headline Collection – Special Report
- How To Get More Done In Less Time – Tips Booklet
- 2 Free 30-Minute Consultation Packages – Certificate

## **Add A Strong Guarantee**

Your prospective customer is naturally hesitant about buying. He fears losing his hard-earned money. He's deathly afraid of being the victim of a scam... or being ripped off in some way. He worries about getting less than promised, less than he bargained for. Unscrupulous merchants are everywhere... and the Internet is no exception. Your prospect knows this. Cheats and con artists proliferate in cyberspace. You have to be cognizant of the added fear your potential customers might be feeling about buying online.

How will you alleviate these fears and assure prospects they have nothing to worry about? That's the challenge... and now is a good time to start thinking about it, while you're drafting your plan.

Review competing offers. See how others work to reduce fear and anxiety. Then, take what's already out there and make it better.

Your goal should be to make doing business with you as risk-free as possible. You can do so by extending the time period of your guarantee. Instead of offering a 30-day guarantee, make a radical extension to 120 days or more. Break the mold of the industry standard.

Be willing to go out on a limb. Assume the risk yourself so your prospects won't have to.

Another strategy is to simplify the process. Reduce the red tape. State your guarantee in the simplest, most-easily understood terms. Make it easy for any dissatisfied buyer to get their money back quickly and hassle-free. Don't make them jump through hoops to get what they want, for you'll rarely discover the real reasons anyway.

Extend the terms, simplify the process, and make your guarantee a major part of your letter and it will become a powerful and effective marketing tool. The secret to success with a guarantee is to make it as risk-free as possible.

## **Build A Case In Favor Of Your Product**

It's never enough to express the benefits of your product. You also need to present as much credible proof as you can gather. *After all... prospects know you're trying to sell them a product.* They expect you to expand on the attributes and make it sound like your product leaves the competition in the dust. But they're also inclined to be skeptical of mere sales talk.

That's where 'proof' factors into the equation. Proof provides legitimacy to any sales argument. Proof is back up material that supports your claims and lends credibility to your presentation. Any proof you put forth should address prospect concerns and provide solid answers as to why they should listen carefully to what you have to say.

At this early planning stage, begin gathering anything that can help build your case in favor of a sale.

Look for...

- Success Stories
- Editorial Product Reviews
- Laboratory Tests
- Customer Testimonials
- Endorsements From Recognized Names In Your Field

Customer feedback is crucial. Get prospects to beta-test your new product for free in exchange for their honest opinions and reviews. Encourage responses from customers – particularly those early buyers. Place your product into the hands of experts (with their permission, of course) and ask them to offer any comments. When you do get feedback whether it's delivered via email, telephone, fax or in person – make sure you record it first. Then, always ask for permission to use all comments. Most will gladly oblige.

## **Outline The Order Process**

Set up a flow chart that documents the entire process from attracting prospects to depositing the revenue into your account. It's a worthwhile exercise to chart the course of action, from beginning to end.

- Prospecting
- Attracting Attention
- Keeping Prospect Engaged
- Injecting 'Magic' into Your Proposition
- Proving Your Claims
- Leading Prospects to The Order Form
- Optional Ordering Procedures

- Shipping Options
- Receiving and Processing Order
- Notification and Shipment
- Depositing Your Revenues At The Bank