How to write a sales letter

Writing great sales letters is one of the most important skills you can learn if you’re going to be successful with your club marketing.

The problem with sales letters, however, is that people approach it from the wrong angle. They write bland, boring letters that focus on them and not the reader. Often the letters lack relevance and they fail to convey a clear message.

The good news is that there is a formula to writing great sales letters and, if you follow the formula, anyone can write brilliant sales letters that will make a huge difference for your club.

The formula works on the basis that your letter must grab your reader’s attention. If you don’t, you could have the best rugby club in the world and it just won’t matter. Here’s the formula, ignore this at your peril!

**Rule 1 – Planning**
Take a few minutes to work out the objective(s) of your letter. What do you want your reader to do as a result of reading your letter? Pick up the phone? Ask for more information? Take a trial? Don’t have more than two objectives and be very clear that you can only have one subject per letter. For instance, if you’re writing about membership don’t be tempted to add in about attending an event. If you’re writing about a partnership, don’t throw in extra about membership. You’ll confuse and probably fail on both counts.

**Rule 2 – Target Reader**
I have bad news for you. Whatever you previously thought, your reader is not interested in you. It’s actually all about them. As you write your letter answer the one question they will be asking as they read, ‘what’s in it for me?’ Consider their priorities and use lots of ‘you’ language not ‘we’.

**Rule 3 – Reasons why they won’t buy**
Put yourself in their shoes and think about all the common reasons that will stop them from buying what you have. Now you have to make sure that in your letter you explicitly cover each one. For instance, if you believe that your reader might consider the sponsorship package as too expensive, you must explain why it’s priced that way, what value it offers, what it will do for the target company’s awareness/credibility/image/CSR values etc.
Rule 4 – Benefits
Now this is really important and to highlight why, I’m going to relay the classic copywriting story about buying a drill.

A customer walks into a DIY shop and asks for a ¼ inch drill. But that’s not really what he wants. What he really wants is a ¼ inch hole. But is that ultimately what he is looking for? Of course not, what he wants is a ¼ inch hole so that he can put up his book shelves and clear the clutter from his sitting room. The moral of the story is that you never sell the features of the product or the service, you sell the benefits.

In this scenario the shop assistant would do well to find out what the customer wants the drill for and then she could explain how the drill will save time, hassle and avoid a full blown domestic when a lesser rated drill causes the wall to crack! (note to self – get husband to buy better drill 😊)

Notice how I’m using two emotions to sell the drill – in this case hassle and an argument. People buy emotionally and justify logically. Let me explain what I mean. I was out shopping with a friend last weekend and she bought herself yet another handbag. She already had 9 at this point and she really didn’t need anymore but her heart won over her head and she bought handbag number 10. She didn’t need any more handbags, she just wanted another.

In your letter sell to your reader based on their emotions – whether it is their pains:

- Unhealthy
- Unfit
- Poor social circle
- Lack of confidence
- Inactive
- Too expensive
- Boring

Or their desires and needs:

- Healthy
- Happy
- Fun
- Popular
- Confident
- Good looking
- Good value

Rule 5 – Credibility
We’re talking here about using testimonials, references, results, scores, statistics to demonstrate why what you’re offering will deliver the results that the reader is looking for. If your target reader is an existing member, then you’ll need less proof but if you’re writing to a new audience then more proof will be required.
Rule 6 – Offer
A letter without an offer is like a rugby player without his boots – useless! I can’t think of a single occasion why you would write a sales letter without incorporating a really good offer (with a deadline). Make sure the offer is simple and that you make it easy to buy. Letters that end ‘I invite you to call us’ or ‘Please do get in touch’ are a joke, please don’t commit this copywriting sin!

Rule 7 – Don’t be boring
You’ve got to capture your reader’s attention with something interesting, relevant and useful. Use personality, character and humour and never write in that boring ‘corporate speak’ so that so many people use. Try writing pretty much as you speak. There’s only one reason why children want to read a 600 page Harry Potter novel, and that’s because it isn’t boring!

Rule 8 – Headline
This is the first thing that people read and if it doesn’t spark some interest then they won’t read any further – simples! Here’s some insider tips on the three best types of headlines:

- How to
- Secrets
- Using numbers (but don’t use 10 or 20, it sounds made up)
- Or a combination of all three

“How to ….get a six pack in 8½ weeks”
“Jeff reveals his secret formula for getting a six pack”
“7 steps to a six pack your friends will envy”
“The secret 7 step formula to a body your friends will envy in 8½ weeks – FREE!”

Rule 9 – P.S.
The second most read part of any sales letter is a P.S. at the bottom. Because people tend to scan read letters their eye is drawn quickly to the P.S. at the bottom and for this reason alone, it is a good idea to use one. Using a P.P.S. and even a P.P.P.S draws more attention to the bottom. Here’s what your postscript should contain:

✓ P.S. Big benefit/your guarantee
✓ P.P.S Deadline/number available
✓ P.P.P.S Repeat the call to action

Rule 10 – Jazz it up
Use copywriting ‘scribbles’ to make the letter more interesting. Think about the layout and put important stuff in boxes. Use bold font, underlining, asterixes, stars, exclamation marks, highlighting and anything else you can think of so that the important information grabs the reader’s attention.
Rule 11 – Use stories
Since early childhood we’ve got used to listening to and relating to stories. Using stories in your letter will help to capture people’s imaginations and they will engage with the ‘hero’ in your story – as long as you keep it relevant. So please don’t go off on tangents, but use stories to communicate your message in a compelling and interesting way. With all good stories there should be a:

- Beginning
- Problem
- Climax
- End