

# How to Make Your Headlines Stand Out

Does your headline get lost in the crowd?



Or does it stand out?



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# 1 Why bother with headlines?

Many people ask this question. On the internet, it's Search Engine Optimisation that determines where your webpage appears on the search results page, and none of the traffic generation methods I've looked at seem to spend much time talking about headlines, so how can it be so important?

The answer lies in understanding the purpose of a headline, and where it sits in the overall piece.

In summary:

**Traffic Generation brings people to your site.**

**Great Headlines Make Them Stay and Read**

## 1.1 What is the purpose of a headline?

If you want your headline to do its job, it's important that you first know what that job is!

So let's take a moment to think about the job of a headline.

Let's start with a few things that a headline is NOT.

- It's NOT a summary of what's to follow.
- It's not a throw away that doesn't really matter
- It's not something you should just write up front and forget

### 1.1.1 So what is a headline for?

**The purpose of a headline is to entice people to read your story or article.**

That's it.

It's that simple.

Your headline only has one purpose!

## 1.2 Why does a good headline matter?

The purpose of a headline is to entice people to read your story or article.

If you don't have a good headline, it will not meet that single purpose.

If it does not meet that purpose, then you will not get many (if any) readers.

Your headline needs to be eye-catching and interesting.

It is something that it's well worth taking time over

### 1.2.1 What do **you** do if a headline does not entice you?

We all know that if a headline does not attract us, we are very unlikely to read the story that follows.

If an internet headline doesn't grab our attention pretty much immediately, we will simply click through.

When writing your headlines ALWAYS ask the question, 'Would this make me want to read on?'

### 1.2.2 5 times as many people read the headline as read the copy

David Ogilvy, a very successful businessman known as the father of advertising said: *'on average 5 times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written your headline, you've spent 80 cents of your advertising dollar.'*

Think about that for a moment.

**On average**, 80 out of 100 people who read your headline will not read any further.

You work hard to drive traffic to your website or blog, and when it arrives, 80 out of 100 people will read the headline and immediately click away again.

If you want more than 20 out of a hundred to read what you have written, then your headline has to be **above average**.

I've read other reports that suggest Mr Ogilvy was quite conservative.

Other estimates say that an average of 9 out of 10 people who read the headline will not read any further.

Whatever the actual number, the truth is that if you don't have a good headline, most of your potential readers will simply not bother.

You will lose readers, and potentially business simply because you do not have a killer headline!

### 1.2.3 How long should you spend writing a headline?

Take time to create a good (or better, great) headline, and you'll have invested that time wisely.

However, there is no absolute answer to this question.

In general terms, if you spend less than 30 minutes on your headlines, they are unlikely to be consistently great.

Some people say that you should spend as long on your headline as you do on your content.

You may feel that is a bit too much, but there really is no denying how important your headline is.

So there are no rules for how long it should take to come up with a killer headline.

But it's so important that you shouldn't stop until you have a headline that answers all of the questions asked in this report, and most especially, one that meets the one and only purpose of your headline – **to entice readers to your content**.

Your content, of course, needs to be consistently high quality, but no matter how good it is, if the headline doesn't do its job, no-one will ever read it!

## 2 What should a great headline look like?

### 2.1 Interesting and Positive Adjectives and Trigger words

These words will evoke a psychological response.

Positive words will produce a positive response, and since that's always what we're seeking, I won't concern myself much here with negative words, except to say that sometimes, headlines of the form 'Don't .... Until You Read This' can be very effective

Positive and interesting words will catch your reader's eye and entice them to read further.

I'm a strong advocate of keeping things simple, so I also firmly believe that 2 short simple words are better than 1 complicated one!

Positive words for me are, therefore, words like Fun; Free; Easy; Simple; Strange; Amazing.

I often use these together with words like Reasons; Facts; Ideas; Tricks; Ways; Secrets; Lessons.

I also try to use questions when I can.

In headline terms, I find 'How' and 'Why' the most useful, but the others creep in from time to time.

### 2.2 Numbers can emphasise content

How many headlines do you see that include numbers (or even start with numbers)?

Scan the shelves at the newsagents and you'll see plenty:

10 Reasons Why ...

5 Top Tips ...

3 Lessons you Must Learn if ...

Are just a few examples.

There are no obvious rules as to what the number should be.

I usually work on 3, 5 or 7 (occasionally 10), but sometimes obscure numbers (17 Keys to.... or 39 Secrets for ....) work well.

### 2.3 Reasons Why

A headline must give readers a 'Reason Why'.

They need a compelling reason why reading further is a good use of their time.

When someone reads a headline, they will likely subconsciously (and in a split second), ask themselves a number of questions.

The answers to these questions will determine whether they decide to read on.

These questions will include:

- What's in it for me?  
What will I get from reading more?

- Am I intrigued by what this headline is promising?  
Does this article promise something I want to know about?
- Do I believe the body will deliver on the headline promises?  
Headline promises must be intriguing enough to attract readers, but not so outrageous that they are unbelievable.
- Am I emotionally drawn to read on?

**The reality is that first time readers decide whether the content is actually worth reading based only on the headline.**

## 2.4 Structure and content

There are 4 U's you should consider when writing your headlines.

These also apply to subheadings.

You should ensure that your headline is:

- **Useful,**
- **Unique,**
- **Ultra Specific** and
- creates **Urgency.**

Check your headline to make sure all 4 U's are covered.

Your headline should include a positive words(which may or may not also include a number and/or a question), an adjective, a keyword an and outcome, and above all, should be positive.

Don't forget that **a bad headline will stop a great article from being read!**

## 2.5 Focus on the benefit

What will the reader get in return for the time they spend reading your story / article?

What's in it for them?

- Make sure the benefit is clear in the headline.
- Make the benefit specific and unique.
- Use forceful, commanding language.  
'Make \$99,999 each month by ...' in more forceful than, for example, 'if you.... Then you can make \$99,999 each month'
- Ask a question, such as 'What would you do with \$99,999 each month?'
- Write your article as if it is a news report, and give it a similar style headline.  
'Small Town Guy makes \$99,999 each month'

Above all, make sure your benefit is something valuable, something your readers will want.

## 2.6 Your target audience

Think about who you want to read your article.

A great headline addressed at the wrong audience will not attract readers.

If your target audience is interested in weight loss, the best internet marketing headline in the world will not attract many readers, simply because it's not what they're interested in.

Try to put yourself in the shoes of your target audience. If you were in their position, what would make a headline so attractive that you felt you had to read the article?

Be objective, and don't forget to research.

Check related blogs from recognised experts in your field.

Check magazine headlines.

Keep an eye out for killer headlines in ANY field.

Think of ways you could change things up a bit to make it relevant to your writing.

Do your research and keep on doing it!

## 2.7 When to write your headline

There are 2 schools of thought on this, and unfortunately, they are total opposites.

The first is that you should write your headline before you write your content.

This means that when you write your content, you are doing so with a clear view of what you're aiming for.

It's closely aligned with the traditional approach of writing to a brief.

If your background is in report writing or technical writing, then you are likely to find yourself more closely aligned with this approach

The second is that you write your headline after you've written your content.

With this approach you allow ideas to flow freely while you're writing, and then, at the end, go back and match a great headline to the content.

You are likely to find yourself more closely aligned with this approach if your background is in creative writing.

My background is in technical and report writing, so I prefer the first approach. However, I always take time after I've written my article to go back and check and refine the headline.

Obviously, advertisers are a subset of the group of people that write headlines, but one thing that most advertisers agree on is that your effort should be split pretty evenly between headline and content!

Most find this counterintuitive – spending as long writing a 10 or 20 word headline as you do writing a 500 word blog post doesn't feel right, unless you really do understand the importance of that headline.

## 2.8 Check for ambiguity

There are several high-profile examples of headlines that are ambiguous.

One of the most famous is 'Textron Inc. Makes Offer To Screw Co. Stockholders'.

Make sure you check your headlines carefully to make sure that they actually do say what you intended, and that they are not open to interpretation.

## 2.9 Get inspired

There is a huge amount of written information out there.

Think Newspapers, Magazines, Websites, even search engines.

Look around.

Some websites you may look at are news websites, such as <http://cnn.com> or <http://bbc.com>.

You'll have your own favourites.

Also look at your favourite magazines, whether online or on a newsagent's shelf.

Headlines are all around you.

Which ones catch your attention?

Make a note of them.

Think about why they captured your imagination, and try to use the same ideas in your own headline writing.

Once you understand how and why 'the professionals' write their headlines the way they do it will be easy to be inspired to work with their ideas.

I think most people hate 'clickbait' – web content aimed at generating advertising revenue often at the expense of quality and accuracy. Clickbait relies heavily on sensationalist headlines to attract clicks and to encourage sharing on Social Media.

I'm not suggesting that your blogs or any of your websites should be 'clickbait'. Quite the opposite in fact. If you want long term sustainable success, then you need quality and relevant content.

BUT...

Clickbait headlines work.

They can be a great source of ideas but you must always ensure that your headlines are honest, and accurately reflect your content.

## 3 Content, Content, Content

No matter how great your headlines, if you don't back that up with high quality articles, you will not build and retain a loyal readership.

People do not want to read dull or uninspiring content.

If your headline promises secrets, then you need to deliver secrets, not common knowledge.

Your content should be as exciting and engaging as you can possibly make it (if you're writing about a subject that is in itself quite dull, that can be a challenge, but try anyway), and above all else, your headline.

Provide information that is not readily available elsewhere.

Include pictures and infographics where possible.