

principle 7

Long Copy vs Short Copy

Why write or present with one hand tied behind your back?

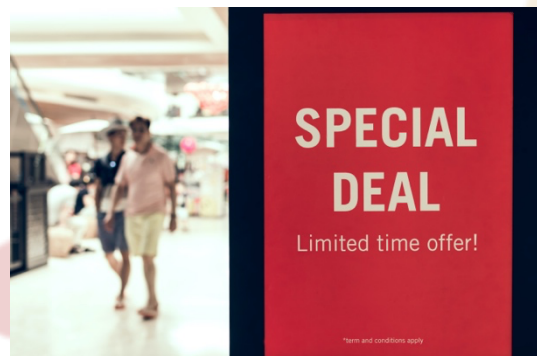
Contrary to conventional thinking long copy is best. Long copy gives you the ability to convey to the reader everything that they need to know to make a decision. You can answer all the questions and you can put paid to any doubts they may have.

It's a fundamental rule that the most seasoned marketing pros know well: "Long copy outsells short copy." You need to know and understand this important rule of sales excellence, too - but what does it mean?

We're talking about any kind of sales copy here - the advertising copy in your print ads, the text of your direct sales letters or postcards, the script of your radio ad - it's any writing used to sell what you want to sell. The bottom line is, the more or longer the text of your sales vehicle, the better chance you have of making a sale.

People only become bored in something that doesn't interest them

A lot of inexperienced marketers and business people don't understand or believe this. They think this way: "People have short attention spans. They don't have time to read, are easily bored, and so forth. So what you need is short, punchy copy that gets attention fast and makes a sale fast."



Well, there is a large grain of truth in this way of thinking. It's true that people are easily bored, that they have short attention spans, and that it's hard to hold human interest with any kind of selling message for long. But experienced marketers know ways around these problems. You CAN keep your prospects interested, reading, and taking the time to get through your entire pitch.

For example, if you are sending out an 8-page sales letter with a lot of copy, you need something right up top that will grab the reader and make them want to go deeper into the text of your letter, keeping them reading. For starters, you need a terrific headline atop Page 1 that shouts out at readers,

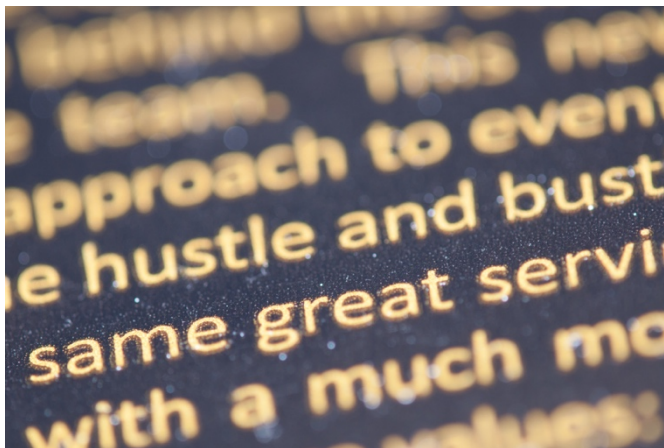
grabs their interest, and which makes them a promise. That promise basically says: "What you are going to read in this newsletter is so hot and interesting, you can't afford not to read on!"

The headline is the ad for the ad

Once the headline does its job and lures the reader to your first sentence, you need to keep the process of creating interest going. This means the first sentence of your sales letter must be compelling and provocative - enough so to make the reader move on to the next sentence, the next, and the next - until they get to the bottom of the first page, where they need to be motivated to turn the page and read Page 2, then Page 3, and so on.

See what I mean? Long copy does not have to be intimidating, boring, or a chore to read. A good writer can grab the prospect's interest with a headline that sparks interest, entices, lures and makes it fun and interesting to read on. There are tons of good ways to get this job done. It is not my intention here to get into the specifics of sales letter copywriting excellence - the larger point is, a well-written, compelling, enticing writing technique will never bore the reader, but rather, get them salivating and asking for more!

Good copy is 'salesmanship in print'



Remember, advertising, whether by letter or media is nothing more than salesmanship in print. You wouldn't dream of sending a salesperson into a sales call without getting them to tell the prospect what the product or service is, what it does for them, answer all their objections and

then ask for the order. So, why do it in Print? It's just plain common sense.

In general, a letter is as long as it needs to be. Whether a letter is long or short it is always boring and uninteresting and therefore gets rejected by those that have no interest in the content to begin with. In other words the letter must be targeted to those most likely to be interested in the subject matter. When this is done they will want to know as much as possible about the subject - a subject by definition of your targeting - that is dear to their heart.

In addition to the pages in direct mail pieces, other items, such as lift letters, an extra note, or a coupon all add to the length and amount of things the reader must confront - but it all also adds to the strength of the entire sales tool. Each additional item gives you one more shot, one more tool with which to make a sale.

The Long Copy Rule holds true for print advertising, as well. Think about it: What has more selling power? A small classified ad with 20 or so words, or a display ad that can fit in say, 200 to 300 words? Of course, the bigger ad sells better. True, a big display ad is bigger and easier to see than a tiny classified and so attracts more lookers by sheer dint of its greater size. But it's also that extra space you get to make your case with sales copy that really makes the crucial difference -- you have more words, more copy, to make your pitch, convince the reader, tell them what they need to know, and get them to buy.

'AICDA' - The copywriters magic formula

You see, a good sales pitch needs to do five things. Those five things can be summed up in the term AICDA -- it stands for Attention, Interest, Credibility, Desire, Action. A good ad, sales letter, radio ad or TV spot must produce all five. You first need to get Attention -- that's what a headline is does, for example. In radio ads, it's that loud opening noise, sound or music that jangles the listener to attention. If you don't get their attention, all is lost. Without attention, the reader cannot and will not go deeper into your message to get the heart of your sales pitch.

The I stand for interest. Once you get their attention, you must give them something that arouses interest. This can be a lot of things -- a fantastic price, an offer for something free, or a hint at an opportunity that is yet to be named further in the ad copy.

C is for credibility. You must establish credibility. This is done by providing testimonials, a test study, or some solid statistics that PROVE that what you are talking about is the truth, and of course a third party testimonial is always stronger because when presented correctly it is perceived as independent, whereas you are not.

D stands for desire. You must make the prospect desire or want your product. Again, there are many ways to do this -- you appeal to emotions, hint at how a problem will be solved, or how life will be made better if they buy your product. And more.



Last but not least -- A is for Action! The reader must be prompted, urged, asked, and convinced to take action. It's amazing how many otherwise fine sales pitches fumble at this crucial step. If you don't give the prospect a reason to act, clear instructions on how to act -- and even ask them to act -- they probably

won't! One of the best ways to induce action is to put a strict time limit on your great offer. Make them understand that they must act quickly to get your good deal, or lose out forever.

The bottom line is, to do AICDA right, you need a certain amount of copy to get the job done thoroughly and effectively. The more words you have, the better off you will be. That's why long copy almost always outsells short copy. It gives you all the space and word-power you need to cover all the bases and get the job done.

One last thing: I am not suggesting there is no room in selling for short copy. Indeed, shorter selling vehicles, such as classified ads, have an important function. A classified ad, for example, can prompt readers to call or write to you and ask you for your larger selling tool. Trying to make a complete sale with a tiny classified ad is most often folly. Making sales with small ads is just too much heavy lifting for such a limited marketing tool. It's far better to use a two-step approach using the small ad to get readers to request your full-blown, very best long copy that gets the total job of AICDA done.

So there you have it -- long copy is better than short copy. You can and should use both. But never have any doubt where the sale is made -- it's with long copy.

Understanding That 'Advertising Is Salesmanship In Print'

Your ads are like salespeople - they have a job to do

A good and experienced salesman or woman does a lot of things in the process of making a sale. They immediately gain customer confidence and build fast rapport. They get the customer's attention and excite interest in what is being sold. Through experience and a polished, practised sales pitch, they create desire in the mind and heart of the prospect - they appeal to both the mind and the emotions. When all of the above has been established and accomplished, they induce the prospect to make a decision and take action. And thus, another sale is made.

This is what a live, flesh-and-blood seller does - and that's what your paper-and-ink print ads, your radio and TV ads should do as well, not to mention your direct marketing materials, including your sales letters, brochures, post cards and more. It seems like a heavy load for an inanimate object to carry, yet that should be your goal. As explained, a good print ad, for example, should produce good old AICDA -- Attention, Interest, Credibility, Desire and Action. It grabs attention with a good headline. It creates interest with perhaps a subhead and the text of the ad that follows. The use of testimonials and proofs adds authority, integrity and credibility. The text of the ad, or the body copy, should also produce desire, and finally make a call

for the reader of that ad to take action. It should ASK the reader to take action, or maybe demand he or she does so.

If this sounds rather fundamental or obvious, then take a few minutes right now to go look at some ads in newspapers or magazines. You'll be amazed at how many ads-- if fact, most of them - don't do half of this stuff. Look at how many ads contain simply the name of a company, perhaps a brief mention of the product and a phone number. Such an ad does little more than say: "I'm here! Call me if you want to - anytime, now or later. There's no reason why you should or shouldn't!" Other ads seem more concerned with being cute, entertaining, or getting a laugh. Well, that can be nice, but does it sell?

Don't settle for this. Your ads, in effect, should be like salespeople themselves, doing everything a living, breathing salesperson does - covering all the bases and doing a complete job of opening, making and finishing a sale. Don't be afraid to include a lot of text in your ad. The more words you have to sell, the better you can sell because you can accomplish all you need to do - and that means AICDA. On the other hand, be careful to not try to make your ad do too much - don't confuse people. You can generally make only one point in an ad, and sell only one benefit at a time. But once you choose a benefit and you have focus, then use all the tools - the headline, a graphic element, body copy, and activation information - to make a complete sale.

Just remember two things: Your ad IS your salesperson, and your ads accomplish what it needs to with AICDA.