

Quick Guide to



that get **attention**





# The Art of Great Headlines

Great headlines will grab your readers' attention. Once you have their attention, you can sell them on the features and benefits of your products or services. This quick guide will help you create attention-grabbing headlines for any marketing piece that you are going to use.

Your customers need something, and your product or service meets that need. To get your customers' attention, create headlines that address their need rather than trying to convey your product or service value. Use the copy for that.

Great headlines tell readers about the end result in a way that makes them want to read or see more.

The biggest mistake people make when writing a headline is to think of it as a selling tool in and of itself. Headlines are not for promoting sales or showing the features and benefits. Headlines are meant only to grab the readers' attention. The rest of the copy should do the selling.

This guide will show you how to keep your headlines as attention-grabbers and avoid other common mistakes.

## Creating Effective Headlines

### Direct and Simple

Headlines are not the place for wordy descriptions. A good rule of thumb is to keep your headline 10 words or less.

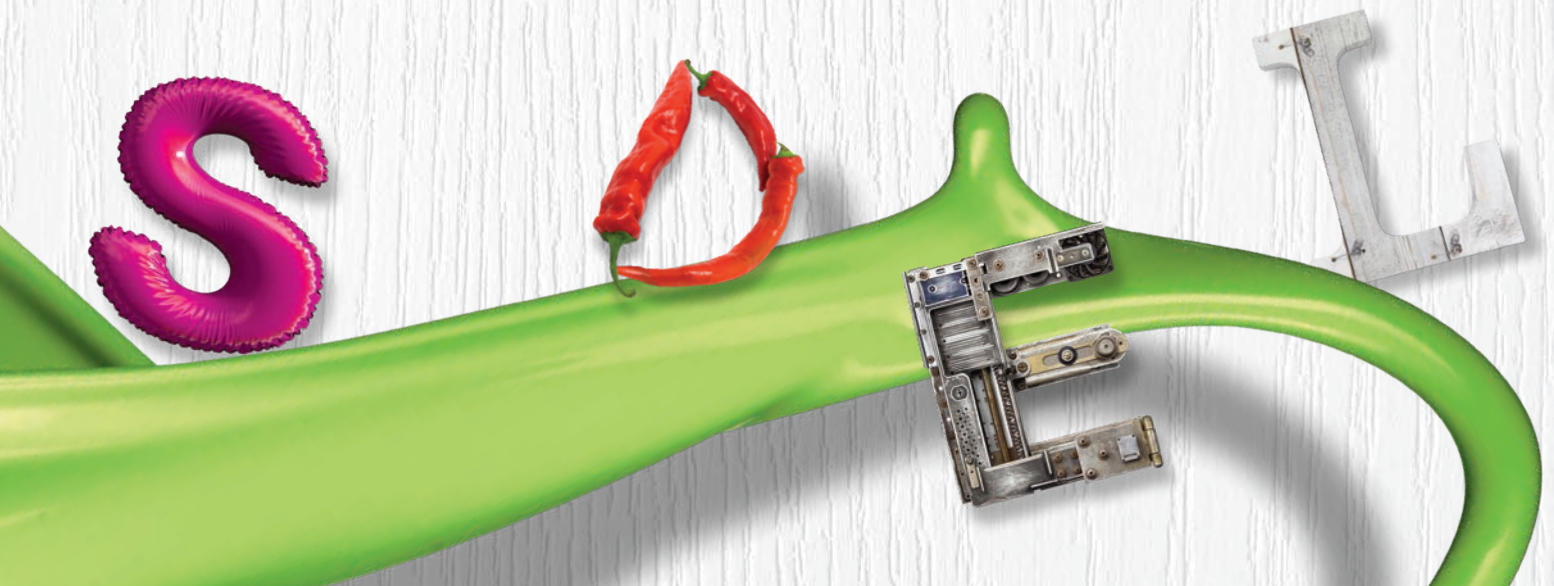
Ulta Beauty sends a bimonthly catalog-style flyer that contains several postcard-size inserts. All headlines on all pieces are short and concise:

Cover Headline: **Bring the Beauty**

The cover does not need to use a lengthy description of the items found inside of the catalog.

Insert Headline: **Get A Free Gift**

The insert uses the short headline to catch readers' attention and then explains what the free gift is and what customers have to do to get it.





## Convey the Benefit

It's important to clearly say how your customer will benefit. The focus of your headline needs to be what your reader is going to get out of the content or get out of your product or service. It should evoke an emotional response that makes the reader want to read more.

## Useful Information

Headlines should convey results and solutions. Your readers are looking for solutions. They need to connect with the solution conveyed in the headline. If you can evoke an "Aha! This is what I need!" through your headline, they will read on. If you can get them to read your content, they will be more likely to take action on your offer. If you fall short, you will lose them.

The National Pork Board created a number of brochures to created a series of brochures that contained great recipes and cooking safety tips, all packaged in bacon wrapping paper, in an effort to help consumers while touting the positive contributions made by the pork industry. This "Pork Shoulder Pocket Guide" is an example of presenting useful information in a headline. The headline conveys a clear understanding that the brochure contains valuable information about cooking and enjoying pork shoulder.

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# Attention-Grabbing Headline Word List

**DO:** Use action verbs: "Earn more, save more, get more."

**DON'T:** Use all nouns and adjectives: "Better rates, fewer fees and great service."

## Word Choice Matters

Choose active words for your headlines. Steer clear of passive words such as is, was, are going to, and will, in favor of clear actions. For example:

Passive: You will save big money...

Active: Save big money now...

## Quick Attention Grabbers

The most common words from successful headlines:

Quick	Save	Easy	Guarantee(d)
New	Proven	At Last!	Yes
How to	Best	Why	Free
Last Chance	Fast	See	Make

A recent American Airlines campaign sent a four-panel postcard with this great headline:

**"Make Every Moment  
And Every Mile Even  
More Memorable."**

They left the process or the "work" that customers have to do to earn the result for the four panels of copy in the mailer.



## Stay Away From Adjectives!

Studies of the most effective speeches in all of history show that they have a common trait of being high in verb count and low in adjectives. Great headlines follow the same example.

Adjectives are descriptive words like beautiful, stunning, multi-faceted, bountiful, considerable, or limited. You have a limited number of words to work with in a headline, so don't waste space with descriptors. Action words are more effective.

## Action Words

succeed	accomplish	beat	best	exceed	outdo
outperform	outshine	outplay	confound	gain	conquer
slam	rout	crush	clobber	cream	drub
foil	frustrate	lick	master	thwart	whip
zap	trample	wipe	achieve	benefit	flourish
gain	get	overcome	prevail	prosper	realize
thrive	triumph	win	acquire	conquer	earn
fulfill	hit	punch	obtain	attain	outrun
outwit	profit	reap	receive	recover	retrieve
score	secure	surmount	vanquish	silence	demolish
embarrass	annihilate	extinguish	quench	wreck	outflank
humiliate	wallop	score	bloom	mushroom	advance
progress	boost	magnify	ripen	swell	heighten
delight	cram	savor	profit	reach	strengthen
fortify	nourish	refresh	rejuvenate	possess	grab
capture	catch	grasp	grip	seize	snag
snatch	take	hook	land	nab	nail





# Keep in Mind

## Watch Your Pronouns

Just as you want to take care to choose action words and results-oriented language, you also need to be careful when you use pronouns. Be sure your wording focuses on your customer. Pronouns should focus on them (e.g., you, your), not on you (e.g., we, our).

Write your message in second person by using you and your. Avoid third person all together. Make your message about your customer, not about you.

## Subheads Become Headlines

If you need a subhead to explain your “clever” headline, it is the subhead that should be your headline.

Legacy Plumbing created a postcard with the headline, “You can’t plan for the unexpected...” The headline was followed by a subhead that should have been the headline: “Any plumbing problem, any time.” The benefit was stated in the subhead, not the headline.

## No Puns, Clichés, or Idioms

Generally, using puns, clichés, or idioms in a headline points to a lack of creativity. Trying to be clever for the sake of being clever does not.

## It’s OK to Break the Rules!

Headlines are not the place for adhering to the AP style guide. They sometimes don’t even require correct grammar – sometimes. Don’t be afraid to break the rules when it is necessary to show your customers a great result.

### Instead of:

“Our team has 75 years of combined mortgage experience.”

### Use:

“Stress Less with a Worry-Free Home Loan” (alternate: eliminate stress with a worry-free home loan)

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**Some of the most famous copy headlines completely break the rules:**

**Just Do It** – Nike

**Spread the happy** – Nutella

**Eat Mor Chikin** – Chick-fil-A

**Got Milk?** – California Milk Processor Board

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# Final Tips

## Write the Headline Last

Until you get good at focusing your headline on just the results without being tempted to include all the other exciting features of your offer, try writing all the rest of the copy first. You'll get all your excitement out and on paper and then you can narrow your headline focus to one ultimate benefit.

## Go Digital

You can also apply the tips in this guide to your digital resources. These tips will work for your email newsletters and social media headlines. Tell your audience what they're going to get as a result of reading, clicking, watching, or opening your email.

*If you remember one thing about writing headlines, remember this: it is for the sole purpose of grabbing attention. You know your audience; what is it they need? Show them that they will get what they need from reading your material. It is not your call to action; it is your "Hey! Read Me" statement.*

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## About GAM

We know that writing effective copy is one of the biggest challenges our print customers face. Providing content like this guide is one of the many ways we are always striving to help you succeed.

When you are ready to put your copy into print, we hope you will consider us to be part of your success team. Your print pieces are our number one focus, and you will find our staff and customer service to be top notch.

Call us to learn about the latest trends...to make your marketing pieces stand out. From concept to printed product, we are ready to support your graphics, marketing and printing needs.



GAM – Graphics and Marketing, Inc.  
45969 Nokes Blvd., Suite 130  
Sterling, Virginia 20166  
703.450.4121  
GamWereGood.com  
GraphicsAndMarketing.com

