

## how to produce a sales letter

### 1. Why do I need a sales letter?

A sales letter can help you to sell your products or services to existing or prospective customers or clients. It can also attract people to visit a web site or attend an event by selling a concept, rather than a tangible product.

What is most important is to know what you want your sales letter to achieve, eg:



- Attract orders for your product / service: \_\_\_\_\_
- Obtain an appointment with your client: \_\_\_\_\_
- Prompt recipient to take a specific action: \_\_\_\_\_
- Attract recipient to attend an event: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Is the message in my sales letter strong enough?

People are bombarded by hundreds of sales messages every day, so to achieve its purpose the message in your sales letter must be:

- Eye-catching
- Attractive
- Relevant
- Interesting
- Energetic
- Full of value

If your sales letter says nothing new or is lacklustre, nobody will read it.

Put yourself in the position of your customers and ask if you would be excited by your message.

Once you know what you want your sales letter to achieve and have decided on the message that will accomplish this, you can start planning production.

### 3. Who is the target of my sales letter?

Your sales letter will be most effective when mailed to people likely to be interested in it. To mail it randomly wastes your money, as you will be relying on chance for it to reach the right people.

To target your audience effectively, define your customers. Are they consumers or businesses? Are they from a specific age range, income bracket, business sector, etc?

If your customers are from one clearly defined group, a single sales letter will probably appeal to them all. If they are a mix of many groups, a different sales letter could be needed for each individually definable group. This is because the same product could appeal to two separate groups for entirely different reasons requiring two different sales approaches.

Who are your customers?

- Consumers: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age range(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- Income bracket(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- Businesses: \_\_\_\_\_
- Industrial sector(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- Size by turnover: \_\_\_\_\_
- Small / medium / large businesses: \_\_\_\_\_
- Location: \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. How do I produce a distribution list for my sales letter?

If you are sending your sales letter to existing customers and contacts, you will probably know their name and address details already. These will be easier to manage when stored in a computer database.

If you are sending your sales letter to potential customers, you need to obtain names and addresses of suitable prospects. You can buy lists from a list broker or similar source, or obtain data yourself from directories, etc. When buying data, check that it is up-to-date and, where feasible, verify the information yourself.

Always check that communications you send out comply with all relevant regulations regarding direct mail. In addition, some consumers and businesses do not want to receive unsolicited direct mail, so it is best to ensure, as far as you are able, that your communications do not annoy recipients. After all, they will be less likely to buy from someone who has annoyed them.

### 5. What format will my sales letter take?

Will it be a single-sided letter or will it be accompanied by a leaflet or brochure?

- Single-sided letter
- Single-sided letter accompanied by: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. In what packaging do I enclose my sales letter?

Depending on the size, weight and quantity, you have a choice of sending your sales letter in an envelope or in more substantial packaging, especially if it is accompanied by a brochure or other bulkier items.

- Envelope
- Padded envelope
- Shrink-wrapping
- Other custom packaging: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are mailing a large quantity of items, you can outsource the fulfilment to a specialist mailing house, which will insert the letters into envelopes or suitable packaging, label them and deliver them to the postal supplier.

### 7. How do I mail my sales letter?

Depending on the quantity of items you are sending, you can apply postage stamps or frank your letters yourself or, if the number of items qualifies for discounted bulk postage rates, have the postage mark printed on to the envelope or label to save the time and expense of doing this manually. Another option is to use pre-paid envelopes. Postal suppliers can advise you on the range of options available.

- Stamps
- Franked mail
- Self-printed postage mark
- Pre-paid envelope
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 8. How much will my sales letter cost?

Calculate how much the production, fulfilment and mailing of your sales letter will cost you. If you are sending 10 or 20 the cost is likely to be small, but it could mount up rapidly if you are sending hundreds or thousands.

If you are enclosing brochures with your letter, calculate the weight of the finished package, as this could raise the cost of postage considerably. And don't forget the cost of printing or photocopying the letters, envelopes, address labels, any accompanying materials and fulfilment.

- Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_
- Weight: \_\_\_\_\_
- Production costs: £ \_\_\_\_\_
- Professional copywriter: £ \_\_\_\_\_  
(if you do not wish to write the text yourself)
- Fulfilment costs: £ \_\_\_\_\_
- Postage costs: £ \_\_\_\_\_
- Other costs: £ \_\_\_\_\_
- Total cost: £ \_\_\_\_\_

### 9. How do I lay out my sales letter?

- Your letterhead will probably display the name of your business, your address, phone number, email and web addresses. If not, these should be included, usually at the top of the sheet.
- Include the date on which you intend to post your sales letter.
- Each letter should be individually addressed with name, title and business (where appropriate) and full postal address. The easiest way to achieve this is to use computer word-processing software that enables you to "mail merge" or combine a database of names and addresses with the main text to produce individually addressed letters.
- Address the recipient personally, eg Dear Mr Smith. Most word-processing software packages can handle this with their mail merge facilities.
- Conclude the letter with "yours sincerely" – as you have addressed the recipient personally – and your signature (and title). If you are sending large numbers of letters, consider scanning your signature so that it can be printed digitally on to each copy of your sales letter.

### 10. How do I write my sales letter?

Now that you have established what you want your sales letter to achieve, its target audience and format, you know everything you need to write the text.

The tone of your writing should be influenced by the topic and how recipients are likely to view it. Business-to-business sales letters tend to be more serious than letters to consumers, although there is no reason why a sales letter should not be written in a light-hearted or humorous tone where appropriate.

An effective structure for your letter could include (but is not limited to):

- Headline** – a single line of bold text to grab the reader’s attention
- Introductory paragraph** – expanding upon the subject of the headline
- Body text** – including whatever detail or arguments are necessary
- Closing paragraph** – including a call to action, eg to send an order to you, call you, visit your web site, etc.
- Postscript** – to re-emphasise your offering

If you do not want to write your sales letter yourself, is there someone who can write it for you? If not, commission a professional copywriter to write your sales letter.

### 11. How do I write an attention-grabbing headline?

Remember that this letter will probably be one of many to drop on to the recipient’s desk or doormat. Why should they read your sales letter? Why is it important to them? You have to convince them that they must read your letter.

The headline is the most important single line of text in the letter. If it succeeds in catching a recipient’s attention, they are more likely to read on and respond to your message. To achieve this, the headline should touch on an issue close to the recipient’s heart. This could include:

- Identifying a known problem and offering a remedy:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Sharing secret information or a practical tip:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Making a controversial statement:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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- Announcing a new product or service: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Offering an irresistible deal: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Asking an open question (that cannot be answered with “yes” or “no”):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have more original ideas – all the better. The only purpose of the headline is to persuade the reader to read on and not throw your letter away.

### 12. How do I write the introductory paragraph?

The introductory paragraph should expand upon the subject of the headline. If the reader has been persuaded to read on, it is because they do have some interest in the subject; the introductory paragraph must increase this interest.

### 13. How do I write the body text of my sales letter?

The body text should link the claims made in the headline with the call to action in the final paragraph. Do not digress. Keep straight to the point – do not provide detailed explanations, but refer to any accompanying brochure where this is necessary. Focus on the response you want readers to take by:

- Emphasising why the reader should purchase your product / service:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Stressing the benefits to the reader of having a problem solved (eg eliminating worry, creating peace of mind):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Using evidence to back up any claims you have made to create trust:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

The reader is likely to be very interested in the subject of your sales letter if they have read this far and the body text should aim to obtain their complete agreement with your message.

### 14. How do I write the closing paragraph of my sales letter?

Having read this far, you must convert the reader's interest into action by making it as easy as possible to respond in the way you choose. You can do this by:

- Demonstrating how easy it is to contact you or place an order
- Repeating any offer you have made, eg discount, free gift

Highlight contact details and urge the reader to contact / order via:

- Enclosed order form / pre-paid reply coupon or envelope
- Telephone number – freephone or local number
- Web address – linking to a page which repeats your sales letter's offering
- Email address – a specific address which you can monitor closely

### 15. How do I motivate readers to respond to my sales letter?

If you are providing a special offer or discounted price, you could limit this to a certain time period, so that readers have to respond within one week, 14 days, etc. Alternatively, you could offer the first 10, 100, etc. respondents an even better deal. There are many forms of incentive you can offer – make sure your offer is genuine, realistic, good value and that you are able to deliver it.

### 16. How do I write a postscript for my sales letter?

Write a brief reminder of your offering or deal to persuade wavering readers to take action. This should be no longer than one or two lines. A handwritten reminder often works far more effectively than a typed one as it shows a personal touch, which many people appreciate.

### 17. How do I check my sales letter?

- Read your letter to check spellings, grammar and sense
- Check all dates, prices, details and offers – do not embarrass yourself or open your business up to legal action by including incorrect information
- Ask someone else to read your letter and check all the above

### 18. How do I know if my sales letter will be effective?

Test your sales letter by showing it to a trusted colleague or associate and ask for their response. Take their comments into consideration and make any amendments you think are necessary. You could also conduct a test mailing to a small sample of your distribution list to gauge response.

### 19. Will my sales letter generate its own responses?

Some sales letters can generate huge responses, while others need back-up.

If your sales letter is not part of a co-ordinated marketing campaign with associated sales support, decide whether you need to follow up your sales letters with telesales calls to convert interested prospects into actual customers.

### 20. How should I prepare to handle responses to my sales letter?

When you mail out a sales letter, be prepared to satisfy any extra demand that it creates.

Are there people or departments who need to be advised that you are sending out your sales letter? These should be consulted at an early stage – if they know of any reason why your business cannot satisfy the demand created by your sales letter, you can take the necessary action to remedy this.

With everyone primed to handle more orders or to respond swiftly to enquiries, your business will be prepared to satisfy customers and provide good service.

### 21. How can I monitor the success of my sales letter?

- Use a special email address and count the emails: \_\_\_\_\_
- Use a special phone number and count the calls: \_\_\_\_\_
- Use a code or PO Box number and count the replies: \_\_\_\_\_
- Use web site statistics to count visitors to a web page: \_\_\_\_\_
- Analyse your sales data.