

CC 089: How To Write Perfect Headlines For Your Blog Posts

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The Importance of Headlines

Headlines are crucial – whatever type of content you’re producing.

In fact, advertising legend David Ogilvy said that “on average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written your headline, you have spent 80 cents out of your dollar.”

The Inverted Pyramid In Journalism

When I was at journalism college in Birmingham in the late 1990’s, I learned about the importance of writing good headlines in the context of the inverted pyramid.

Established in 1845 when Samuel Morse invented the telegraph, the inverted pyramid was a new way of passing important messages and breaking news from one point to another – by loading all the most important details and key information on the front end of the story. This of course starts with a great headline.

Reading the newspapers and news websites (especially the tabloids), will help you learn how great headlines are written.

Newspaper headlines include all the most important information up front, written in an enticing way that encourages you to read more – the headline then segues into the introduction or lede of the story (l-e-d-e), which covers the “who, what, when, where, why and how” of the story in the first couple of paragraphs.

In turn, the lede entices the reader to move on to read the important elements of the story in more detail (with quotes, statistics, eye witness reports etc), and then the article finishes up with other general background information and supplemental details at the end.

So we see that in this context, all the information in the inverted pyramid is hierarchical in importance – and all flows from the headline itself.

Here are some examples of journalistic headlines and first paragraphs.

Firstly from the BBC website:

Theresa May calls off MPs’ vote on her Brexit deal

Prime Minister Theresa May has called off Tuesday’s crucial vote on her Brexit deal so she can go back to Brussels and ask for changes to it.

Secondly from the New York Times website:

U.N. Approves Sweeping Deal on Migration, but Without U.S. Support

More than 160 countries adopted a sweeping international accord on migration on Monday, after the United Nations secretary general robustly defended against the “myths” and falsehoods that critics had directed at the deal.

How Website Visitors Read Headlines

In terms of blogging then, great headline writing and having an article structure based on the inverted pyramid is ideal for the digital era of short attention spans and a hunger for fast food information.

In this context, you may have already seen the Nielsen Research study about the F shaped pattern of how people read websites – scanning from top to bottom right to left (reading the headline first to create the top horizontal line of the F).

Then scanning down and across from left to right in the middle of the page to get other essential information (forming the second horizontal line of the F), to finish reading down the page for all the supplementary details as the vertical stem of the F reaches the bottom of the page.

This is literally the inverted pyramid formation in action on a web page – so there’s a direct relevance here.

Headlines In Google

The increasingly sophisticated Google algorithm is also geared for this inverted pyramid model too, especially for information based searches – with search intent realised in headlines and first paragraphs through relevant keywords and related phrases, and answer boxes picking up on front loaded, relevant information at the start of your article.

Ricky and Jim at IncomeSchool.com are very successful at getting Google answer boxes in the SERPS with their articles, by combining keyword specific and engaging headlines with short opening paragraphs that answer questions right at the start of their articles – in bolded text – thus following the flow of the inverted pyramid model and immediately satisfying searcher intent.

Great Headline Formulas

So all of this process starts with great headlines that include your main keyword, give essential information but also entice us to read on into the main body of the article.

With that said, let's look at some proven blog post title examples.

Brain Clark at Copyblogger.com has a great list of headline formulas that get proven results.

His standout blog post title formulas include:

1. “Who Else Wants [Blank]” – a headline that implies an already existing consensus desire, for example:

Who Else Wants a Great WordPress Theme?

Who Else Wants a Higher Paying Job?

Who Else Wants More Fun and Less Stress When on Vacation?

2. “The Secret of [Blank]” – a headline that uses insider knowledge that's beneficial to the reader, for example:

The Secret of Successful Podcasting

The Secret of Protecting Your Assets in Litigation

The Secret of Getting Your Home Loan Approved

3.”Here’s a Quick Way To [Blank] – a headline that both solves problems and offers a quick way to do it, which readers love, for example:

Here’s a Quick Way to Get Over a Cold

Here’s a Quick Way to Potty Train Junior

Here’s a Quick Way to Backup Your Hard Drive

My Favourite Headline Formulas

If you do a Google search on headline formulas you’ll find literally hundreds of different types of headlines you can use in your blog posts – and all have their merits.

However, based on my own results I’ve discovered only 2 types of headlines that really move the needle in terms of getting reader engagement and raising traffic.

Firstly, we have the classic “How To” style article headline – which answers questions and very simply satisfies the reader’s thirst for knowledge to solve their problems, for example:

How To Write Amazon Product Reviews For Affiliate Websites – that’s got me 32k page views & 1000’s of email subscribers and counting.

Secondly – and I got this great headline formula from Brandon at <https://brandongaille.com/> and from Brian Dean at Backlinko...

The classic extended list post headline, that tells people how to solve their problem in a simple step by step way, or lists out extended details on a specific subject – for example:

How To Create a Customer Avatar In 5 Simple Steps – that’s got me 16k page views, and also 1000’s of email subscribers and counting (& this one combines the list headline method and the how to technique).

Conclusion: Writing Perfect Headlines

So there you have it, if you want to write the perfect blog post headlines that are proven to get results, just alternate between these two methods.

By the way, my favourite headline I’ve ever written in 20 years of copywriting was for a print newsletter client in the technology niche. It was about one mobile phone company losing market share to its competitors. It’s not quite perfect, but it makes me smile and gets the point across.

The headline is:

“Nokia in Apple and Blackberry Crumble.”

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