

THE MARKETING DEAL ▶
Special Quick Start Guide Edition



"Read all about it!"

6 HEADLINE PLAYS

by Diane A. Curran

Thinking about headlines brings to mind a fast-paced 1940's movie, where music blared while a newspaper spiraled toward us at dizzying speed on the big screen, to announce a dramatic plot point, as a kid in a wool cap shouted the news and peddled stories "Hot off the press! Read all about it!"

Turn the page for a modern update...

Great headlines sell papers, often with intentional puns, bad grammar, and non-sequiturs generously applied.

Heck, I remember when Boston was a 2 newspaper town, with the **Boston Globe** and the Boston Herald (since gone) competing hotly in every morning and evening edition! Headlines won the day.

These days in L.A., the local champion of pun-filled headlines is none other than **Variety**, an entertainment newsmag, which cheekily plays footloose and fancy-free with its show biz fodder. It relies upon clever copy to sell stories, just like in the olden days, to a very savvy, even jaded, audience of industry insiders.

What do you need to know about headlines, as a business owner?

What must they do? Choose your best play from these 6 goals:

- 1. YES: Spark emotion.** Emotion trumps thought every time in the world of grabbing attention. **NO:** Provoke an audience.
- 2. YES: Name the problem.** In as few words as possible, identify what needs to be changed. **NO:** Point a finger.
- 3. YES: Name the solution.** With the right emphasis here, the problem gets fixed, and you're the answer. **NO:** Talk down to anyone.
- 4. YES: Make an offer.** It need not be dollars and cents, or "free," but the goal is to spur action. **NO:** Promise what you cannot deliver.
- 5. YES: Get personal.** This is not the time to be all things to all people. Speak directly to your audience. **NO:** False intimacy.
- 6. YES: Be authentic.** People have exquisite radar. **NO:** Fake it. People can sense when they're being played. Just don't do it.

Yikes, all that? Now, a headline does not have to do all six jobs at once, but really, the great ones do. Some headlines are so good, they become elevated to tagline status, consistently and repeatedly delivering a powerfully layered, yet succinct message.

Example?

FedEx: “The world, on time.” Remember, they started life as Federal Express, saying “When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight.” Whew, they’ve come a long (or short) way, baby.

Good headlines can use support from sub-headlines, bullet points, and text that adds key details when genuine interest has been sparked and your audience *now wants to know more*, to fill out the story.

- **Take a look at your web site...** does each page fulfill the criteria above, to keep your readers interested?
- **Put your ads, and even your business card, your speech titles, and any marketing message through the same evaluation test.**
- **Making the right changes now** will spell the difference between an audience rapt and wanting more... and an audience that’s left the building, perhaps in search of a *headliner* we all still pay attention to: *Is that you, Elvis?*

So, does small business need headlines?

In a word, yes. But why?

A small business always has a tougher time getting heard above the din of big corporate messages.

Smaller business owners have to move quickly to get their audience's fleeting attention, because they do not have the luxury of endless repetition, high production values, a cast of thousands, or a million dollar budget to make a lasting impression, the way Coca Cola® or the car companies do.

It takes the average adult mind about 7 seconds before it wanders off course when listening to someone, reading, watching TV or video, too. That's just the way we human beings tick.

Now we know why movie titles (the ultimate headline) get shorter, and shorter, and shorter. "Around the World in 80 Days" was a fast paced fun-filled movie, but that title was almost as long as the movie.

How to create a world in one word:

"Rocky," "Cabaret," "Goldfinger," "Psycho"

"Titanic," "Moonstruck," "Doubt."

Even one single word, or two or three, can speak volumes, so a headline, tagline or title does **not** need to be long. The best aren't: Nike: "Just Do It!" Apple: "Think Different" Google: "Don't Be Evil"

Can they be longer? Yes, but they'd better be strong and create a world. Dale Carnegie: "How to Win Friends and Influence People" L'Oréal: "Because I'm Worth It." Disney: "The Happiest Place on Earth"

How fast does listening occur? Faster than the speed of sound, and often it's unconscious. iTunes gives you a seconds-short song snippet to judge if you want to buy. If you don't like the first few bars, it takes way less than the full snippet for you to know if you'll click yes or no.

Shazam's iPhone app is programmed to recognize and identify songs based on just an 8-second snippet... such tools reinforce our **listening impatience**. Grab folks quick, or not at all; there's no second chance.

Reading your headline once may be all the focus your audience is willing to give, now that they've been trained by the Internet to process information, both visual, and audio, at warp speed.

As the debate rages on between old and new media, one casualty is the cost-efficient traditional small newspaper and magazine ads small businesses relied upon to build awareness beyond the yellow pages.

Ads, directories, direct mail, and even brochures and traditional media kits keep losing ground to the ever-advancing Internet.

Web sites and blogs are now essential for running a business, if only to ensure people see you as legitimate.

News and special interest aggregators and social networks command more and more attention, grabbing territory away from traditional media, even at White House news conferences.

Electronic media is the new corner newsboy hawking headlines.

The good news is, the Internet flattens the playing field. Make sure you're on it, and ready with your own play!

• • • • •

P.S.

For you sound devotees,
here's the link to a wonderfully detailed article analyzing how Shazam can do their thing so well with such short snippets:

<http://coding-geek.com/how-shazam-works/>

QuickStart Special Edition • Published by www.TheMarketingDeal.com • June 2016

@2016 Dane A. Curran, All Rights Reserved