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Michel Fortin Brain Dump

Million Dollar Copywriter
Coaching Answers Revealed

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Tapping Michel Fortin's Brain

Tapping Michel Fortin's Brain: Volume One

Edited by Stephen Dean (www.stephensblog.com)

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www.copyboosters.com/special.htm

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www.7copysins.com

www.failuresecrets.com

www.michelfortin.com

www.successdoctor.com

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About “Tapping Michel Fortin's Brain”

Michel Fortin is known as the first copywriter to have a sales letter reach over \$1,000,000.00 in sales within a 24 hour period. If he wasn't already well known, this feat made him legendary.

It made it easy for me to select him as a copywriting mentor. The first three years of my professional copywriting career were often guided by his many copywriting articles (<http://www.michelfortin.com>) and other teaching tools (<http://www.deanrecommends.com/copydoctor.php>)

But in February of 2007, I was given the chance to learn from Michel one on one via email. (<http://www.successdoctor.com/coaching>) What follows are many of the in depth email answers Michel has shared with me over my first 4 months in the program.

Check out my membership site, www.copyboosters.com for even more answers from Michel, as they come in.

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Preparing To Write

It can be hard to find people talking about what you should do BEFORE you start writing copy. But that's often the most important part. You need to get to know your customer and what they desire. Along with HOW to talk to them. So I periodically hammer Michel with these kinds of questions...

- > Question: "How do you get inside the head of the prospect?"
- > And I'll try and make it more specific by saying, what's a quick
- > overview of your methodology for discovering the conversation
- > in the prospect's mind?

Michel's Brain:

I just posted a blog post today, "How to Target Your Perfect Customer," that specifically deals with this. (What a coincidence!) Here's the link:

<http://www.michelfortin.com/how-to-target-your-perfect-customer/>

Generally, this involves doing a lot of detective work. Market research is key. Getting to know the prospect as intimately as possible is even better, and a step beyond typical market research. Sometimes, I conduct phone interviews with clients, record the conversation and get the call transcribed. And often, they practically write the copy for me!

I try to pull out their passion. Get them to expand. Ask open-ended questions. Ask questions (like the questions I posted in my blog post) and let them take over the conversation. Really.

I also sometimes browse related or industry-specific forums. Just watching some of the conversations going on is very telling. People are posting their desires, their fears, their concerns, their appreciation (or dislike) of certain products, both competing and non-competing products, etc.

Sometimes, I join these forums under a pseudonym and pose questions, as if I was "one of them." I then carefully watch what kind of answers they give me. And blogs and social networking sites, which have now exploded, are perfect locations to discover what kind of conversations are going on in specific niches or about specific topics.

For example, let's say you're writing copy for a "fly fishing" infoproduct. Then you could browse forums like:

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<http://www.flyfishingforum.com/>

<http://www.theflyfishingforum.com/>

<http://troutunderground.com/>

Sometimes, and if the client hasn't done so, I also create a blog or information site, where I post articles on the topic at hand. If I have enough time, I tend to wait it out a bit, see what kind of traffic it generates, what kind of comments it gets, and what kind of keywords they find me under.

There are tons of market research tools out there to help you. You can use them to do keyword research, lateral analyses -- meaning, other topics, concepts of discussions going on in the marketplace you target, including locations they find you under. For example, if a blog on fishing links to you, what was the conversation? What are the comments on that blog post in which you were linked from? What other sites are they linking to, and what do THEY say?

(There are many new tools to help you, like www.hittail.com that lists some of the less-than-targeted keywords they find you under, but are popular enough on the Internet to warrant more research. Hittail is specifically designed to help you know what to post. You can post articles with more of those keywords in them to attract more traffic. But I like to use it to find out the frame-of-mind of the visitor.)

David Garfinkel said it best: don't just learn who your market is and what their problem is. Find out "how they talk about it." That's important. How they talk about their problem is not just a language thing (meaning, what the problem means to them).

It's also very insightful into the mindset of the market, the behaviors of your market, buying patterns, lifestyle choices, etc. For example, if your product is about how to cure insomnia, people don't talk about insomnia. They talk about lethargy, lack of productivity, loss of job or relationships, feeling sluggish, absenteeism, lack of clarity and focus, low self-esteem, etc.

So the copy shouldn't talk about how to cure insomnia. It should talk about all the "problems" and "end-results" people suffer and talk about as a result of insomnia. See the difference?

I often ask Michel to critique sales pages that I'm writing. This can lead to very specific answers that aren't always beneficial for everyone. But often there are gems that are universal

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AND very important. Like this one...

Michel's Brain:

Always go for the lowest common denominator. If you ever doubt that a lot of people "may not" know about something, then make sure you educate your audience.

Here, Michel got even deeper into inner psychy...

- > My question is in general, how do you find out the different tips and
- > tricks for writing to different markets. For women or for men is a very
- > general example... but what about for like say... doctors, or people
- > who tend to be very logical. Is it just from experience that you learn
- > the tips and tricks for writing to a market (like knowing that the women
- > gaming market is about being social)? Or is it from the research stage
- > where you pay close attention to how they talk? And/or is there some
- > research that has general advice about writing to different markets?

Michel's Brain:

I'm sure you've read my article about writing for different personality styles:

<http://www.michelfortin.com/does-your-copy-have-personality/>

I would take a look at Tony Alessandra's Platinum Rule:

<http://www.platinumrule.com/>

(Sign up for his newsletter. It's filled with golden nuggets. While it pertains a lot to social or sales situations, he also gives a lot of great info on how to gather information for specific personality styles, how to pinpoint telltale signs, how to ask specific questions to find out more, etc.)

I also use some of these tools:

<http://www.marketresearchworld.net/>

<http://www.researchandmarkets.com/>

<http://www.marketresearch.com/>

As for ideas, I tend to surf "question and answer" type websites, forums and blogs. For example:

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<http://www.ehow.com/>
<http://answers.yahoo.com/>
<http://www.knowthis.com/> (I love this one!)

Especially...

<http://www.knowthis.com/studies/focus-on-market-research/reports.htm>

To answer your question more specifically, I tend to find out most of what I need to know in the research phase. After I get them to fill out my questionnaire, I probe further, which may include internal, external and lateral research.

Here's what I mean.

Internally, I get to expand on, clarify and prod more information out of the client. And I normally do this during doing client interviews. I look at past copy, previous results, surveys they may have conducted, and their own market research.

I then interview existing clients -- existing clients are worth a mint! I call up, with my client's permission of course, clients who I can probe further. Not just success stories (which are best) but also clients that fit into that business' perfect customer profile.

I try to learn more than just what's readily apparent. For example, I don't limit myself to asking questions about their purchase, the product, their knowledge or opinion of the company, etc. I also ask them personal questions, like where they hang out, what do they read, what forums are they active in, where did the need for the product come about, who told them about it, etc.

Externally, I then try to gather research data, statistics, studies and other types of collateral information to help me understand the market more. There are tons of websites online that give hardcore data on specific demographics, from trends to lifestyles. This is great information!

If I can, I conduct keyword research (or even opt-in projects where the opt-in form is also a survey of sorts), and see what kind of response I get. There are tons of keyword tools out there, such as WordTracker.com, KeywordsAnalyzer.com, KeywordElite.com, and a few more.

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(I can list more of them if you're interested.)

Laterally, I try to find out about the market using "the side door," if you will. I see other products (the most popular ones) they've bought and check out their copy. They may or may not be competitive or even relevant. But this gives me some great clues as to the language, the challenges, the fears, the goals, the behaviors, and the character traits of the market.

Forums and blogs are fascinating tools in this regard. If you discover that, for example, your software caters to a market that's also made up of coffee lovers, then browse coffee-related forums or blogs, and watch and read how people talk.

See the language they use, how open or reserved they are, what personality traits they show in their conversations, etc. If you can, nothing stops you from joining these forums, asking questions and letting them answer -- or allowing them to spur the conversation. You might be pleasantly surprised at what you might find out!

In the end, however, a lot of it comes from gut instinct. After being in sales (not just copywriting) for so long, I've done a lot of research and learned a lot about different people, different markets, and different personality styles.

So in the majority of cases, I sort of know what the market is and what they want. But I don't stop myself from digging deeper to stay abreast of hot news, trends, and shifts affecting the market. That's why I'm subscribed to many ezines and blogs, because it always keeps me on my toes.

Constructing The Offer

Copywriter's are usually filled with awesome business and marketing techniques as well as persuasive skills. Simply because they're involved in so many different product launches and marketing campaigns. So I enjoy getting "hot off the presses" business advice from someone who's involved in markets across the board...

- > General question today. Have you noticed any offers that really work
- > well online? Like say... the double your money back guarantee... or
- > a ton of bonuses... or download now, pay in 7 days... and so forth.
- > A ton of bonuses is seen a lot of course (although Brausch doesn't
- > seem to believe in them). But is there a secret weapon offer? Or one
- > that you recommend to clients?

Michel's Brain:

The best? The basic versus premium offer. For example, a "standard" versus a "platinum" package. You offer the topmost, higher ticket one first, and you subtly downsell them to the lesser package.

You can see this with John Carlton, for example, with his recent coaching program. Or some of the major alternative health offers.

Basically, you offer a high-end product at first. The copy focuses on *THAT* product. You describe the offer, give all the bells and whistles, bonuses, extras, etc. And then, right after you mention the price, you describe the "Standard" (or "cheaper" package) offer.

We've testing this with not only marketers but also with heavy hitters. We're talking about huge companies, with millions (like 13 million subscribers) on their lists, and heavily trafficked websites.

And this seems to be the best model right now.

The great thing about Michel is that you don't get any dogma from him. This answer about bonuses will probably forever change the way you use them in your copy...

- > "Brausch says bonuses don't work. Do you have testing on this?"

Michel's Brain:

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Bonuses, in terms of how bonuses are used in the Internet marketing space, are falling out of favor. But bonuses DO indeed work. They just don't work as well as they used to.

I have tested this, and the best bonuses I've found are normal bonuses, with equal or less value than the actual product (for example, you wouldn't want to pitch a \$500 bonus to a \$40 product). And the bonus is:

- 1) Directly relevant to audience but not necessarily the offer. (For example, one guy I wrote the copy for had a real estate seminar in Las Vegas. The bonus was a voucher for playing some casinos in Vegas. Again, irrelevant to the offer, but relevant to the audience.)
- 2) Less hypey bonuses work best. The copy on some bonuses are so over the top that they oversell them. It smacks of a scam, and people are desensitized to them. Just clean, pithy, to the point bonus copy, with just a few benefits, work very well.
- 3) Be creative with your bonuses. Don't go for the standard, hackneyed, "But wait, there's more!" Some bonuses are included in the offer, but added after the offer has been made (or a trial close). For example, you can offer a bonus NOT for buying for taking quick action -- great for adding a sense of urgency.

For the latter, here's an example:

You offer an infoproduct of about 22 chapters. You pull 2 chapters out, and turn them into bonuses. But rather than making them standalone bonuses added to the offer, you add "quick-action bonuses if they buy within 24 hours..." and then add the extra 2 chapters as extras.

Not "free"... Not "bonuses" per se... But "quick action gifts" or "extras." (Even changing the wording from "bonuses" to "gifts" or "extras" increases response.)

Deconstructing Headlines

Here's a critique of a headline I wrote where Michel had some very good constructive criticism. You need to hear this...

Michel's Brain:

Hmmm, here are the three biggest problems I see with this headline (and this, without knowing how targeted the group is, such as, is it for business owners? online marketers? information product junkies? etc.):

1) It's negative. Words like "disguised," "time suckers" and "tricks you" have bad connotations. It's also redundant. (However, it can be reworded to say the same thing, but make it newsy or add an intriguing element. But as it stands, it's too "Ya right," or "so what?"

2) It's pushy. You hit them with a negative, then a benefit. It's like telling them, "Dude, you're a loser, that's why you need this program."

And here's the biggest stumbling block...

3) It tries to sell in the headline. You're giving them the goods upfront, too early. Sounds more like a summary of the sales copy as a whole, when a headline is meant to get people to start reading, not tell them what's it's about that early on.

I think you need to get them to start reading -- not what the copy's all about. Don't give them the goods upfront like that. Especially with such a product, which is really difficult to sell.

Instead, use a newsy headline or one with intrigue, even if you use the same angle you took with the current headline. That will surely drive more readership.

Think of magazines and tabloids like Cosmo and Vanity Fair around New Year's time, and the kinds of headlines on the cover that gets people to buy them like crazy.

Here I ask Michel on some advice on writing headlines, and he gives one heck of a response! Truly, every one who attempts to write copy needs to read what Michel has to say here...

- > At the Warrior Forum, I see copy critique requests and they almost
- > always have those long headlines. I believe one article you wrote said
- > those work good for presold audiences... but my thought is that for
- > a beginner, the longer the headline the more opportunities they have to mess up.
- >

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> Do you have any other advice on headline writing for absolute beginners?

Michel's Brain:

Sure thing.

I'm sure you've read my blog posts on headlines. There are quite a few of them. Here's the link:

<http://www.michelfortin.com/tag/headline/>

But here are some additional tips...

Remember, the headline is more than a mere summary of the website. For one, it is the first thing that people see. If a headline does not instantly give an indication of not only what the page is all about but also the reasons why people should read further the moment they hit it, it will actually deter prospects.

In fact, headlines that do not communicate any benefit in reading the next paragraph or navigating the site will dissuade readers from browsing deeper, which is where most online sales are made.

So the true purpose of a headline is not to summarize or advertise the website, the salesletter, or the business behind it. It's simply to get people to read further. That's it.

In advertising parlance, a headline is the "ad for the ad." For instance, a resume is not meant to land a job but to land an interview. A headline is, in the same way, meant to land the visitor's attention and arouse their curiosity -- not the sale.

If a headline does not achieve this quickly, efficiently and effectively, people will simply click away.

You may have heard of the famous "AIDA Formula," which stands for, in order: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. Ads must follow this formula in order to be successful. They must capture the reader's attention, arouse their interest, increase their desire and lead them to take some kind of action.

Other than "grabbers" like graphics, multimedia, or "lumpy mail" in direct mail marketing (where trinkets are added to grab people's attention), the first part of the formula often refers to the headline.

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If the headline does not command enough attention (or does not command it effectively and, above all, rapidly), then the rest of the formula will fail. People will likely leave at the click of a mouse. So the headline is not meant to do anything other than increase that attention factor.

Usually, there is a gap between the prospect's problem and its solution (or a gap between where a person happens to be at the moment and the future enjoyment of a product's benefits). But many prospects either do not know there is in fact a gap or, because it is one, try to ignore it as a result.

Therefore, a headline that either communicates the presence of such a gap or implies it. Better yet, if it's one that widens it, it will likely appeal to those who can immediately relate to it. (Of course, that's people within that site's target market.)

Using a headline that immediately conveys either a problem or a potential benefit not only makes the reader aware that there is a gap but also reinforces it in the mind. (And this doesn't mean writing ALL the benefits in the headline to cover all the bases, as in the case of mega-headlines.

Some headlines are newsy, others are sensational. Either way, it doesn't matter. All that matters is that the headline gets the reader to start reading. And if you created or widen the gap mentioned earlier, then after reading the headline readers will want to know, by browsing further, how they can close that gap.

Famous sales trainer Zig Ziglar said that people buy on emotional logic. In other words, they buy on emotion but justify their decision with logic. Therefore, emotionally-charged headlines also help to widen those gaps.

The wider the gap is, the greater the desire to close it will be. How do you achieve that? While a website should focus on the solution rather than the problem, adding a negative (or a potentially negative) situation to the headline is often more effective because it appeals to stronger emotions and motives.

Granted, this might seem somewhat unusual or contrary to what you have learned in the past. So in order to understand this, let's take a look at how human needs and emotions work.

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In the late 1960s, psychologist Abraham Maslow developed the hierarchical theory of human needs. In essence, Maslow stated that the foundation of all human needs is our need to survive. The next one in that hierarchy is our need for safety. After that, it's social needs (e.g., the need for affection, to be loved, to feel a sense of belonging). The need for attention, to feel valuable or respected are esteem needs. And finally, at the top, is our need for self-actualization.

A similar principle, based on Maslow's findings, is called the "pain-pleasure principle." In essence, it states that people want to either avoid pain or gain pleasure. In anything we do, we want to either move away from pain (i.e., solve a problem) or strive towards pleasure (i.e., gain an advantage).

But when given the choice between the two, the avoidance of pain is the stronger motive, because our need to survive and to be safe takes over. The emotions attached to pain are far superior than those attached to pleasure.

Therefore, a headline that communicates a problem (i.e., a painful situation or a potentially painful one that could arise without the benefits of one's offering) will have more emotional impact than a pleasurable one. It also instantly communicates to those who associate to its message and thus isolates the serious prospect from the curious visitor.

For example, when I work with plastic surgeons I often tell them to use as a headline, "Are you suffering from wrinkles?" Immediately, prospective patients who can instantly relate to the headline will more than likely read the ad further.

They do so for two reasons. First, the headline appeals to those who have wrinkles. But second and more important, the headline appeals to those suffering from wrinkles (i.e., people who not only have wrinkles but also want to do something about them).

Therefore, think of a negative situation that is now present, or one that will occur without your product or service.

Now, sometimes this pain can be implied. And the implication can often be a lot stronger than the one specified. (As a mentor once told me, "Implication is more powerful than specification.")

For example, in a recent headline split-test for a salesletter I

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wrote that promoted a marriage counselling information product, the headline "Save My Marriage!" won over "Stop My Divorce!" by a huge margin. The conclusion? "Stop My Divorce" is a negative. But it's specific. (And the implication is that the product may only stop the divorce but may not necessarily get the relationship back on track and stop the marriage from disintegrating.

"Save My Marriage!" implies so many things. And the positive benefit is also implied -- the marriage (i.e., the love, the passion, the relationship, the happiness, etc) can also be saved. Because not saving those, too, can be labor-intense, painful, and too difficult to bear.

(Another reason may be that in "Stop My Divorce!" the divorce is imminent. If this was the case, people would probably be more interested in how to win in a divorce rather than stopping it. But I digress.)

Incidentally, the last headline uses another readership-enhancing technique: It begins with a verb. In other words, it directs visitors and takes them by the hand. Other examples include headlines that begin with the words "claim," "discover," "find," "get," "read," "see," "earn," "visit," "surf," "join," "sign up," "order" and so on.

But go a step beyond that. Don't stick with mere verbs. Use action words that help paint vivid pictures in the mind. The more vivid the picture is, the more compelling the headline will be.

(For example, a headline like "zoom past the confusion" will be better than "discover how to do it right.")

Ultimately, don't let visitors guess what they must do or what they will get from reading further. You can also tell them in the headline. Also, you don't need to be direct. You can, in this case as well, imply what they must do.

For example, if you're selling an accounting software, rather than saying "Poor fiscal management leads to financial woes," you can use "Don't let poor fiscal management suck money right from your bottom-line." People can picture the action of "sucking" more than they do "leading."

Headlines that communicate something worth reading will cause people to surf deeper into your site (or read further into the

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letter). But the important thing to remember is, you only have a few seconds -- if not a fraction of a second -- to connect with you reader. That's why being pithy is vitally important.

Think of an "elevator speech."

Like with a person you've just met in an elevator, such as a potential client, you only have a few short seconds to make an impact until you or the other person finally leaves the elevator. The important thing to note is that your elevator speech must be good enough and concise enough to capture, in just a few short moments, the attention of the person to whom you're introducing.

Sometimes, headlines need a little push. Just making a bland statement is not going to get you anywhere. You need to compel your readers. You need to not only capture their attention but also keep it. You may even need to shock, pique their curiosity, and not just inform.

For example, rather than say, "How to lose 30 pounds in 6 weeks," you added "with these 7 tips," you push people to read further to find out what the heck those "7 tips" are. (That's the headline, "Do You Makes These Mistakes In English?" worked so well.)

Erroneously, many people often look at their prospects reading their salesletters for the first time as qualified patrons. And they tend to do so by considering their visitors as being "physically" inside the store once they read the front page -- with headlines that begin with those hackneyed words "welcome to." (While they may or may not be targeted, they're still not qualified. They are what they are: Just visitors.)

Have you ever walked by a retail store whose sign in the main window said "welcome to [name of the store]"? Not likely. But you've probably seen such a sign upon entering a store. And there's the problem: In both cases, you had to walk inside the store first before you were welcomed.

When people read your headline, they're not "inside the store," yet. They're still outside, thinking about whether to go in or not. So there must be something that gets them interested in walking into the store to browse or inquire further.

It could be a variety of things. For example, it could be the showcase display in the window, possibly an outdoor sign touting

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some special, a banner announcing a special sales event, a store catalog or sales flyer received in the mail earlier, or a friend heralding the benefits from a product she bought at -- or some special deal she received from -- the store.

Salesletters are no different.

A headline is like the store's front window or entrance -- people are not *inside* yet. Websites are not different. Look at the web as one, colossal shopping mall. When people surf the web, they're browsing the mall. When they hit your site's front page, they are only seeing the "outside" of your store.

Think of the people reading your headline as merely "window shopping." So your headline must be effective *and* efficient enough to instantly capture their attention, and compel them to enter your store and browse further.

Understandably, a salesperson's ability to instantly capture the attention of her busy and incredibly preoccupied prospect is easier in the physical realm. Most of all, her enthusiasm for, and belief in, her product are easy to convey in person. Her ability to instill confidence and create trust, as well as her unique set of sales and people skills, product knowledge, personality and expertise, are equally advantageous.

A salesletter is your salesperson in print.

And like a salesperson, a headline must qualify the reader, and it must do so by communicating those ideas and emotions that empower people to at least enter the store. The responsibility therefore rests almost entirely on the words one chooses. Those words can make all the difference. And words should appeal to specific motives -- whether directly or indirectly.

Finally, here are two extra pointers for headlines. First, try to be as specific as possible. Use very specific, quantifiable descriptions. For instance, use odd, non-rounded numbers instead of generalizations. Odd, non-rounded numbers are more credible and have pulled more than even or rounded numbers.

"Amazing new system helped me earn \$3,956.75 in 29 days!" is much more credible than "\$4,000 in 1 month!"

That's why, for example, Ivory soap was marketed as being 99 and

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44/100% pure. If Ivory said 100%, it would not have been as believable. If one of your benefits is the fact that your offer helped to improve the results of over 1,000 people when it has really helped 1,163, then use the number 1,163 instead.

And second, use quotation marks. Research (and some of the top copywriters) suggest that quotation marks in a headline seem to improve readership. While the jury is still out on why this is so, a plausible reason is that quotation marks can make a headline appear as if it were a quote. It's human nature: We believe more what a person says than what a company says.

In conclusion, ask yourself: "Does the opening statement beg for attention? Does it arouse enough curiosity? And does it genuinely reflect and cater to the needs, motives and emotions of my target market?" Most importantly, "Is the language easy to understand, especially by that market?"

Contrary to popular knowledge, benefits are not means for creating hype or blatant puffery. They are vehicles through which customers can fully understand and appreciate a site's true purpose, because...

Different words mean different things to different people.

On Testing

Being able to ask Michel about specific test results he has discovered can't be any more valuable to me. It's a goldmine! (And listen to the part about red headlines)

- > I thought "order" was a negative buzz word... what do you think
- > about the whole line... or what do you think is the best way to
- > present an order link/button?

And the copywriting industry has been told to use the word "you" and "your," but according to Glyphius by James, it's a negative. His software is based on tons of research an actual, proven ads. So my thinking is, as with all things, when you overdo something, people become desensitized to it.

For example, red headlines are falling out of favor. They used to work very well. But now, every single darn letter on the web uses a red headline, automatically (and unconsciously) telling people that it's a salesletter. So response is going back down.

I think there are two things to note, here:

1) James tests all the time. And he may or may not have tested without the word "order." And also, his copy is relatively short, and he relies heavily on affiliates to presell for him. So if people are already sold and hit his website, they might be inclined to "order" because that's precisely why they've hit his website in the first place.

(I would test it with and without the word "order" but with organic traffic versus affiliate traffic. My thinking is that it might be different in each case.)

2) Then again, as I said about the headline, the word may not depress response anymore. People may have become so desensitized to the non-use of the word "order" to automatically indicate that it's a salesletter, therefore being counterproductive.

Also, another thing to keep in mind is this:

The biggest increases in response have nothing to do with small, insignificant, often surreptitious things like words or colors. They do, but not as much as dramatic changes tested.

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Flint McGlaughlin, owner of MarketingExperiments.com (a great site for testing results) talks about variables being as wildly different as possible to obtain more statistically significant results. He calls them "categories."

Similarly, changing the approach of the copy, using a different category (or approach) to sell, often gives the best results. And in this mindset, the best changes are anything that:

- 1) Provide more proof (see my "FORCEPS" formula)
- 2) Allay customer fears
- 3) Ease of ordering
- 4) Right market awareness (see my "OATH" formula)
- 5) Less salesletterish appeal (more "newsy" or editorial-like)

And this can be copy-, design-, order- and offer-specific. Tiny little changes are only really good to test once you've discovered a winning formula. I often tell my students to test complete variations of approaches, and/or variables within the five categories above, before tweaking it with tiny little things like single words, colors, font sizes, etc, etc, etc.

What *always* increases conversions? Who else, but Michel Fortin can you ask this question?

- > Are there any design elements that you wouldn't leave out of a
- > letter? Elements that might be consistently increasing conversions currently...
- > like maybe audio under the headline, video, handwritten notes,
- > sidebars... elements of that nature?
- >
- > Thanks,
- > Stephen

Michel's Brain:

Audio under a headline increases conversion in most cases -- but it has decreased it in others.

So your question is trying to pinpoint those "absolutes" in terms of design that I would never leave out. And that's a tough question. I think there are only a few:

- 1) Tables, fixed width and centered.
- 2) White background for the middle table.

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- 3) Black text. (Always!)
- 4) Larger fonts for the headlines/headers.
- 5) Small number of graphics and photos. The picture of the author of the letter, a picture of the product (if it's a digital product, either a screenshot or a sample), and elements of proof.

Everything else is a variable -- that is, it varies. Even Johnson boxes (I have found, in some cases, that NOT adding Johnson boxes improved response).

A great book that talks about eye movement and how to place certain elements on a salesletter, which I recommend, is Lenny Eng's confession of a web copywriter, at:

<http://www.linkora.com/lennyeng>

And another GREAT course is Maria Veloso's Web Copy That Sells:

<http://www.webcopythatsells.com/>

Oh, one thing I would probably add as a design element that seems to almost always increase response are graphic bullets -- either plain yet colored bullets (look at pretty much all of Clayton Makepeace's salesletters), or check marks, boxes or arrows.

Finally, maybe another one is definitely link feedback. Sometimes, order buttons are great -- but we've had good response with plain old order links. The thing is, you need feedback -- either the cursor changing or the colors changing. Here are some great blog posts by another one of my students, Eric Graham, who tested this (and his findings are congruent with mine):

(Read these posts in the exact order I've placed them here.)

<http://www.conversiondoctor.com/conversion-blog/2007/usability-split-test-results-link-appearance-matters-more-than-you-think/>

<http://www.conversiondoctor.com/conversion-blog/2007/what-in-the-heck-is-%e2%80%9csecondary-link-feedback%e2%80%9d-and-how-can-it-help-you-sell-more/>

<http://www.conversiondoctor.com/conversion-blog/2007/submit-button-usability-split-test-results-size-does-matter/>

<http://www.conversiondoctor.com/conversion-blog/2007/the-ultimate-submit-button-revealed-putting-all-the-pieces-together/>

As I've delved deeper into multivariate testing, different strategies on “what to test” were a

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perfect question to ask Michel, who is a fanatical tester.

Michel's Brain:

When I think about elements to test and that convert the best, the two most important ones are the headline and the offer.

But other than that, I think of the AIDA formula. That is, anything that helps to draw attention, create interest, increase desire and drive action are elements I want to test.

For example, when it comes to attention, think of the things that help stop people from scanning/surfing, and forces them to start reading. From headlines to pictures, from pop-ups to video, from different colored backgrounds to different colored headlines.

Even different variations of these are great test subjects. (For example, we found that testing action shots of the author of an infoproduct s better than a mug shot. Especially if they "involve" the copy or copy elements.

Think Alex Mandossia's copy. He uses a lot of "eye gravity" shots, like pretending to hold up Johnson Boxes, pointing fingers at opt-in forms, holding up a headline, etc. Since you're in the stock market copy, then I'm sure you'll appreciate this one, which is actually for a successful product:

<http://www.vectorvest.com/>

(The author is "holding up" a computer screen showing the charts they offer their members, as if showing off the product.)

And do the same with the rest of the formula. (For instance, when it comes to "desire," one of the most important things are elements of proof: adding competitive charts, scans, pictures of the products, video tours/samples, etc are test-worthy.)

Anything that doesn't really help either part of the AIDA formula are not important. They tend to deliver poor results or negligible ones at best.

Colors are, for example, great to test with subheads, headlines, background colors, etc. Because when people scan, they help to grab their attention. (Including testing reserve type.)

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But testing different colored fonts usually don't give much in terms of results. (The only thing I found is that the higher the contrast, the greater the response. Black on white is, by far, the best. Dark blue on white, or black on light yellow, are next. After that, no big difference.

Strategies For Writing For Autoresponders

Writing sales letters is only part of the job of a copywriter...

- > Hi Michel - how bout an autoresponder series? Have you noticed
- > or developed a powerful way to set those up to sell, sell, sell? I
- > know some people like to do eCourses. Others like to tease the
- > reader to buy... and what about continually adding to the offer?
- > For example, "still haven't made a decision? How about a 3 day
- > free trial?" Do you know the best way?
- >
- > And, do you know of some successful examples I could subscribe to?

Michel's Brain:

Personally, I have found that actually taking parts of the copy and inserting them in the series is the best strategy. Works really well -- a lot of people don't read the copy from top to bottom, and so what you're really doing is "spoon-feeding" the copy back at them.

Sure, the copy should contain content, but the object is to bring people back to the salesletter and buy. Often, handling questions is a great tactic. Sort of like an FAQ delivered over time, incrementally.

For example, you can start your email with a question, and you take time to answer it -- and it should contain copy from the salesletter that answers it.

eCourses are great -- but what I've found is that people tend to be desensitized to them, thinking it's just another sales tactic. So you might want to state that it's a lesson -- not a course. Sure, the first email would be a series of lessons, and can indicate that the course will be delivered in installments, but not on the sales copy inducing people to join.

Also, "sneak previews," free trials, samples, or tours are best. This is part of what I talked about in my white paper, Death of the Salesletter, about "simplification" of the web.

Tapping Michel Fortin's Brain

Here's a great example: one of my clients works with Dr. Hyman for his "Ultrametabolism" book. And he's a testing nut. I mean this guy has tested everything under the sky. And what they found was the "sneak preview" worked best:

<http://www.ultrametabolism.com/>

The best offers I have found are most often:

- 1) Adding bonuses not announced on the salesletter. Or adding something "new" they never knew about, or anything "new" (i.e., "you probably didn't know this, but..."), etc.
- 2) Making the bonuses/premiums (i.e., the offer) time bound, and using the follow-ups to keep reminding them of the time crunch if they don't order soon.
- 3) Downsells. In other words, you sell them on the bigger package at first. After a while, if they haven't bought, you then make a lesser offer, perhaps for a smaller version, a digital version (as opposed to a physical version), less bonuses, etc, for a cheaper price. And this, of course, is restrained by time -- which actually works better if the main, bigger offer is "open" with no deadline or scarcity.

Winning PS formulas

The PS is widely known as the second thing a reader looks at after the headline. So they can be very important. It made sense to throw this question to Michel...

- > For the PS, I usually use 2 or 3. And the first one I aim to make
- > it have a curiosity element, for people who just jumped down
- > to the bottom of the letter, to persuade them to go back up and
- > start again.
- > What's your strategy for using the PS?

Michels' Brain:

My strategy is actually threefold:

1) Restate something said in the headline. Not necessarily verbatim, but in a benefit-driven, "oh, by the way" manner. Remember the three major steps about presentations:

- a) Tell them what you're going to tell them.
- b) Tell them.
- c) Tell them what you told them.

P.S.'s are therefore great tools to restate the core notions mentioned in the headline. For example, Brian Keith Voiles talks about using the headline (i.e., a variation of it or something that states something similar) in the P.S. It's a great tactic that I've used, too.

2) Mention something not mentioned at all in the letter. A "true" P.S., in other words. An afterthought. A "by the way." An incidental notion that has merit and benefits the reader. Perhaps an extra bonus not mentioned in the copy. Perhaps an extra benefit, either one that's not mentioned, non-obvious or unsought. Perhaps a last-minute deal or discount. Etc.

3) Stick to one or three. My tests show that two sucks. One P.S. is fine. Three is great. And you know what? In tests, we found that the middle P.S. is the one people act on, remember most, get inspired by, etc. This is why I add a call to action, perhaps a restatement of the close or a link to buy, in the second P.S.

If there is indeed a "aha!", an afterthought that's outrageous, or an extra not mentioned in the copy, use it with the second one.

A Simple Audio Script

You can't read much about audio scripts in the classic books like Caples and Collier. So why not ask the best web copywriter out there?

- > Hi Michel, what's your strategy for writing an audio script... like
- > for an audio button under the headline? Is it a summary of the
- > letter? Or a summary of the headline and deck copy? Or have
- > you tried different things with different results?

Michel's Brain:

Usually, I repeat the headline, the deck copy, and some kind of incentive to keep reading -- perhaps a curiosity puller, that pulls people into the copy to read something... And then I give them instructions on reading further.

I never make the offer in the audio. Don't invite them to skip over the copy, in other words. Simply tease them, and pull them into the copy. For example, let's say you do this on a sales page that sells copy critiques. You can have the audio repeat the headline and deck copy, and then say:

"Take a moment to read this important letter to learn more, such as how to plug these 7 costliest leaks in your copy right now that's draining your profits and drowning your bottom line..."

A Quick Tip On Guarantees...

- > Hi Michel - For the guarantee, are basic "30 day 100% Iron Clad Money Back"
- > guarantees enough? Or should it be ditched for something like double your
- > money back? And do clients go for the latter often?

Michel's Brain:

Ultimately, the generic answer is, the stronger the guarantee or risk reversal, the better. But a too-strong guarantee for a small ticket item in a very cynical ca cause it too backfire -- I know this from split tests. People tend to think there's a catch, in the back of their minds, even when your copy is clear.

7 Deadly Copy Sins

I've created several products to help people write better sales copy. One of them is at www.7copysins.com.

- > I just put together a few camtasia videos for a small little project,
- > supposed to be a lead generator for my membership site (which
- > I'm still putting together, and will be using your previous advice.)
- >
- > I called it the "7 Deadly Sins That Kill Amateur Sales Letters!"
- >
- > Do you think those 7 live up to the title of the product? Think I
- > should replace one with something else? I just bought a new
- > mic to fix the audio, so they'll be better quality the second time 'round...

Michel's Brain:

I think these seven are awesome.

Check out www.7copysins.com to see what he's talking about.