

The 12 Most Popular Headlines of All Time

Introduction

They say that if your web site has a bad opening headline you'll lose over 50% of your visitors in the first few seconds after they arrive at your home page. Headlines are the most important part of a web page, but what constitutes a good headline?

In today's article I'm going to list the top 12 best direct response headlines ever created. How do I know these are the top 12 headlines ever? Simple. I read this article. I've written quite a few headlines over the last few years. Some worked and some didn't. The headlines below have sold hundreds of millions of dollars of products over the last 50 years, and best of all you can adapt each of these headlines to suit your own business.

1. "They laughed when I sat down at the piano - but when I started to play!"
This is *the* most popular headline of all time. It has been used in direct marketing to sell millions of dollars worth of products, but what is it about this headline that makes people keep reading? I think it's the anticipation. As a reader you ask yourself "well, what happened when he sat down at the piano? Did they like what he played? What song did he play?". This makes you want to keep reading to see exactly what "they" did when "he" started to play the piano. Can you use anticipation to build curiosity in your headline?
2. They grinned when the waiter spoke to me in French - but their laughter changed to amazement at my reply.
Again, the use of anticipation. "What was her reply?" you ask yourself. "If they didn't think she could speak French, then what country was she from?". When I see this headline I picture a group of mature aged women sitting around at a fancy restaurant with a waiter by the side of the lady who replied in French. How can you use visual imagery to create a killer headline for your web site?
3. Do you make these mistakes in English?
When I was writing our most recent newsletter I decided to give this headline a try. "Do You Make These Mistakes When Attracting New Clients?" is the headline I chose. The headline is followed by a paragraph about our web master secrets email course. I think when you see this headline you immediately ask yourself "What mistakes is he talking about? What if they are costing me and my business money?" This headline is easy to flip and use for business. Can you flip it?
4. Can You Spot These 10 Decorating Sins?
Similar to headline #3, this headline provokes thoughts of embarrassment. Obviously this headline would've been used in craft magazines targeted to female homemakers, but what do you think the inner monologue of a reader would have been when she saw this headline? "Decorating sins? I've spent so much time decorating the family home. I hope I haven't committed any of these decorating sins. Let me read on just to make sure." What "sins" might your potential customers be committing? Can you use this headline on your web site or in an article?
5. How a "fool stunt" made me a star salesman
The "How" headline pulls really well because it sounds more like the introduction to a story rather than a headline. People love reading stories and when I see a headline like this I say to myself "Hmmm, a story. I don't really like salesmen but I wonder what the stunt was that made him a star". How can you use the "How" headline to make your ad or web page sound like a story? Being a PHP developer, I might use it like this: "How crashing a web server made me a star web developer".
6. How a strange accident saved me from baldness

The same as headline #5. I think to myself "How can an accident save this guy from going bald? Is he crazy? This sounds like an interesting read, let me skim over the article".

7. Who else wants a screen star figure?

The "who else wants" headline implies the theory of social proof. "Who else" means that other people already have what's in question (in this case it's a "star figure"). This headline also implies that just by reading the content of the article, you too can have a star figure. This gives the copywriter plenty of time to "warm you up" in the body of the article so that you're ready for the sales pitch a few paragraphs after the headline. Make this your next headline: Who else wants [insert the benefit of your product here]?

8. Who else wants a lighter cake - in half the mixing time?

The same as #7 with a clear benefit – half the mixing time. Implies social proof and if that doesn't work the benefit acts as backup.

9. Free to brides - \$2 to others

Headlines with "free" in the title don't really work anymore, but you could flip this headline in another way. This headline is strictly targeted to brides, making them sound in a class of their own, as opposed to "others" who have to pay \$2 for whatever the article is promising the bride for free.

10. Free to high school teachers - \$6 to others

The exact same format as headline #9. Use this headline and just plug in words relating to your industry: [Low price] to [your target audience] – [High price] to others

11. Announcing the new Ford cars for (year) "Announcing" is an authoritative word and immediately removes the visitor's skepticism that the headline could be for an advertisement. "New" also piques the interest of a lot of people as in most cultures it's generally acknowledged that the people with the newest [product] are trendsetting individuals and not followers.

12. Are You Ashamed of Smells In Your Home?

This is a binary response headline. You either answer yes or no. If you answer yes, then the headline gets your attention and you continue reading. The trick with this type of headline is to make it a question that the majority of your readers will answer yes to. Which question will the majority of your web site visitors answer "yes" to?

Conclusion

You've just read my thoughts on 12 of the top 101 headlines of all time. Next time you're adding a page to your web site or writing an article, why don't you try incorporating one of the headlines mentioned above? You never know which one will trigger your customers into a buying frenzy ;)