



# How to market your business better in 30 days





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# Introduction

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Marketing your business is essential – it's about having the right product or service for the right audience and making sure that they know it's available.

Most small businesses start on a shoestring. Few of us are fortunate enough to have serious investment when we have that rush of blood to the head that gets us to quit our jobs and embark on self-employment. That means you need to watch the pennies and do a lot of things yourself that you might not have any experience in.

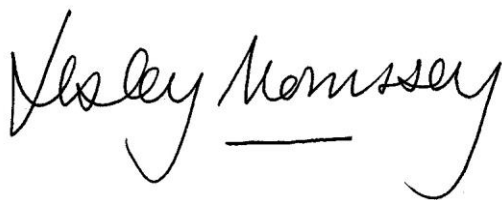
We've all been there and made a few – sometimes expensive – marketing mistakes.

Here's a few that I've made:

- I printed lots of postcards I never used
- I employed someone to do telephone marketing (because I don't like it) and found they weren't keen on doing it either
- I've launched unfocused marketing campaigns because I thought 'everyone will want this' – but nobody did and, at the time, I didn't understand why
- I've gone networking and met lots of nice people, but got very little business – because I didn't know how to network properly.

Now everyone has access to the web your written material has the potential to reach a huge audience. That's a huge opportunity – and a potential minefield!

Writing to persuade people to take action is a science **and** an art. This will provide you with the 'how to' and some tips to apply and pitfalls to avoid as well as some suggestions on how to develop that essential art of writing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nelsley Morrissey'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.



# Targeting your message

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## 1. What is your message?

If you have a clear idea of what your message is - hooray! But you're in a minority. I'm always surprised at how tough business owners find it to clarify what their message actually is. Let's look at some of the issues:

- A strap line (that's the bit that comes after your company name e.g. 'The world's favourite airline'; 'I'm loving it'; 'Just do it') is not your core message. It contributes to it, but it doesn't deliver value.
- What you think your message is and what your target audience wants to hear need to be flying in formation! To get potential customers engaged there needs to be something in there that hits their hot buttons.
- The message should be clear, easy to understand and short. If you've got to get into explanations then you haven't cracked it yet!

A good place to start is to understand what existing and previous clients have liked about what you have delivered for them. If they like a particular aspect of your product or service, there's a good chance others will too. Review your testimonials - or ask clients for feedback to help you with this.

- ▶ What makes you different from your competitors?
- ▶ Why do you stand out?
- ▶ What do you do that's different or better?

This will all contribute to crafting your message.

Start by writing everything down you can think of, no matter how trivial, you'll find there are some really useful bits of information. Ask colleagues, people in your network, suppliers and anyone else who knows your business for input.

Gathering all this information will take a little while - but will be worth it when you've developed a really powerful message.

In most cases you'll find the answers to some of these questions and the feedback from clients will start to clear some of the 'woolliness' away and a trend will start to emerge.



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The toughest part may be when what you thought were your strong points don't appear anywhere in your feedback - and, painful as it is, you have to let them go.

Pick the most compelling points and create a short statement that is focused on the reader, not on you and your business. Aim for something that will offer real value to the reader.

### **Action**

Write down the answers to these questions in detail:

What makes you different from your competitors?

Why do you stand out?

What do you do that's different or better?



## 2. Who is in your audience?

When you've cracked the message and got that polished to a shine, you need to know who you want to get it. I hear lots of people saying 'Anybody' or 'Everybody' - and I know of services and even products that do have a very wide application. The problem is that when your audience is so broad it's almost impossible to ensure that they are listening to what you have to say.

Let me give you an example - a friend of mine met the man who would be her future husband and they were amazed to discover that they had identical cars. Same colour, same model, same year, same everything! However, after some discussion they found that they had bought their cars for very different reasons.

- Ray bought his because of the performance and what went on under the bonnet
- Anne bought hers because it was red!

If the salesman had tried to sell Anne the car on its performance she wouldn't have been interested and would have gone to look at other makes of car. If the salesman who Ray bought his from had tried to interest him in the colour, he wouldn't have made the sale.

This salutary tale is a great example of the importance of knowing what your audience wants and then giving them that. It might be the same product or service, but the customer may want it for different reasons. That means that you now need to take your perfectly polished message and represent it for each niche audience you have so that it appeals to what they want!

To get the message targeted accurately you really need to know each audience well. This will enable you to present them with exactly what they want. So you need to know all about them and where to find them too.

You may have more than one audience, but don't fall into the trap of sending the same message to each group. Aim to reach one group of people at a time, tailor your message to their needs and that way you can target them much more closely.



**Action**

Describe your primary target audience.

What do they do?

What age group are they?

Where do they live?

What is important to them?

Now answer the same questions for each niche group you want to reach.





### 3. Giving them what they want

This is your third step on the journey of writing the right thing for the right audience!

Today we're going to look at what people want. Now you've got your message honed and you've identified at least one target audience, you need to know how to deliver exactly what they want.

The challenge for most of us is that we know what we deliver, but don't always check what our audience actually wants. I always ask my clients 'why do people buy you?' and 'what do your current clients like best about what you do for them?' Most of them don't actually know the answer, some of them think they know, but can't clarify it. I get responses like:

"Because they like us."

"Because we're good at what we do."

"We've got a long history going back years."

"I was at school with Joe [the MD]."

"We've always delivered what we promised."

"We've never had any complaints."

Realistically, none of these are good reasons for the client being retained. Delivering what you promise is an expectation, not a bonus!

The secret is to talk to your clients (past as well as current) and find out what they like about what you do - and, most importantly, what changed for them as a result of your efforts. That's the bit that will appeal to new clients - the 'what's in it for me?' part of the equation.

Learn about why people buy you and then use that to persuade others to do the same.



### **Action**

Talk to your existing clients.

What do they really like about what you do?

What do your products and services do for them that makes life easier?

Find out what the value is for them from what you deliver.

# Writing for the web

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## 4. Why is your website so important?

When people discover you exist, whether they've:

- Met you at a networking event
- Connected with you on social media
- Been introduced by someone else

They'll want to check you out. The obvious place to do that these days is online. They will look for your web address and go and find out more about your company and what you do.

How well does your website stand up to the test of 'being checked out'?

Does it look attractive?

Is it obvious what you do?

How easy is it to get around?

Is it a consistent representation of you and your business?

These are tough questions to answer and you'll find it hard to be that objective yourself. The easiest way to get some feedback is to pick the most outspoken of your friends and acquaintances and get them to take a look and give you some honest and constructive feedback.

As they may not be your target market you'll need to ask them for very specific information, rather than just ask 'what do you think of my website'.

So far we've only addressed the people who have already got an interest in you. When people find you from a random search then it's even more important as there's nothing that's 'warmed them up'.

The level of professionalism of your website reflects the way you run a business. As my Yorkshire relations would say 'Think on'!



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*Note: If you have to get alterations to your website done by your web designer, work through the whole web section making notes, then book a meeting with your designer and get the changes done in one hit.*

### **Action**

Be brave! Ask 5 people whose opinions you value to take an objective look at your website and tell you what they think. Ask them:

Does it look attractive?

What's the first thing you focused on when the site loaded?

Is it obvious what you do?

How easy is it to get around?

Is it a consistent representation of you and your business?



## 5. Writing for your reader

I wish I had a pound for every website I've visited that starts with 'We' - and then continues to 'We' all over their website in paragraph after paragraph!

I know we're all proud of what we do - but, as a potential customer, I really don't want to know what you do - I want to know what I get.

Worse still, some websites think that the first thing you want to know as a visitor is how long they've been in business, how many people are in the team, who their clients are ... etc. If I've visited your website there's a really good chance that the first thing I want to know is whether you have got what I want. Once I've established that you have then I might be interested in some of these things, but they shouldn't be taking over prime real estate on the home page.

If you've been working through this one day at a time you should have a good idea of what people might be looking for - now you've got to find a way to present it to them in a way that engages them.

For instance, 'We are a respected firm of chartered accountants' becomes 'You'll get a proactive approach to your business accounts, aimed at saving you money on tax and helping you to be profitable.'

It's all about sitting in the shoes of your reader and telling them what they want to know.

### **Action**

It's time to take another look at your website – how many times do you have 'we' on the page?

Work through the copy on your site and see how many sentences you can reposition so it's about 'you' instead of 'we'.



## 6. Your reader's journey through your website

When someone lands on your website they are usually looking for something, whether that's a product, a service or information. The secret of a good website is that their journey from their landing point to where they get what they want is seamless. There are no internal conversations going on in your visitor's head:

"Is that the page I want? No, that's not what I thought it would be."

"Where's the menu? Oh, is that it? No, doesn't look like it."

"Oooh, what a lot of boxes - I wonder which one I should click on."

"I wish people didn't have flashing adverts, it's really hard to find out if they've got what I'm looking for."

"This is a bit arty - but how do I find out whether they do X?"

"OMG - someone's written a book on the front page, I haven't got time to read that much."

These are just a few of the thoughts that fly around your visitor's head if you haven't made their journey simple - and I'm sure you've visited a few sites yourself that trigger the same kind of thoughts!

Here's the formula that helps your visitor to get what they want quickly and easily:

- Clear headline that stands out on the page (whether that's the home page or any other page) and engages the reader
- Short, lively copy that is benefit rich and about the reader and their issues, not about what you do.
- Copy that ends with a call to action - a 'now do this' statement - that is a link that takes them to where you want them to go next on your site or provides them with contact information for them to call or email you.

Of course, there are some other things that will help - and we'll be covering those in the next section!



### **Action**

Today's task is to ensure that the focal point on every page of your website is a headline that engages them. (There's more about headlines on day 15).

If you're still eager to do some more work check that every page has a call to action at the end of the copy.



## 7. Do it now!

Do you know what you want people to do when they've looked at each page on your website? Every page should have a purpose, whether that's to send the reader to another page with more information or to contact you by phone or email, or fill in a form, complete a survey, download a free report - the options are many!

It always astonishes me how so many websites tell people all the exciting things their product or service offers and then don't ask for action. It's like a sales assistant in a shop demonstrating the item you're interested in and stopping short of asking you if you are going to buy it.

If you want to make your website work, you need to ask people to take action - and you need to make that action easy for them to take. This means that when you say 'explore our product range now' you don't then expect them to scroll back up to the top of the page, find the menu, work out which page they want and then click through. You make the words 'explore our product range now' into a link so it's almost a knee-jerk reaction to click on that and they're exactly where you want them to go.

A couple of 'don'ts':

- Don't hide the link by just making the words a different colour or bold - people are not mind-readers and might not recognise that is a link. Use the web standard underline (ideally in blue) so there is no mistaking it.
- Don't say 'click here for our services page' and just make 'click here' into the link - that's not a call to action and people using a screen reader will only hear 'click here'; which doesn't tell them anything useful!

If you've got a page you particularly want people to visit create a mini-ad and install it in the right hand column near the scroll bar so they have a clear and attractive call to action, with a button that looks like it takes them somewhere. Don't rely on people guessing that the box is a link; many won't.

Online we are mostly impatient and lazy! We want results quickly and we don't want to have to work hard to get them - make it easy for your site visitor to do what you want them to do.





### **Action**

If you haven't introduced your call to action on each page – do it now!

The next task is to check all your links and ensure that you remove all the 'click here' references on your site and make them into a clear call to action or a button that people will click on.

## 8. 5 reasons why people don't get your message

If you want people to get your message you need them to hang around long enough to read it. There are lots of reasons people don't stay on a website; these are just five of them:

1. Too much going on, making it difficult for them to focus on any one thing and read even a headline.
2. No single point of focus - in other words several places with similar weight headings, making it hard to decide where to start.
3. Dark backgrounds with lighter coloured text. This tests the eyes and makes the brain work very hard processing the actual words rather than the sense of what they are saying. Most people give up quite quickly.
4. Long paragraphs that look 'heavy' - most of us think that it looks too 'hard' to read!
5. Justified paragraphs with all the lines the same length - so the reader's eye doesn't have a shape to help them track how far down they have travelled. It's easy to get lost and read the same line twice or skip a line. Frustration can send your reader looking for something less stressful to read.

These are simple things - but ones that many websites get wrong. How does yours stack up?

### **Action**

Review your website and check it for the above challenges to your reader.

Make notes and get the problem areas changed.

# Core writing skills

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## 9. Language, language!

Knowing what your message is, who your readers are and what they want is a great start, but then you need to write in their language. Before you start rushing off to find out how much it will cost to translate your site into Greek, Dutch and Swahili, stop! That's not what I'm talking about. I mean that you need to ensure that people can understand what you're saying - their way, not your way.

This may seem obvious, but so many websites don't get it right, so I think it's worth banging on about it a bit!

The key things to remember are:

- Don't use industry jargon - even if you're writing for that industry. You never know who has been asked to do the research; they may not understand all the terms you use without thinking.
- Ensure shortened forms and acronyms are explained. Even if you're referring to an industry association or institute, spell it out the first time on each page with the shortened version in brackets then use the short form thereafter.
- Don't ramble! Everyone can write, but some people take a lot more words to say what they mean than others. Keep it short and simple.
- Don't use obscure words, just because you happen to know what they mean. Optimum reading level for a website is about Grade 8 - that's a 12- 13 year old! If you have to use three simple words instead of one complex one, then do.
- Check your spelling, grammar and punctuation - your reader will make judgements about your attention to detail based on any errors they spot.
- Don't fall into the traps of using similar words incorrectly.

The moral of this is to write for your reader, in their language and at a level they can easily understand.



### **Action**

Check your website for jargon – how could you make things simpler?

Check that all acronyms appear in full the first time on every page.

Check your sentences don't run over 200 characters including spaces. If they do, find a way to chop them up into two or more sentences.

Get a 12 year old to read your site and check they understand it easily.

Get that irritating friend or relative who is utterly pedantic about spelling, punctuation and grammar to proof read your website.

## 10. Which word is right?

English is a very rich language with many more words than most languages have - however, even with so many words to choose from there are many instances where one or more sound the same, but mean something different. Here are the most common words that are misused.

**Complimentary** - when someone has said something nice about you OR a free gift or service.

- 'He was very complimentary about her dress.'
- 'There's a complimentary book for everyone who attends the workshop.'

**Complementary** - something that comes together with another item to make a whole, the other part of something.

- 'The two businesses were complementary, bringing together services that offered their clients a much wider selection of options.'

**Lose** - mislay; the opposite of found

- 'If you lose track of the presentation there are notes that will help you to catch up.'

**Loose** - able to move about easily; the opposite of tight

- 'Now he has lost a lot of weight all his clothes are loose.'

**Affect** - Verb; to take on the attitude or character of something.

- 'He is affected by watching football, he gets very excited.'

**Effect** - noun; the result of something happening;

- 'Winning the award had a big effect on him.'

**Effect** - verb; to carry out.

- 'She effected massive change in the department.'

**Your** - belonging to

- 'Is that your bag?'



**You're** - contraction of 'you are';

- 'I hope you're well.'

**There** - that place

- 'Put the parcel over there.'

**Their** - belonging to them

- 'Their feet hurt after such a long walk.'

**They're** - contraction of 'they are'

- 'They're very late; do you think something has happened to them?'

**Discrete** - separate, unconnected.

- 'The two projects were discrete.'

**Discreet** - Being able to keep something quiet, subtle, unlikely to gossip.

- 'Can we trust him to be discreet?'

Choosing the wrong word can impact on your reader's opinion of your ability to deliver good quality services. It can also distract the reader from what you are trying to say as they start thinking about the fact that you have made an error instead of concentrating on your message.

If in doubt, check it out - use a dictionary - I do this all the time!

### **Action**

If you've done the last action tasks your pedantic proof reader will probably have picked up any errors where the wrong word is used.

Today's task is to place a dictionary and a thesaurus where you can reach them easily (or create bookmarks for your preferred online versions) and make a habit of using them regularly.



## 11. Do you write like you talk?

When I was young I was a prolific letter writer - I had an American pen-friend and a French pen-friend, and my Mum stood over me shortly after Christmas and birthdays, insisting that I wrote to say 'thank you' to my aunts and uncles who had sent gifts to me. I carried on with this discipline when I left home and Mum would have been on my case if I didn't send her at least one letter a week! Of course, this was long before email became the way to communicate.

As I got older my school friends scattered far and wide and I made friends in the various places I lived; writing letters was the only way to keep in touch that I could afford - phone calls were much too expensive for my meagre salary! The feedback I got from people was often 'I love getting your letters, it's just like listening to you talk!' This led me to believe that 'writing the way you talk' is a good thing - but is it?

The answer is 'yes' and 'no'!

Writing in a way that gives people the impression that you're talking directly to them is definitely a good thing. It helps to make a connection and engages them to want to 'hear' more.

Writing exactly as you talk is not a good thing. We talk in fragmented sentences, stopping in the middle of a thought, adding something, changing subjects, interrupting each other and using incorrect grammatical structure generally. If you wrote like that people would never be able to follow what you were on about. When you're speaking to someone they have more to go on to help them understand than just the words. Your tone of voice helps people to follow your message and, if you're face to face, your face and body also help to get that message across - written copy is totally reliant on the words alone.

What is the point of all this?

When you write something read it aloud - it should be easy to read and easy to understand. If you find yourself running out of breath in mid-sentence or struggling to get through a sentence or paragraph, it's time to do some editing.

Writing so it 'sounds like you're speaking' is not 'writing like you talk'. It is about writing copy that has life and energy.



### **Action**

Try describing what you do for your customers out loud. Record it on your mobile phone, type it up and you'll see exactly how this works. Unless you're extremely good at dictation you'll find it necessary to do some adjusting. Try and retain the energy of the spoken thoughts, whilst tidying up the sharpness of the written one.



## 12. Stylish publications!

There are disagreements about things like single quotes or double quotes, one space or two after a full stop, what case headlines should be in - and other punctuation and layout styles. Whoever is 'right' or 'wrong' - and most people who are passionate about punctuation will swear THEY are right - in the end it comes down to the style dictated by the owner of the publication, whether it's online or offline.

House style is about consistency and professionalism and includes all sorts of things. For example:

**Fonts:** One or more fonts are chosen and everything that goes out from the organisation uses the same fonts - for headlines, body text and sub-headlines. Newspapers do this and more - their style sheets (actually manuals) dictate the font, the column width, the positioning of stories, pictures, type of pictures for particular places, etc. etc. Some newspapers even have a unique font created for them.

Changing a font can completely change the look and feel of a piece of copy - try typing something in Arial and then changing it to Times New Roman - it creates a completely different image. The style affects people's perception of your brand.

**Presentation:** I was taught (by a seasoned advertising executive from the renowned J Walter Thompson advertising agency) that headlines in upper case are hard to read and headlines that have a capital for each word stop the eye at every word so that your reader gets your message one word at a time instead of as a sentence. That makes sense to me - but, some publications and companies prefer the alternatives. I have even come across one publication that doesn't use any capital letters, so everything is in lower case (yes, they are designers)!

There is a whole range of options when it comes to highlighting a word or book/film title - some people use inverted commas or double quotes, others use bold, others italics; some even use a completely different font or colour of type. From my book editing days I favour the italicised title and hate the rash of inverted commas that some texts suffer from - especially when they appear as quotes and also in their normal role of apostrophes too.

There's even the little matter of your brand and logo - does it go left, right, centre, down the side, along the bottom? Can you ensure it's consistent online and offline?

As long as everything uses the same approach, that's fine - and it's worth checking out how your chosen style works in a variety of situations before making that decision.



Punctuation: Of course, anything you publish should be punctuated correctly - but what is correct? If you read Lynn Truss' *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* you'll probably have a good idea of just how passionate people can get about perfect punctuation! Even in the less lively *Penguin Guide to Punctuation* there is quite a discussion about the use of single or double quotation marks. I still maintain that double quotation marks remove the confusion that occurs when apostrophes and quotation marks appear close together - but that's my house style!

Some people like the modern tendency towards putting a single space after a comma and a full stop. My house style has two spaces after a full stop, although only one after a comma, because I learned that that little extra space gives the reader a moment to digest the last sentence before launching into a new one. It improves understanding and retention of information. The modern trend is to use a single space. Again, it's down to the owner of the publication or business to make that decision and then stick to it.

You wouldn't think there would be so many decisions to make before you launch your brand on the unsuspecting public - but, it's worth getting it right in the beginning in order to create a professional 'joined-up' image.

### **Action**

Review all your written communications.

How consistent is your own 'house' style?

Are you using a consistent font online and offline?

Does your image look consistent wherever it's presented?

## 13.Editing skills for beginners

When you've written a piece of copy the best person to edit it isn't you! However, if you don't have a handy editor around you'll need to at least review it. To gain a little perspective leave it as long as possible after having written it, but at least overnight.

With a fresh eye you'll immediately see things that reflect your evolving thought processes that occurred whilst you were writing! Things like starting a sentence with one thought in mind and then changing your mind part way through - resulting in sentences that don't flow and sometimes don't actually make sense.

Look for:

- Very long sentences; anything that is getting past the two line mark (on a normal A4 set up) needs breaking up somewhere.
- Wordiness; it's easy to find yourself rambling, so anything that doesn't make your point easily will need to be either cut or sharpened up.
- Complex words; just because you know what words mean doesn't mean your readers will. Stick to 8th grade English (see section 9) so you don't lose those people with a lesser vocabulary.
- Keep paragraphs to no more than 6 lines - one idea per paragraph; one thought per sentence.

Also check that the purpose you started with is delivered by the end - it's easy to go off track somewhere along the way and that means your reader will end up wondering what it was all about.

### **Action**

This is more of an ongoing task than a one-off. You should be constantly reviewing all your written material with the above 'rules' in mind.

# Brochures

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## 14. Creating hard copy brochures

These days people tend to focus on the web - and if you read the preceding sections you'll already have some ideas about creating copy for your website, but what about a hard copy brochure?

The main purpose of a brochure is to put information about your organisation into your potential clients' hands. Your brochure will have similar information in it to what is on your website, but you'll need to think about how it is presented.

Always consider how people handle the document you are giving them, where are they looking? When you know that you'll be able to place your key messages in the right places.

If it's in a book style presentation, the pages will need to be in the right order to lead people through the information in way that will keep them engaged. Most of us read the right hand page before the left - that's why newspapers put the second lead story on page 3, not page 2. It's why it costs more to place a magazine advert on the right hand page.

Think about what your core messages are and where the best place is to put them. If your first page says 'Introduction' will that engage your reader or will they skip that bit?

If your brochure consists of a folder with a selection of loose sheets, consider what copy will appear on the folder itself and in what order the sheets will be organised to provide the most appealing presentation and encourage the recipient to read them.

The folder itself offers opportunities to engage your reader even before they pull the sheets out - how will you do that? Where will that critical message go?

There are other types of brochure, but these are the most common. Your designer will work with you to help you create something that will make an impact - but don't abdicate all responsibility to them; it's your brochure, make sure it works.



### **Action**

If you have a brochure already take a good look at it and maybe ask a few people who might be your potential customers for their feedback.

If you don't yet have a brochure think about whether it might help you to present your business professionally and what would need to be included to do that.

# Writing to persuade

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## 15. Read me!

This is the first thing you want people to do so you can connect them to your message. Whether it's a brochure, flyer, website, blog, article or email the first thing they see must make them curious or interested enough to pursue things further.

- On a brochure it's the front page that entices you to look inside.
- On a flyer it's either on the front to get you to unfold it or the headline at the top that makes you want to read further down
- On an email it has to be strong enough to make you bother to open it
- On a web page (any web page, not just the home page) it needs to tell you enough to draw you on and find out more
- On an article or blog it's the headline that intrigues, engages and implies that there is something interesting, useful or even entertaining in the main body of the article or post.

So, what makes a good headline?

That's hard to answer, as every subject creates its own headlines to some extent. However, there are some good practice tips that might help:

1. It needs to be reader focused - so not 'We do', but 'You can have'
2. It needs to be long enough to be compelling and short enough to retain attention. It depends on the type of document as to what is too long - but not several lines, particularly not on a website. Some say up to 17 words; I'd suggest fewer.
3. It needs to have energy. That means active words. It should read well and not be hard to say (even reading silently can tie you in knots sometimes!); stumbling over the words reduces their effectiveness.
4. It needs to have something in it that connects with the reader in some way. It might answer a question, it might ask a question that relates to what they are looking for, it might say something challenging or controversial, it might say



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something that needs explanation and intrigues the reader to find out more. It might also say something that tempts or offers the reader something they want.

A good headline is a catalyst to the reader taking action.

### **Action**

Work through all the material you currently use to promote your business, website, flyers, brochures, email marketing messages. How good are the headlines in relation to the above recommendations?

# Marketing copy

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## 16. Emarketing secrets

Email marketing has joined telemarketing and direct mail as another effective way to reach potential clients. However, there are a lot of misconceptions about what makes a good email campaign. Here are a few things to think about before you launch your next email marketing campaign.

Put yourself in the shoes of someone receiving an email - we all get so much of it, there has to be something that stands out in an email to make you want to bother opening it. American audiences are different from UK audiences - but there are some common elements.

1. The subject line has to scream 'Open me!' to make me want to open an email from anyone I don't know.
2. The salutation needs to be my name - not 'Dear friend', 'Hi there!' or 'Dear reader'. And definitely not my full name 'Dear Lesley Morrissey,' has me reaching for the delete button! I KNOW it is spam; I don't need to read it to check!
3. The message must have value to me - even if it is a sales pitch, it needs to tell me something I want to know - not just what you want to tell me!
4. It needs to be short enough to keep me engaged to the end and long enough to have substance.
5. It must give me an easy route to taking action.

There are some other things to consider:

If it's a fancy html message I now know it's a sales message. That doesn't mean you shouldn't use visual images - it does mean you need to think very carefully about your message and how it will be received.

One email won't work - a percentage of your audience won't read it for all kinds of reasons, from 'not interested', to 'too busy'. Most of us need between 5 and 12 contacts before we are ready to buy (assuming the product or service is of interest in the first place). A good campaign will have a series of email messages integrated with telephone follow ups and maybe even one or two direct mail items.





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A minimum number of messages would be 3, but 5 would be better. The intervals between messages should not be too frequent (i.e. not every day or even every other day), and should be scheduled so they arrive on a different day of the week so if a recipient is always busy on a Tuesday, then the messages don't always arrive on their busiest day.

Each message should stand alone - but be about the same product or service. Consistency is good! If each email is for a different product those people who read several will be confused as to what you're presenting.

Most of this is good common sense - plan your emarketing carefully and you'll find it pays off - providing, of course, you've got a good list - but that's a whole other subject!

### **Action**

Plan an email marketing campaign.

What do you want to promote to your niche list?

What do the people on your list most want that this product or service fulfils?

What sort of subject line would make them take notice of each message?

What can you include in the message that is of real value to your readers?



## 17. Direct mail campaigns that work

I am famous for being phone-phobic - I answer it, but rarely pick it up to make calls. Consequently, the idea of telemarketing is something that sends me running for something else to do - anything else! However, the same doesn't apply to writing sales letters; somehow I seem to have developed a talent for them. Maybe it's my geeky systems mind-set that likes the idea of a nice structured process that takes the reader from 'hello' to 'here's how you get your hands on this'.

A good direct mail campaign has to get the reader's attention right from the beginning.

There are two approaches one is to try and disguise it as an ordinary letter the other is to be right up front and start with a benefit statement right above the salutation and below the address and date.

Whilst none of us are stupid and we know that a letter from someone we don't know is probably going to try and sell us something, if you can find a way to draw people into the letter you've got a better chance of them reading on. Curiosity is a powerful driver!

The first paragraph or the headline has to have something in it that reaches your reader strongly. This means that you need to know your audience very well indeed.

It's no good sending the same letter to a young married reader with two small kids as to an elderly widow. In the same way it's no good sending the same letter to an accountant as to an electrical contractor - they have different needs, different issues and different points of pain.

So paragraph one has to draw the reader in - talk about their problems and how much pain they cause - and then tell them that there's a solution.

If you use a conversational tone and put yourself in their shoes you'll be talking with them, not at them. Explain why the solution is there and what it will do for them.

Benefit rich copy is compelling, this means that you need to know what your reader's challenges, needs and wants are then your solution can be presented to address all of these. In fact, if you have really powerful benefits that address their worries you can use these as bold statements in the text. This means that, even if they only read the bold bits, they'll get your message.



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Finish up with a reminder of their problem and the solution and then ask them to take action - give them a number to call, reassure them how easy the process is, create an image of a pleasant experience and sign off.

You need to do this in ONE PAGE. Yes, there are 16 page sales letters, just as there are very, very long sales pages on the web - but for most people one page is enough. Most will read page one, but only glance at page two - unless page two is a different document.

If you have information to include don't put it in the letter, but provide it as a professionally presented attachment. The sales letter must be good enough to get them to look at it, but at least you won't have a long complicated letter for them to get their heads around.

Just one final thought - coloured envelopes have been proven to get opened more than plain white ones - something to consider when you're planning your direct mail campaign!

### **Action**

Plan out a sales letter aimed at one of your niche audiences.

How will you gain their interest?

What benefits will you use to keep them reading?

How will your letter be structured?

How can you use the layout of the information to make your letter look more attractive?

# Article marketing

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## 18. What is article marketing?

Most people that have even the most basic understanding of the World Wide Web know that content about your business or expertise in several places is a 'good thing'. People who know a bit more about search engines know that the more content you have on the web that is relevant and linked to your website, the higher up the search engine rankings you are likely to be. The challenge is - how do you get all this copy out there?

There are many options and they include a blog, guest blogs, articles and other websites. Today we're going to talk about article marketing.

What this means is that you write an article that shares your expertise and then publish it, not only on your website, but also on other websites that are set up for just this purpose.

Look at sites such as:

<https://www.articlecube.com/>

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

<https://ezinearticles.com/>

<https://hubpages.com/>

<https://www.articlecity.com/>

<https://www.buzzle.com/>

<http://www.easy-articles.com/>

This all seems quite straightforward - except that, if you read the 'instructions' on some of these sites, you'll quickly realise that posting the same article on several sites is not permitted. It has to be a unique article. For anyone who isn't a prolific writer that can be a huge challenge, but it's not as bad as it appears.

You don't need to write a completely new article, you just need to edit the article you've already written so it's at least 20% different from the original. That can include



rearranging paragraphs and using the richness of the English language to present the same thought in different words.

Aim for a handful of sites, start with one and then add others as editing time allows - and always post your articles on your own website too to build up the relevant content your site has. That will contribute to being found by the search engines too.

A word of warning - an article is not a marketing piece, it's a knowledge or information item that gives value to the reader in some way. It might share your knowledge of a specialist area, give them a series of tips, be a 'how to' explanation, present a case study so they can see the whole situation from start to finish. Most article sites allow you to put your web link and a short bio on the end, but if you try to include much blatant promotion in the body of the article it won't appear.

Start small and work up!

### Action

Visit the article sites:

<https://www.articlecube.com/>

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

<https://ezinearticles.com/>

<https://hubpages.com/>

<https://www.articlecity.com/>

<https://www.buzzle.com/>

<http://www.easy-articles.com/>

Pick two or three that you like and get yourself a free account and find out what their rules for submission are. Read the small print!

Write a list of subjects you could write about.

Get the 'How to write a good article' download from [The Treasure Chest](#)

# Blogging skills

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## 19. Blogging basics

What is a blog? Well, it all started out as an online journal - think Star Trek 'Captain's log, stardate June 21st 2315'. Online logs were called 'web logs', shortened to 'blogs' and that kicked off something that started as a personal journal of events and became a huge source of knowledge, information, humour and reputation building content.

So what should you write on a blog? There isn't a definitive answer - you can write whatever you want to write, however, if you're writing for a business audience you will need to consider how you can add value for your readers. If you don't, they just won't bother to read more than one or two.

Like your website your blog must have a purpose. That can be to:

- Share your expertise
- Comment on relevant topics
- Create a community
- Entertain
- Be controversial on your specialist subject
- Raise awareness of a particular topic

The important thing is that you know why you're blogging - and what you'd like to achieve from it.

So how often should you blog? That's entirely up to you - some people blog once a month, others daily. Consider what you'll need to do to keep your audience engaged and how you'll let them know when you've posted a blog. There are many ways to do this using RSS feeds or using social media marketing tools like Hootsuite to post links in Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn etc.

What happens if you're not a great writer? That's easy, these days you can post audio files, video clips, pictures - don't let a little thing like that stop you!



## Action

Download **How to blog for business** from [The Treasure Chest](#)

Jot down a bullet point list of your points for your first blog.

Develop these into a blog (or podcast or video clip)



## 20. Making one blog go further!

When you've written a good blog and posted it on your own blog - is that it? As the daughter of a thrifty Yorkshire-woman, I know how to make a little go a long way so I use one blog for many things.

This isn't the only way to do this, but it is a good place to start.

Step 1: Write a set of tips around one subject.

Step 2: Post the tips on Twitter one at a time over a period of time - say a day.

Step 3: Expand the tips into a blog by adding more information and explaining some of the points in more detail.

Step 4: Post on your own blog.

Step 5: Post the blog on another social media website blog e.g. LinkedIn or on another blogging platform such as Blogger.com.

Step 6: Take 3 blogs that have a common subject or closely related subject areas and turn it into an article. Edit the article (this can be as simple as rearranging some of the sections and a light edit) and post it on an article site.

Step 7: Put together a number of articles in related fields and create a report to give away to your loyal fans as a pdf download.

Step 8: Use some of your blog content edited down to size as a knowledge article in your newsletter.

Step 9: Repost the original tips on Twitter (allow a lapse of 4-8 weeks from the original posting).

Step 10: After creating a dozen articles you have the bones of an ebook - it might need knocking into shape to make it flow, but what a great way to demonstrate your expertise!

It takes a little extra work - but not as much as it would to create content for all these uses from scratch.





## Action

This whole section is a 'to do' list! Start at step one and work through the list.

Realistically, this will probably take you more than a day, but schedule the tasks in for the next few days and you'll be surprised at what you can achieve.

Start now with your first set of tips:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.

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## 21. Creating consistent blogs

Many people say to me 'I won't be able to keep coming up with good content for my blogs', it's a perpetual challenge! However, there are a few tricks to generating good content. The first one is to have a dedicated brainstorming session.

Get a pen/pencil and a sheet of paper and jot down all the things that are important about your specialism - start with main headings and then sub headings. I find mind mapping is really useful for this and working at it in a single session gets your mind flowing in the right direction.

When you've got your list, go and have a break and then come back and you'll find lots more ideas pop up!

Decide which subjects are 'big' enough to write two or three paragraphs about as a stand alone. Where there are related subjects with just a small amount of information you might find they work together under a single heading.

These will be the core of your blogging activity - you'll find that things come up in the news, in meetings, in conversation and at networking groups that trigger a rant or opinion piece. These can be added as they come along, but with your core list you'll never sit there thinking 'I don't know what to write'! You'll be creating good quality, useful and informative blogs.

### **Action**

Think of the things relating to your business that you've had lively conversations about recently.

Take a sheet of paper for each subject (aim for two or three to start).

Write the subject in the middle and then use the mind mapping technique to add the key points around it. It will start to look like a spider.

Aim for an introduction (why you're writing about this subject), three key points and a closing paragraph.

Use the map as a structure to get your first blog written.



## 22. Spreading the word

We've already talked about posting your blog content in more than one place, but there's another way to get your words in front of a wider audience.

This is about placing the link to your blog in as many places as possible. You write one post and then lead people to it from a variety of places, so more and more people discover your opinions, knowledge and business skills.

They say if you want the most efficient way of doing something, ask a lazy person! I think I qualify; I definitely don't believe in reinventing the wheel! Here's the system I use:

- Take your blog and pick out 3-7 sentences that stand alone. These are your social posts.
- Put them in a spreadsheet.
- Add the link to your blog on your website.
- Use a tool like Hootsuite to upload these and schedule them to go out to your social media pages.
- Send a couple of the day you publish the blog, the rest on the days following (You'll need a Hootsuite Pro account for this, and you can download a template for how your spreadsheet needs to be set up.)
- KEEP the spreadsheet. You can change the dates and reuse these posts in the future, next month, next summer ... and so on. The only exceptions are blogs that are topical and will, therefore, be dated quickly.

If you do this with each blog you write, you'll soon have a bank of reusable social posts, that keep your blog in people's current social media feeds for a long time into the future.

Most of your competitors will only post links during the week their blog is published - and then it vanishes without trace.

There are many social media management tools like Hootsuite. Check out Buffer, Tweetdeck, SocialOomph and ZooSocial for starters. Do some research to find out what each one does, before investing in a subscription. If you're going to put out posts to all your social media daily - it will save you hours in time and you can schedule a week or even a month in advance.



### Action

Take a blog you've already written and work through it to create soundbites. Which sentences will stand alone and may intrigue, capture interest and make people want to know what the rest of it is about.

Choose a social media management tool and complete your profile and attach all your social media accounts.

Get comfortable with their uploading and distribution system.



# Online marketing

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## 23. Integrated online marketing

Online marketing is part of your overall marketing strategy and social media play a leading role.

The secret of success is to have a strategy that identifies what you want to achieve, the resources (time/money/people) needed and the means of measuring your success.

These then need to be accompanied by a management plan; who does what, for how long, when and how?

Sounds simple - but most people don't think their online marketing through with that level of focus. To be honest, some people don't think their offline marketing through either!

The challenge is to know what the tools can do and then apply them diligently. Most online marketing is not a quick fix - it takes time to have an effect, sometimes creating this over several months. You don't build a reputation overnight!

Connecting up tools like Hootsuite to feed your tweets to your Twitter, Facebook, Facebook page and LinkedIn accounts is a good start. These and other tools like them need to be explored and understood first.

Having a strategy that dictates the sort of content you will post, how you will get traction on your Facebook page, how you will optimise your LinkedIn profile, etc. is important too.

Setting aside time is critical.

It never fails to amaze me that people are willing to invest time at networking events to raise their profile and promote their business, but not to invest the same amount of time in developing their online reputation in the same way. Consider how much you could achieve in three hours a week online.

Bear in mind that your online and offline marketing are not separate entities - they work together and can yield amazing results. I know of people who have asked their online community for introductions to companies they wanted to work with and have had the door they've been hammering on for years opened in a matter of hours.



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Take the time to think about your online marketing, include social media, your blog, newsletter, articles, free give aways (reports and white papers), autoresponders, email marketing and using groups to raise your profile, build your reputation and provide information - but remember, it's not a one way street - be prepared to give as well as take.

### **Action**

Review your online marketing activities.

How can you streamline them?

Which tools could you learn to use that would make it easier and be a better use of your time?

What could you do that you're not already doing?

What are you doing that you could stop doing or do differently?



## 24. Social media and your business

It's almost impossible to avoid social media these days - unless you've been living in the middle of a desert for the past few years with no communication with the rest of the world. Everyone has opinions about it from 'total waste of time' to 'most valuable tool that's been invented in decades'. Whatever you think, it's here to stay - and, no doubt, to evolve.

OK, whether eagerly or reluctantly, you realise you're going to have to live with it - then let's just look at what it is, and isn't.

- It is a means of forming and building relationships by communicating two ways.
- It isn't a broadcast only tool; people will very quickly get fed up if all you do is talk at them.
  - It is an effective way to extend your business profile much further than most people would otherwise be able to do.
  - It isn't a waste of time if you have a strategy and a management plan (but it can be if you let it take over).
- It is a way of growing a reputation as an expert in your field.
- It isn't a means of being irrelevant, spamming people or being rude or aggressive.
  - It is a way to share information easily so people benefit from the useful websites, articles, blogs and other online media that you find useful too.
  - It isn't a way to sell at everyone who follows you or befriends you on any of the social media platforms (they can disconnect as quickly as they found you).
- It is a very powerful business tool if you know how to use it.
- It isn't going to make you rich overnight, it's no quick fix.

So what does all this mean to your business? You've got your hands on a very powerful and very low outlay tool - but it's like any other tool in your toolbox; it won't work if you don't use it properly. That's the secret, get some advice, think things through, work out what you'd like it to achieve and what you'll need to do to get those results - then go for it, consistently and with focus.



**Action**

What social media sites are you currently on?

What do they do for your business?

What would you like them to do for your business?

How could you use them better?

How much of your time on these sites is social and how much business?





## 25. Key social media platforms

There are thousands of social media, social bookmarking, social networking and microblogging sites, but what do they all do?

Social media is a term that includes most of the others and also blogging, online article writing and newsletters. They're all means of communication with an audience that may be made up of random viewers, people you're directly connected with and people who have specifically asked to receive information from you.

Social bookmarking sites offer their members to post links that they have found interesting and useful as a means of sharing information with others. It's a good way of getting your blog read, but also of sharing specialist information that may be of interest to like-minded people. Generous sharing generates connections and builds your reputation.

Social networking covers membership sites that offer the opportunity for people to make new connections, reconnect with people they have known in the past and also get connected to people they want to meet through mutual connections. An introduction from a known source is always much more powerful than a 'cold' approach.

Depending on the network there are many other functions of these networks, providing everything from a dedicated group that has discussions around mutually interesting topics, to being able to post social information and events as well as photos and/or business information.

Typically most people think of LinkedIn as the 'business' end of the spectrum and Facebook as the 'social' end, but both have elements right across the spectrum.

Microblogging is where you can post small bits of information, limited by a maximum character count. Twitter is the best known, but by no means the only one.

Learning to write succinctly to get your message across is excellent practice for writing longer copy!

Using a combination of chosen social media to promote your message means understanding what they all do.



**Action**

Create a plan for each social media site and allocate some of your marketing time per day/week to carrying out your plan.

Get your existing social media sites working for you and then add carefully chosen sites.

## 26. Microblogging - what is it really all about?

The best known microblog is Twitter, but most social networks have something similar - known as 'updates' or 'status' . If 'blog' is short for web log, then a microblog is a very short web log. Twitter was launched in 2006 asking people to answer the question 'what are you doing now?' - but the scope has extended far beyond that and the understanding of what that really means varies widely.

There are others, like Tumblr, that are not confined to just text or to 140 characters. They allow you to upload pictures and audio/video files too.

I hear so many people complaining that 'Twitter doesn't work', but when I try to establish what they are expecting it do they either don't know or simply expect it to act as a free sales person. They have completely missed the point. That's a bit like going up to a complete stranger at a networking event or party and saying 'hello, my name is Lesley, I'm selling webcopy, do you want to buy my services?' Well, what would your response be if someone did that to you? Quite!

If the answer to 'what am I doing now' is 'playing computer games', not many people are going to be interested, unless I'm able to tell them useful or interesting things about the game I'm playing - like shortcuts or ways through. If the answer is 'eating a late lunch' that doesn't really tell them much either. However, if I'm following a special eating plan and trying to get a group of buddies together, some information on the lunch and how it works might be useful.

It may sound calculated, but if you're going to use microblogging to help you achieve something, whether that is new business connections, fans, people who have a common interest, keep up to date with people who are friends or find out specific pieces of information, you need to know what you're trying to achieve and post content that helps you to do that.

Always look at it from the perspective of people who see your messages - what is their likely reaction? Use the microblogs' power to get information to a larger audience, share your expertise, gain a reputation, build relationships, create interest, pass on useful information, let people know of offers and special deals and interact with a wide range of people.

Don't be a broadcast-only person, respond to others, share information with your own followers and answer questions.



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Finally, be human - it makes a big difference, people engage with you if you engage with them, if you are business, business and more business, they get bored. However do be careful what you say – it may come back to haunt you one day!

### **Action**

Plan your microblogging strategy (yes, that includes updates and status on various social platforms)

Schedule time to write one post a day - or at least three a week.

Aim to share and/or like at least a couple of other people's posts a day, that are relevant and interesting to your followers/connections.

Respond to at least one person's post with a comment each day.

TIP: If you have a social media management tool you can use the dashboard to make this reasonably easy, so everything is in one place.



# Newsletters

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## 27. What makes a great newsletter?

This is very subjective - everyone has a different view of what they want in a newsletter, but we all get so many these days that those that are read consistently have to offer real value, consistently and repeatedly.

If you're like me, you've signed up to various reports or giveaways at various times or given your card to people at networking meetings and now you're on their list. This means that you almost certainly get the occasional (or frequent) newsletter. If you're not too busy and in a generous frame of mind you'll probably read the first one you receive - but after that they simply get deleted if that first issue didn't impress you with the value it provided.

You have a choice, you can find the newsletter's 'unsubscribe' link and get off the list or you can just delete them as they come in. Most people I know delete rather than unsubscribe.

So what would get you to keep reading the newsletter, week after week, or month after month? For most of us it's one of three things:

- Valuable information that helps me in some way or makes me think about things that will move me forwards
- Offers that are targeted to my specific needs/wants and offer excellent value
- Entertainment

A typical reader does not want to know about you or your business' progress; they want to know something that will help them to do something they can't, or something that provides a solution for a problem. Information of value to the reader is right at the top of the list of things that keep people opening your newsletter. This means that you really need to know your readers very well indeed.

I read about ten newsletters reliably - these are some of my favourites:

<http://gihanperera.com/newsletter> Expert Gold by Gihan Perera Expertise about marketing online



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[http://www.mediacoach.co.uk/free\\_email\\_newsletter](http://www.mediacoach.co.uk/free_email_newsletter) The Media Coach by Alan Stevens Great entertainment and lots of useful tips on media interviews, speaking and social media.

<http://www.lopatata.co.uk/resources/connecting-not-enough-newsletter> Connecting is not enough from networking expert, Andy Lopata. Excellent tips and advice on networking offline.

Whilst these are not the only newsletters I read, they're a good selection of widely varying formats and styles. There is no magic formula, just great value issue after issue. Are you up to the challenge?

### **Action**

Review the newsletters you currently receive.

What appeals to you about them?

Sign up to one or more of the above newsletters or see them online and see if the style appeals to you.

Identify what you could deliver in the way of value to your readers.

Decide whether you could do this yourself or engage a copywriter to help you.



# Writing for the media

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## 28. Press releases: the importance of the story

Getting your name in the press is a great way to promote what you do, but how do you go about getting a high profile in the local and national media?

The first and most important thing is to have a good story. People aren't interested in the things that are exciting to you - like opening a new business, moving to a new location, employing a new member of staff, even launching a new product or service unless it's very unusual or leading edge.

If that's now knocked out everything you can think of, don't worry, there are lots of ways to make your story work. These are just a few ideas to get you started:

- Get someone to interview you about how you got into business and what rocks your boat about what you deliver - people like reading about people when they have an interesting story.
- Find something that's in the news that's relevant to your business and link up with that - how does it affect your business? What do you deliver that will help people deal with the issue? People like solutions or interesting facts they can relate to.
- Dig up something about the type of business you're in that is quirky or unusual and write about that. People enjoy 'odd' stories.
- Write a personal commentary on something that's going on at present in your business - a 'day in the life' approach. It has to be written from a very human point of view, rather than a sterile description, to make it work. People like to get an insight into different worlds.
- Do something for charity - but make it unusual and involve all your team. It's wise to have a really good reason for choosing the charity to really make a good story. People like good deeds, especially when there's a strong driver behind them.

So now you're getting the idea you'll find that you start to see the story in everything you do!



### **Action**

Identify three publications that your target audience reads.

Make a list of three or four subjects related to your business that you think the readers of these publications would be interested in.

Use the mind-mapping techniques to create the key points you want to include. Stay focused on your readers and what they want (not what you want to tell them).



## 29. The structure of an effective press release

Having a story is only half the battle (although probably a big 'half'), the next step is delivering something that an editor will notice. There are a number of things that help to get your press release read and published.

1. A good headline. This needs to be engaging, interesting and generate enough curiosity for the reader to make them want to read more.
2. A strong first paragraph that sets the scene and keeps the reader interested enough to want to read more. It's not good practice to put your company name in the first line or headline, it can turn the editor off as they immediately classify the article as 'advertising'.
3. Statistics and data that validate your story.
4. Quotes from relevant people, especially experts or known names, but your managing director or a key member of your team will do if they have something interesting or, better still, controversial to say.
5. A point at the end so your story comes to a clean end rather than petering out weakly.

These are my tips to give you a better chance of your press release being considered for publication.

- Head the press release up with 'Press release' and 'for immediate release' (or, if your story cannot be published until a certain date, 'for release on [date]')
- Ensure that each page carries your contact information (name and phone number) at the foot of the page so the editor can get hold of you if necessary.
- Don't put your contact information (web address, company phone number, email) into the press release itself, put these at the end for information.
- Don't try and sell your products or services; that will get your piece 'spiked' (deleted in today's terminology).
- Stick to no more than two pages of A4, preferably one if you can get your story down to something short and focused. If the editor is really interested he or she will ring you for more information.



## How to market your business better in 30 days

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- If more than one page, write 'mf' (meaning 'more follows') at the foot of the first page and 'ends' after the final paragraph and before the information for the editor. This ensures that the editor knows there is another page if someone prints it out and the pages get separated.
- If you are attaching a photo or other visual put a caption in under the editor's notes. Ensure you identify everyone of importance in photographs by position.

If you are hoping to be published in a particular publication it's a good move to read some previous copies and ensure your item is in keeping with their style.

Develop your own press list that includes details of local and national publications you want to be in and also professional journals and relevant magazines that might be interested. Invest some time in finding out who the right contacts are and find out what they are looking for and you've got a much better chance of getting noticed.

Be persistent - regular good quality press releases will, eventually, get published.

### **Action**

Using the above as guidance develop your subjects from yesterday's action plan into strong press releases.

Get in touch with the publications you have identified and find out what they need in terms of submissions. Aim for a friendly conversation with the relevant editor and find out their lead times, how they like material delivered and deadlines for each issue.

Make sure you get the right contact details and add them to your press list. You can grow this list over time.

# Award presentations

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## 30. Writing a winner

Getting an award, whether locally, regionally or nationally, is a great boost for your business. Sometimes you are nominated by other people, but often companies can simply enter themselves. This means that the written application is a document that you really need to get right.

One of the most successful award winners I've met put the secret into a simple formula for success 'Just answer the questions!' This may seem obvious, but, having helped a few people with their award presentations it's surprising how many people ramble way off the topic of the question when writing the responses to the qualifying questions.

This is not a time to go 'political' and answer the question you'd like to have been asked; you really need to focus on what the judges are looking for. If they don't see it in your responses, you won't even make the short list.

The easy way to retain focus is to start with a list. Look at the question and write a list of all the things that relate to the question. When you've included everything you can think of organise the list into a logical order. This might be chronological or it might be in order of achievement or link things together that are related in some way.

Now you have a structure start with an introductory statement, write around each group of subheadings and then finish with a closing statement.

Don't be afraid to use subheadings or bullet points as they both help the judges to get your message easily. When you've finished, put it aside for a day or two and then go back and read it objectively. Does it ramble? Is it easy to understand? Is it focused and full of relevant information? Are there words, sentences, even paragraphs that could be cut out or cut down? Be ruthless!

If you use this approach to every question you'll be much more focused and your application will be sharp and polished. The judges will get the information they want without having to make a lot of effort - and you have a fighting chance of getting through to the next stage.

### Action

Find out what awards are coming up in your area and in your industry.

Decide which categories you might be eligible for – don't be shy!

Find out how to get nominated or apply.

Plan your presentation.

### ... and finally

Visit [www.insidenews.co.uk](http://www.insidenews.co.uk) and raid the Treasure Chest if you haven't already.

If you need help with your written communication

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*Lesley Morrissey runs Inside News, a boutique agency specialising in reputation marketing. The team focuses on generating content to:*

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*Maintain your **Visibility***

*Demonstrate your **Expertise***



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