

Great Headlines

A GUIDE TO GETTING THE MOST OUT OF
DISQUS PROMOTED DISCOVERY

DISQUS

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We'll help you put your content in front of relevant, interested readers, and we can guide you through all steps of the process, from deciding what to promote all the way through creating and optimizing the headlines and executing the campaign. Contact us for more information and for more copies of this guide.

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Great Headlines: A Guide to Getting the Most Out of Disqus Promoted Discovery

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Great Headlines

At Disqus, we help the right readers find your content by placing your headlines in front of them with Promoted Discovery.

But to get them to click, that headline has to be compelling.

So our editorial team created this guide to help you write better headlines. It's our way of sharing what we know, based on our own research, our Promoted Discovery results, and the decades of headline-writing experience represented on our editorial team.

We hope it's useful and welcome your comments or suggestions for our next edition at advertise@disqus.com.

Just The Headlines? What About Articles?

This guide will help you figure out what headlines will work best for Promoted Discovery.

But of course the start of a great headline is a great article. So feel free to use these guidelines to help you decide what kinds of content might work.

When you decide what to create, you might think about what your company wants to say, or how to share a certain kind of message.

Start with the reader. Picture the person you want to reach. What is she talking about online or in social media, or in person? What is she trying to find online? What would be helpful or fascinating or compelling to this person?

Find the right intersection between that content and your goals, use our advice to guide topics and headlines, and you'll succeed.

Authenticity

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE: BE REAL

When USA Today was launching in 1982, the editors rewrote the business headline “Personal Incomes Rise” to **We’re Making More Money.**

They wanted to appeal to real people with a real message. They were marketing to readers. That’s what professional headline writers do every day.

It’s fine to be aggressive and creative. Do what you can to get people to read your content. Our research shows that the most-often-clicked articles are about celebrities. So if your article is about a celebrity, you’ll get far more attention if you name that celebrity in the headline.

But don’t get carried away. False or misleading headlines will create expectations and then disappoint the reader, ruining your chance of building a valuable, longterm relationship. Be aggressive, but be honest.

Structure

HOW TO BUILD GREAT HEADLINES

Four tricks that work so well, they appear in just about every list of headline tips:

1) **Make a list:** The 5 Best, 8 Ways to, 11 Tricks, 25 Best Looking. There's even data that shows odd numbers performing better than even ones.

2) **2-for-1:** Use a colon to get two ideas into one headline, with a label followed by a phrase:

Pizza: Make it Really Well at Home

Get Out Of Debt: How One Woman Did

Chevy Volt: Test Drive and Test Charge

3) **Use words:** Use 5-10 powerful words. Subjects, verbs, adjectives, superlatives.

4) **Strong lead:** Put the most important words first. Many people don't read the whole thing.

Creativity

DON'T BE SO LITERAL

The headline is NOT the official title of an academic paper. It doesn't have to be the perfect summary of what's in the story.

That can be hard to swallow. Many people do a great job of creating an accurate headline, just as the number of horsepower might be the most important technical detail about a car. But what sells the car might be the number of cupholders.

Here are some things you might put in the headline:

- A wonderful quote from the article
- A fact in the middle that's fascinating
- A question that's answered by the article
- A list of people or places or names

Wow! Factor

SURPRISE YOUR AUDIENCE

Headlines perform well when they're unusual, startling, surprising or even outrageous:

What to Say When Someone Knocks on the Bathroom Door

Musicians That You'll Be Dancing Naked to in 2013

How Men and Women Use Smartphones Differently

Man Discovers Wife of 19 Years Used to Be a Man

So It's Possible That Wearing Black Clothes Makes Us Aggressive

The 21 Best Gifts To Anonymously Email Your Boyfriend

VIDEO: Diver Trapped on the Ocean Floor by a Great White Shark

Stay authentic. Use something outrageous only if you can deliver on that promise to your reader.

Be Superlative

BEST, WORST, MOST, LEAST, UGLIEST

Nobody wants to read about the middle. Offer the best or worst, or other versions of the extremes, and your headlines will be more compelling.

Best Industries for Starting a Business This Year

The Most Beautiful Private Retreat in Northern California

The Biggest Draft Bust in the History of Each NFL Franchise

Incredible Oven Makes New LG Range One of the Best of the Year

The Hunger Games: The Best Blu-Ray of the Holidays?

The Best And Worst Fashion Trends of the Year

If you don't already have this kind of content, check again. You might. Look for things you've done in the past that can be combined into these kinds of lists. Like "Our 10 Best Hotel Reviews."

Aspiration

HELP ME ACHIEVE SOMETHING

Readers have dreams. Some they already know about; some they won't discover until they see your headline. But they want to do great things, and your headlines can open those doors.

Be positive, and make it clear that this article will help. Some successful examples:

10 Phrases That'll Resolve Any Conflict

Incredible 2012 Hairstyles to Steal for Next Year

How to Shine on a Job Interview

Successful People Think and Act Differently

5 Things to Consider Before Quitting Your Job

10 Beauty Tips: How to Look Expensive

Does Your Body Language Project Strength?

This is also a case where you might have this angle in an article but not reflected in the original headline, so watch for chances to use this kind of headline.

Be Imperative

GIVE CLEAR DO'S AND DON'TS

Sometimes, people just want to be told what to do. Kids tire of “eat your vegetables” or “don’t text in the crosswalk” but many adults are happy to take orders from smart strangers.

Start with a verb (or “Don’t” and then the verb) and be direct. Some examples:

Take Care of Employee Smartphones Before They Hurt Your Business

Organize Your Car Now So You’re Ready for Any Emergency Later

Feng Shui: Make These 5 Changes in Your Home

Pair a White Button-Up with Brightly Colored Skinny Jeans

Don’t Avoid Office Gossip: Use it to Get Ahead

Don’t Set Up a Home Office Without These 7 Essentials

Don’t Start These Businesses in 2013

5 Free Must-Have Apps for Driving

Offer Useful Advice

SHOW ME HOW

How-to books, videos and courses are always popular. Your content will be too, if it shows people how accomplish things they need or want to get done:

Make Your House Look Better, Fast, in 5 Simple Steps

Buy These 6 Things in Winter When Prices Are Low

How to Know When to Lease, Buy New, or Buy a Used Car

Avoid Hacking: How to Find and Close Old Accounts

6 Tips for Designing a Cheery Home Workspace

10 Secrets to Creating Your Own Beautiful Kitchen Garden

DIY: How to Build Elegant Black Window Boxes

Tell ‘Em What’s Inside

DON'T HIDE THE BEST PART

Is your content presented in videos? Infographics? Recipes? Step-by-step instructions?

People love those easy-to-use formats, so don't keep it a secret.

Headlines that start with the format or refer to it in the middle often work best:

VIDEO: Watch a Five-Car Pileup As It Happens

INFOGRAPHIC: How to Be a Great Leader

Holiday Recipes: 5 Healthy Snacks the Kids Will Actually Eat

4 Steps to Recover When Your Email is Hacked

VIDEO: The Search for Kennedy's PT 109

SLIDE SHOW: 8 Fashion Failures From the Oscars

AUDIO: Hear 5 Successful Entrepreneurs Explain How They Did It

13 Fantastic 30-Minute Recipes

Watch The Little Ones

USING ARTICLES AND PREPOSITIONS

Headline writing is tricky. You want to convey a strong message quickly, but you don't want to sound awkward.

Words like “of” and “and” and “the” and “a” can be essential to some headlines while they're unneeded clutter in others.

So once you've written a headline, try taking out the little words and decide whether it's easier or harder to understand.

Man Steals Woman's Popsicle is far better than **A Man Steals a Popsicle from a Woman**.

But **6 Signs You Need Day Off** sounds awkward, while **6 Signs You Need A Day Off** sounds right. Trust your ear.

Great writers often simplify sentences by replacing little words with possessives: **Try Out The Old-Time Cable Cars of San Francisco** becomes **Try San Francisco's Old-Time Cable Cars**.

Multiple Headlines

REACH THE BROADEST AUDIENCE

When you're creating headlines for Disqus Promoted Discovery, start with the headline on the article. Will that same headline be compelling if it's seen on a site that's about a different topic?

If so, use it for Promoted Discovery. But also consider writing more headlines from different angles. You're reaching a wide audience, so what appeals to one person might not attract another.

We'll be glad to launch multiple headlines for you, then accelerate promotion of those that perform best. So consider writing 4 or 5 for each article. Here's a sample:

How to Throw the Best Brunch Ever: Tips and Recipes

13 Great Recipes for the Best Brunch Party Ever

Hold The Coffee! How To Throw A Brunch Party That Will Energize (Not Sedate) Your Guests

Make Brunch a Success: Tips and Recipes for a Great Brunch Party

Above All: Context

REMEMBER WHERE YOU ARE

If you have a giant concert photo, a great headline next to it might just say **The Boss!** But in a Promoted Discovery box on another site, that headline might not make sense and would need to read **Springsteen Rocks Charity Concert.**

Disqus has a broad footprint, running on many kinds of sites. You won't always want to use the headline that's on your site.

To write good stand-alone headlines, think of something that would work on a billboard with just some words and your logo. You have only a few seconds to convey a very clear message.

One tip: Avoid acronyms, nicknames or inside references that can't stand alone. "M's" means the baseball team in Seattle, and "CHOP" means the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia. A reader in Topeka needs to see "Baseball Team" or "Hospital" for it to make sense.

Be clear. Be simple. And let Disqus help.

Together we'll make your content a success.

