

Let your readers understand faster

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Checklist

1. Select relevant facts
2. Formulate the headline, maximum seven words.
3. Formulate other headlines, maximum seven words
4. Use many, big, relevant pictures.
All with relevant text
5. Letters minimum 12 pica
length of line maximum 70 signs
make the pictures bigger
6. Take away *half of your text* including
 - a) Superlatives, beautiful, nice
 - b) Abbreviations
 - c) More than, circa
 - d) Weak contrast like text on colored background
including white text on colored background
 - e) Our own company name in the text and "We will do our best"
 - f) Mathematical signs (/+=%)
 - g) Your own art design, funny text and funny pictures
 - h) NO WORDS IN ONLY BLOCK LETTERS

The reader has to understand your message in an extremely short time. A person older than sixty years see contrasts only to one forth of what a person age forty may see.

Use the layout to help the reader, but not to fulfill your art ambitions.

Your business idea may fail due to bad marketing

Here comes the motivation to study the text. The single highest correlated quality or character among top level managers is their ability to express themselves both oral and written. Their ideas will simply fail if they do not express these ideas and orders so that others understand fast.

The cost for marketing may be ten times higher than needed due to irrelevant information.

Of course your clients have to use your Internet much more to get faster response and save money for the company. Today, compare how real estates companies are far behind the airlines today in this aspect. You will fail if your clients have to spend some extra seconds each time.

A big mistake is to market your products and your company, when clients are visiting your page looking for fast service.

Examples

You want, via Internet, to change your departure time for a flight. You want to do that without any interruptions such as reading the marketing text for cheap travels to other destinations. Your clients will look in the same way at your Internet site.

A tenant wants to give a message to the caretaker that one window is broken in the house. Help your client to do that, nothing else.

A young couple wants to rent an apartment in Hamburg. Let them have your proposals. Avoid all irrelevant information.

If you try to give visitors or clients a lot of information you will end up with showing them what you have rather than giving them what they look for. There is a huge difference of information you have to give to a banker compared to a person searching a flat or a tenant looking for service.

On the other hand you may lose possible clients by giving wrong information. There are facts which are important for some people but not for others.

Years ago enthusiastic designer of websites used many colors, odd designed letters and music. They tried to make their site funny and interesting. Users did not choose nice funny avatars, but it turned out to indicate that they are teenagers.

A common mistake by residential real estate managers are to show pictures of nice young smiling kids with the father having one child on each knee. Airlines do never show a baby in the airplane, because they know that the prime association when seeing a child other than your own children is a constant scream. Some readers have gone through a divorce and have very bad feelings. Old people normally stay away from all kids except their grandchildren. I would personally be more attracted if I see two old gentlemen in the silent sunny garden playing chess. Show realistic, informative pictures.

Texts for Internet

As a manager or a coming manager in the real estate business you have to show initiative to augment the quality of texts originating from your company. Here is a checklist for tasks to be performed

Homepage

Construct your web so each visitor will find what he or she is looking for extremely rapid.

There are three main groups of persons, who visit the homepage of a residential property company. On the first page you show each group the direction to go.

1. Presentation of your product. Search of apartment.
2. Service to present tenants, reporting errors
3. Information to bankers, shareholders and others who need up to date information of the company

Present the product

How can a person find an apartment or a commercial unit very quickly?

Show big attractive professional photos with relevant information.

How to search for the apartment?

Do not use the possibility with a research filter to enter number of rooms, number of baths, balcony, a certain small region or price range. *Any search filter will take away all other almost perfect solutions.*

A client indicates that he wants a three room apartment. The program filters will regard this information as absolutely no proposals such as 2,5 or 4 rooms.

The number one rule for a salesman is to find out what the client wants and then propose the best he has similar to those wishes.

In Berlin there are twelve regions. If clients get a chance to select, he will probably write region Mitte. That answer excludes all other nearby regions.

A client indicates Göteborg. He will have no chance to get a nice flat in nearby Kungsbacka, Partille, Mölndal or Lerum.

Help the client to list your proposals in different sequences like price, number of rooms or post code.

A filter will be good if you have more than fifty entries. If you constantly have fifty or more vacant apartments in a town like Berlin, the solution is rather a change of management.

You need large photos of interior, exterior and surroundings, a floor map, a location map and a description without superlatives.

Pictures are more essential than the text

There are dating companies on the Internet earning a lot thanks to that they know simple marketing. The answer rate is at least ten times higher for entries with relevant photos than without any photo. The same applies for real estate dealers. A prosperous real estate dealer use a professional photographer and shows thirty pictures.

Make the action easy

Do not demand mandatory information from the presumptive client such as telephone number, e-mail address or income.

You may indicate that the application will be handled with priority if the visitor or client gives information of income, previous address etcetera. Tell the visitor what he can do to be treated with priority.

Service to present clients

- Report damages on the house.
- Payment questions.
- Forms and instructions when a client moves in or moves out of an apartment.
- Specific instructions for each house like rules for common areas.
- Sell extras such as security door, insurance for the apartment, white goods for the kitchen, parquet.

Information to bankers, shareholders and business partners

- A seller needs to know if your company has the possibility to pay.
- Other real estate companies want to give you an offer to sell or to buy.
- The staff of the community has to be satisfied with your company in the community.
- You send actual information to your banks every quarter. Your bankers may need to study old financial reports, or study specific houses.

Texts for Marketing

Advertisements, direct mail, brochures, television.

Define the message

The main argument

Formulate each of your strong arguments with few but adequate words.

These arguments are based on pure facts and so strong that the presumptive reader immediately decides if he wants to read more.

Formulate the whole message short, not more than seven words. The headline has to cover the main selling point or the main information. It is not easy to make the headline simple, but try.

The main argument is dedicated for the main headline.

Find out which facts in your offer are *unique*.

Compare these two headlines for dating advertisements:

“Charming, nice man wants a wife”

with

“Architect, 180 cm, 37 years, Berlin”

Companies in the retail business have experience how to sell. You have certainly seen pamphlets with short headlines in black, big letters on yellow background saying;

Meatballs 2.25

Carlsberg Beer 0.99

Hot Dogs 3.45

The text arguments and corresponding layout is no hazard. Compare their knowledge with uneducated design. Why do they not announce in colored letters with small size on a nice background like below?

ICA has 37000 products in 40 towns and works on long term with good service

Freie Wohnungen in Berlin

is the perfect title to select people looking for an apartment in Berlin. Only “Freie Wohnungen” without “in Berlin” will result in less number of relevant answers. The additional fact attracts the right persons.

Potsdamer Platz, 410 Euro

will give relevant clients

This message contains enough information for the reader to skip or continue to read.

You succeed when you find the specific argument for the single presumptive reader.

Good arguments

Some arguments are top arguments, but only a few make the headline.

These extra arguments may be essential for some of the readers but will disturb others.

To attract students to this MBA course the main arguments is probably the result. The student wants to know what he will receive after the study such as higher salary, a new work with higher status, better knowledge to act as a manager. Good arguments are these, which makes the study more easier like seven students per class, study in four countries, your fellow students are professionals.

Select your arguments. Ask yourself why an argument is really good. Make them shorter, more effective. Skip arguments which are not on top. Place valuable arguments where your reader first will look.

- as a text to a picture
- as headlines of size number two
- as PS in a letter
- underlined with a pencil in a letter
- as a group of three, each with an initial point

Mandatory facts

For some products, especially for medical drugs and for investments, you have to publish certain phrases. On German websites one has to publish who is legally responsible for the website.

The *label* contains the name of the company, address, telephone with office hours, Internet address, e-mail address. The facsimile number is useless.

Nice environment

You may indicate that your company is big and safe, works for the environment, with a text like

Akelius has 40 000 apartments and is the forerunner in new systems for saving energy.

But who cares, the text might give thoughts like that the apartments are too cold.

Normally these facts attract the employees more than the clients. If you want to rent an apartment in Berlin, you do not really bother if the owner has one or hundreds of flats. It is nice to know, but it is not essential for a client. But for your bank it is essential.

Request for action

In a sales text you may add a sentence that the presumptive buyer has to act before a certain date. This gives more new clients.

If the client acts before a certain date, he may get a gift. But this system has been used too much. It is probably more efficient to state a date and deliver gifts to all present clients as a surprise.

You have to specify exactly how the client has to act. Make the first action extremely simple. Be careful of asking more than name, e-mail address and or post address. Do not force the client to give information at the first meeting.

At the end of the text body comes the demand for action. But just before that you may remind the client, the essentials to gain.

Text for Information

Message in headline

Like an article in a newspaper

I remember when I first saw one of our own papers for information to tenants. It was posted on the wall in the entrance hall. It was easy to read the Akelius logo. The big blue headline, which never changed was; “Akelius informs”. Then if you stop walking and look at the text you will see with block letters some information. The tenants had no idea if the poster was changed weekly, daily or never. You have to show the news, not the sender.

Newspapers like Aftonbladet in Sweden or Bild in Germany have extensive statistics how layout and text have to be produced to obtain more readers. Their main business idea is to get income from companies paying for marketing. They know how to make information attractive. They have the best knowledge how to transfer information rapidly to you.

The headline comes with facts, never with the opinion of the journalist.

The headlines are so essential that the journalist himself do not write them. The headlines are written by special trained managing editors. They know how strong a headline is. By judging the content in the headline, the managing editor decides the number of printed copies.

The headline is never ”Big Catastrophe”,
but hard facts
“Car crashed in Göteborg, 12 killed”.

After the main headline of the article comes a summary as ingress.

In a newspaper, there is one message per article.

To make a long article more readable one paragraph is no longer than five centimeters and the paragraphs will have small headlines showing the essential message.

The width of the column normally 32 characters is optimal for reading. The size is no hazard. By tradition we write to fill a line in an A4 paper, which not is a relevant criteria. To read and understand quickly try to use 32 characters including blanks. Do not exceed seventy characters per column.

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From the professionals of the newspaper industry we learn;

- The main headline will contain the whole message
- The summary or the ingress will give the reader all important information
- The text body will describe the subject in more detail, nothing else.

Text

Sentences

Use short sentences in active form

Write the phrase in the order

- 1; "Who
- 2; does
- 3; what".

That means

The dog bites the man.

not

The man is bitten by the dog.

Use short paragraphs

Avoid a longer paragraphs than five centimeters.

Write the benefits for the user

Formulate what the client gets, not what you are offering.

Use realistic examples

Do not use funny names, or funny things. Be adequate with real figures.

Use modern, simple, but adequate words

Each language has a set of old bureaucratic words. Avoid them.

Swedish:

Försälja, avyttra heter sälja

Prefix be- kan oftast tas bort, som i bedriva.

Prefix för- förstärker handlingen och kan ibland tas bort:

fördelas blir delas

förhindra blir hindra

däremot ska man inte ändra förgifta till gifta.

Avge blir ge

Utgörs blir är

Utöka blir öka

Ej blir inte

Kostnadsfördelar ; blir billigare

e-mail blir e-post

"Det går således att finna kostnadsfördelar som ej beaktats i förvärvskalkylen." blir "Det kan bli billigare".

Gräsmattan får ej beträdas.

Blir

Gå inte på gräsmattan

Pictures

There is no need to fill up a page with irrelevant text or with pictures for decoration. Use pictures if they give information.

What information do you intend to transmit by showing your company with;

- A beautiful lady uses a telephone
- The staff sits near a computer
- A real estate company has real estate

- Board members are wearing ties.
- An old couple sits near a lake
- Beautiful archipelago, lakes or beautiful pictures of a small village

- Children are playing
- There is snow in northern Sweden
- Brandenburger Tor is in Berlin

Skip all that.

Find a picture, that tells something.

The eyes of a CEO or a broker towards the camera intend to say; "Trust us."

Good photos showing information is essential. You may hardly see any marketing of a product without some really professional pictures of the product. Add relevant photos, skip the others.

Add valuable text to each picture.

In the right order

Write the essential search argument first and then the answer. That means

The *store room for bikes* is in the cellar

not

In the cellar there is a storeroom for bikes.

Noun sickness

Avoid using a noun when there is a verb: That means

Calculate

is better than

Make a calculation.

Clean the text

Beautiful, fantastic, high, nice

Do not use any superlative. Let the client judge what is high or fantastic.

Roughly, about, more than.

Berlin has some 3.4 million inhabitants.

Skip “some”. Everyone knows that this number changes constantly.

Akelius has more than 33 000 apartments.

Skip “more than”.

Mathematical signs, exact numerical values other when important

We are open from 9 – 17.

Why use the sign for minus?

The profit was 20%.

Write: “twenty per cent” unless the profit was exact 20 per cent and the exact figure is important. .

One bike / person.

That means that we have to divide bikes by persons.

You will write with letters the digits

from one to twenty,

thirty, forty to one hundred,

two hundred to one thousand.

You write;

Five hundred persons.

If the value is important, like the price of a house, write with numeric signs like

400 000 US dollar.

There are some exceptions for widely accepted use like

old people 60+

Parenthesis, acclamation signs

Do not use parenthesis. Use commas.

The manager (Per from Malmö) will arrive late.

Parenthesis takes space and the text is therefore slightly more difficult to read.

The manager, Per from Malmö, will arrive late.

Three bedrooms and a garden!

Never use acclamation sign. Let the client himself find out what he likes.

No full stop in headlines.

There is no need for a full stop in the headline above.

Abbreviations

Do not use abbreviations other than extremely well known like UN, YTD.

Repetition

- a) Do not refer to previous words. Repeat them.
- b) Make the text shorter with one information only at one place

Your company name more than three times per page

How often does the client need to read the name of your company. Do not write "Akelius gives" but "You will get"

Company visions and other nonsense

Visions were popular among consultants in the eighties, but have never produced more or happier clients. What do you want to achieve by writing "The client will be in the center" or "The client is our king" or "flexible solutions" or "We try harder" or "Our clients are our guests".

All such visions are standard work in every surviving company. No one will be impressed. Use facts. Try "If we do not manage to fix a broken window or a leaking tap within two workdays, you will get a discount of 100 Euro on the next rental bill". The last sentence contains hard facts.

Take away fifty per cent of your text

The essential is to transfer facts.

You may not detect your own mistakes, because you know what the text ought to be.

Be aware of verbiage. Your colleagues may help you to take away fifty per cent of the words. Fifty per cent of your holy text may sound like robbery and destruction of culture, but it turns out to be a true figure.

Your friend or your manager may read your text and give proposals. You are the responsible and have to decide which correction you will make. If you agree to all proposals, you might end up in a mess.

Layout

Each reader should have the possibility to read

Your reader has no time, has a foreign mother tongue, is seventy years old, tired, colorblind, has dyslexia and strong dirty glasses. He uses an old, twelve inch, slow laptop on the balcony with a slow Internet.

Our designers are young, without glasses and use high resolution, wide screens and fast computers.

Make your tests at old, small screens.

The conflict with the art designer

There is a problem using professional art designers. You will for sure get well composed and balanced pages with attractive colors and really nice pictures.

The only problem is that you have to transfer your message. Do not give in. The message is more important than the layout.

Carpenter design or Golden Section

Ask any carpenter to put up an oil painting above your sofa. He will measure and the fixing point will deviate one millimeter from the center point. Always skip the division by two.

A better rule is to try one third. Do not take a snapshot with your camera where the horizon divides the sea and the sky in to equal parts. Move to one third from above or from under. The same applies with a person. Let him be one third from the left or from the right side.

The most popular design in the western hemisphere is called The Golden Section. Anything else will look strange to you. Therefore art books do generally have strange formats. You find this relation between long and short side as in the Golden Section from Parthenon in Athens, via windows to the cutting of paper, A4, A5 etcetera.

The Golden Section has almost the relation two thirds.

That means

- a) Make three columns, never two.
- b) A picture may occupy one third or two thirds.

Make the letters readable

- You distinguish black letters against yellow background as easiest. Black letters against white background are almost as good.
- Do not try to write letters above a picture, whatever your designer tells you.
- Use the same number of letters per line as you find in newspapers.
- No BLOCK LETTERS
- No letter less than size 12
- No underline except for web addresses or with a pencil in a brochure
- No negative letters like light blue on dark blue background.
- Use left aligned texts. Do never insert centered texts.
- Use variable right margin. It takes seven per cent more time to read right aligned texts.

Measure the result

Someone not knowing the message has to try to understand your message. Make the Grandmother test with a stop watch. Put your hands on your back, and keep your mouth closed. Your mission is to spy and notice why the grandmother has problem to understand your text.

Measure *the cost per new client* or and the *cost per answer*.

Comparisons are only valuable if the measurements are done based upon exactly the same circumstances. That means you may have three different texts randomly distributed at the same time.

Prerequisite

Who is the reader

What knowledge does the reader have on the subject?

Which media

Will you be using website, e-mail, letter, book, radio or something else?

You will advertise a new job as a Region Manager. You will save money by having the big headlines or arguments in the newspaper or on the newspaper web. You ask the reader to click for further information or ask him to find details on your Internet site. This combination of media is cheaper and you give a lot more details on your own site.

What response do you estimate?

Are you aiming for one hundred new clients investing an average of 10 000 Euro?

Are you aiming that forty per cent of all incoming claims to your real estate company will be handled automatically via Internet?

In direct marketing you may hardly count a response rate over one per cent. You may have higher response rate addressing your clients.

Is the written word the most effective?

In order to find out what clients think it is faster, cheaper and will generate a better result to call fifty persons rather than to send papers to ten thousand.

Decide delivery time and number of issues.

Repetition

Define the message

- The main argument
- Good arguments
- Mandatory facts
- Nice package
- Request for action

Text

- Use short sentences in active form
- Use short paragraphs
- Write the benefits for the user, not what you are offering
- Use realistic examples
- Use modern simple but adequate words
- Use informative pictures

Clean the text from

- Beautiful, fantastic, high, nice
- Roughly, about, more than.
- Mathematical signs. Use exact numerical for important values
- Parenthesis. Except when used in financial reports
- Acclamation sign
- Full stop in headings
- Abbreviations
- Repetitions
- Information and pictures without significant value
- Your company name more than three times per page

Your dear colleagues will be happy to kill fifty per cent of your words.

Layout

Our reader will distinguish the letters better when you use black letters against a yellow background.

- No BLOCK LETTERS
- No letter less than size 12.
- No underline except for web addresses or with a pen in a brochure

- Use your best arguments for headlines and texts to pictures
- Use left aligned texts
- No negative letters like light blue on dark blue background.
- Do not use a picture as background to your letters.

Measure the result

Make the Grandmother test.

Measure the cost per new client and the cost per answer. Comparisons are only valuable if the measurements are done under exactly the same circumstances.

Updates

You need a plan to avoid that your information will be old. Try to put frequently changeable data on few pages on your Internet.