

YOUR GUIDE TO ATTENTION-GRABBING HEADLINES



Here are six steps to creating clickable headlines.

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Headlines and titles that don't gain clicks mean your content may be passed over. These six tips will help you develop titles and headlines guaranteed to drive engagement and generate clicks and conversion.

1. AVOID THESE WORDS

Readers can easily identify headlines that are written for SEO or just to generate curiosity. Keywords earlier perceived as traffic drivers have been so over-used that readers are instantly turned off.

Outbrain and Hubspot assessed more than 3.3 million paid headlines. These are headlines of paid content that is being promoted or advertised. Findings revealed that many categories of terminology do not perform well in titles. These include:

- Positive superlatives, such as "best" or "always."
- Words implying urgency, such as "now."
- Words indicating a shortcut, such as "easy," "trick," and "simple."
- Instructional words, such as "how to" and "why."
- Spammy words, such as "cure," "credit," "magic," and "free."

2. MAKE SURE IT FITS

Ensure that the titles concisely convey what you are providing via your content. Titles that include content descriptions in brackets, such as [infographic], [blog], [interview], [guest column], [video], [slideshow], [white paper], are likely to generate a higher click-through rate in comparison to titles without such clarifications.

3. KEEP IT BRIEF

The correct length of the headline depends on your goals. Are you trying to garner social shares? In that case, keep the title length to 280 characters or fewer so it is tweetable. Do you want to rank higher in search results? If yes, keep the headline below 65 characters to ensure that search engines do not truncate it in search results.

4. FRONT LOAD YOUR HEADERS

Eye-tracking research conducted by The Nielsen Norman Group found that readers are most attentive to the first few words when viewing link titles.

5. KEEP IT STRAIGHTFORWARD

Headlines such as "New Times Call for New Decisions" have almost no information to indicate what the accompanying story may be about. Instead, treat headlines as micro-content that is informative and precise.

6. CAST AN APPROPRIATE NET

It is always important to target your audience. However, headlines that try to win more readers even if the actual content is only for a well-defined demographic can turn readers off. A case-in-point is a title like "Nine Chemicals That May Be in Your Food." While it seems like an attempt to engage a large number of readers, it in fact has an adverse impact if the content actually talks only about foods a woman should eat during pregnancy. In such a case, a title such as, "Nine Chemicals in Food for Pregnant Women to Avoid," offers clarity to the targeted audience without attempting to reach out to more people with an ambiguous or misleading headline.

STAY TRUE

Staying true to your audience begins with an authentic headline that accurately sums up what the content is all about. ■

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