

# 3 LETTERS THAT SELL

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## Description

There are five tools in this unit:

**Tool 3A A sales letter:** an example to illustrate the main points of a sales letter

**Tool 3B Features and benefits – exercise:** to help you define benefits from features

**Tool 3C Features and benefits – model answers**

**Tool 3D Write your own sales letter:** a structured approach to help you get started

**Tool 3E Checklist:** to ensure that your sales letters achieve sales.

## Purpose

These tools will help you write sales letters that appeal directly to the potential buyer.

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## Background

There are two broad types of sales letters, those that are responding to an enquiry and those that are sent 'cold'. Either are usually trying to achieve:

- a meeting or sales presentation;
- a sale.

Many features of a sales letter are common to both objectives: they need to be personal, relevant and to actively sell. The difference is that when answering an enquiry, you know the potential customer is seriously interested and you have found out which aspects are of particular interest (haven't you?). The letter should build on the fledgling relationship that was formed in that brief telephone call, letter or return of a card.

When you are writing 'cold' you need to capture interest in the first paragraph, the heading even, when you have not had the chance to gain any clues.

### How to lose a sale with a simple letter

Although obvious that it is a sales letter, the less personal it is the quicker it will be discarded. The three most common mistakes are:

- **no name:** starting off with *Dear manager* or *Dear stationery buyer* is unlikely to impress, particularly since you are unlikely to get the job title correct;
- **no date:** *Date as postmark* sends a strong message of "Keeps these in stock to send out whenever there is time."
- **too much information:** does not mean that your letter has something in it for everybody, it means that most people will not have time or enthusiasm to read it.

These faults, when cold mailing, will result in a considerable waste of money. They are unforgivable when you are responding to an enquiry – a personal approach being followed up by an impersonal response.

## **How to gain sales through your letters**

### **Decide your objective**

Your objective is likely to be one of two things:

- to generate a sales lead (just an enquiry in response or, still better, a meeting or presentation)
- to generate a sale.

Decide what you are trying to achieve before you start – if you know what you are selling you increase your chance of achieving the sale.

### **Define the buyer and the buying motive**

If you are responding to an enquiry you should have some information about your buyer's needs and interests; if you don't, some work on the call-handling would be of benefit! Bear these in mind when choosing the information for the letter.

If you are writing a 'cold' letter you may still manage to gain some information about buyers. More likely you will need to consider the most common buying motives of your existing customers. For example, do customers buy your product or service because they:

- are concerned about their health
- want to improve their career prospects
- want to improve their appearance or image
- enjoy contributing to a charity?

### **What is special about your product/service?**

Although the emphasis should be on the points you have identified as being important to the buyer, you may also want to consider what is special and unique about your product or service, for example whether it is cheaper, better quality, or lighter weight than your competitors'.

### **Get the detail right**

The details may be small, but they can make all the difference when trying to appeal to a potential customer:

- always address by name and spell it correctly;
- make sure the name is the same within the address as it is within the salutation;

- don't be over-friendly – most people do not like to be called by their first name by a complete stranger, even less so one who is trying to sell to them;
- use the date, not *Date as postmark*;
- make sure there are no spelling errors;
- check for basic grammatical errors, sentence length and punctuation;
- make sure the letter is well printed, well laid out and carefully folded so that it leaves the envelope looking as good as when it was put it;
- personally sign the letter; if you are not going to sign letters, send a leaflet instead.

### Get message across early

Even when we are interested in a letter, we do not read each word. Lack of time and the tendency to make assumptions about what will be said lead to speed-reading and just scanning over the main points. Make sure that you have:

- a good heading that catches the attention and describes the contents of the letter;
- an interesting first paragraph, or the recipient will not read on to the later ones.

Make the main points easy to find by:

- avoiding too much bold text; too much equals none, as all the text merges;
- good use of paragraphs, one idea in each;
- the subject of each paragraph in the first line;
- short sentences in plain English;
- a logical order.

### Talk to the customer

Your letter should speak directly to the customer. For example:

<b>replace</b>	<b>with</b>
our customers	you
everyone	you
we pride ourselves on our service	you will find our service
our users benefit from	you will benefit from.

## Define benefits, not features

A feature is what is good about your product or service, the benefit is what it will do for the customer. You should present all features as benefits to make them 'live' for the reader. For example:

feature	benefit
soft fabric	comfortable next to your skin
long-lasting	you will not need to replace it for at least fifteen years
all-inclusive warranty	you need pay nothing for parts or labour
self-sharpening	you do not need to sharpen it
lightweight	you can carry it in a pocket.

## End on the action to follow

Always use the final paragraph to lead the potential customer to the action you want them to take. Consider the examples below and see how much better they are than the standard, "If you have any queries ...".

*Please ring or use the faxback form to get your copy of our Spring brochure.*

*There is no charge for looking! Come and see our high-quality, low-price furniture at our Dunstable showroom. We are open from 8.30a.m. to 7p.m. so why not call in on your way home tonight?*

*Please ring me if you would like to see the full range of our catering utensils.*

*A reply-paid card is enclosed. Just fill in your details and send it to us free of charge.*

If you are going to ring the customer, you can say so if you wish, but make sure that you do follow up as promised.

*I will ring you within a week to see if we can help with your bulk copying.*

### Consider a postscript (PS)

If you want to draw attention to a particular point, consider repeating it as a postscript. For example:

*PS Don't forget to return the card within fourteen days to be sure of your place in our prize draw for a year-long 10% discount.*

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## TOOL 3A A SALES LETTER

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### Purpose

This tool demonstrates the principles of an effective sales letter.

### When to use the tool

You should use this tool when you:

- are new to writing sales letters;
- want to review the sales letters you write.

If you are responsible for the development of staff within your organisation or department:

- give a copy of the tool to new and inexperienced members of the sales team;
- use it as a handout or basis for discussion on sales courses.

### How to use the tool

Read the letter straight through.

Return to the beginning of the letter and read it paragraph by paragraph with the explanatory notes.

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29 April 2003

Mrs J M Parsons  
Alderman & Co  
43 Park Street  
Carston  
Lincolnshire  
CS4 9DH

Dear Mrs Parsons

If you don't have the luxury of an IT department for support, *Friend in Need* is here to help when you hit problems with your new office software.

You will find a *friend in need* at the other end of the line any time between 8a.m. and 8p.m., an experienced software user who will talk your language and not confuse you with computer jargon. 96% of calls to us are answered within ten rings and you are straight through to your *friend*, no endless selecting of options on your phone keypad or holding (at premium rate) for your turn in the queue.

You pay an annual charge, based on the number of calls you are likely to make. If you make more, you simply pay £2 per call, billed quarterly.

Not only do you get the help you need, when you need it, you will make huge savings in time and money.

I will ring you next week to answer any questions you have, but meanwhile read through the enclosed leaflet and see how much we can help for how little money.

Yours sincerely

*Letter dated on day of despatch.*

*Addressed personally to the intended recipient.*

*A personal salutation.*

*Speaks directly to the reader and introduces the service being sold.*

*Gives benefits and again talks directly to the reader.*

*Basic explanation of costs, not clouded with detail.*

*Action ending and reminder of significant benefit.*

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## TOOL 3B FEATURES AND BENEFITS – EXERCISE

### Purpose

This tool will help you develop the skill of presenting features as benefits to the customer.

### When to use the tool

You should use this tool when you:

- are new to the area of selling;
- want to consider your own sales letters.

If you are responsible for the development of staff within your organisation or department:

- give the tool to new and inexperienced members of the sales team;
- use it as a handout or basis for discussion on sales courses.

### How to use the tool

Read the list of features. Identify what each will actually do for the reader.

You may find that using, ‘means that’ will help (for example, the standard fitment of airbags *means that* you are protected in the event of an accident).

Beware: this technique is meant to help you identify the benefit. It would be repetitive to keep using the phrase in a letter and it does not always make sense grammatically.

Compare your answer with that in Tool 3C *Features and benefits – model answer*. The words will not be the same, and you may have chosen different benefits, but the principle will guide you.

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You work for a taxi firm which has developed a top quality taxi/chauffeur service for local businesses. After a staff meeting, the following features of the service have been identified. Draft a letter to be sent to members of the local Chamber of Commerce which presents these as benefits.

- Top quality car
- Driver passed Advanced Motorists test and taken additional chauffeur training
- In-car telephone and computer sockets
- Direct line booking number
- Monthly itemised statements

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## Features and benefits – model answer

You will not have the same wording as the model answer below, but check that you have turned the features around and presented them as benefits (you may have chosen different benefits).

Dear <name>

Regent Taxis have developed a new service, specifically to help business users save time and money.

Just think how much you could achieve in the time you spend driving or sitting in traffic jams. In a Regent Executive car you will find sockets for your telephone and laptop computer, even an airline-style pull-down table on which to work. After an exhausting meeting you can relax, catch up with the daily papers or record your thoughts whilst everything is fresh in your mind.

Our cars are all top of the range, executive models with a high specification. You control the temperature, you can choose from an extensive library of CDs or listen to the radio programme of your choice. If you prefer to work in silence, you will find our drivers to be discreet and happy to leave you in peace.

Our chauffeurs are all former police drivers, trained to the highest standards. Additional specialist chauffeur training means that they can get you from A to B with comfort that matches safety.

You can book your chauffeur-driven car from anywhere in the UK, using a direct line which is charged at local rate. You will receive a monthly, itemised bill so you can see exactly what should be charged on to clients. We can tell you this at the end of each journey if you prefer.

I enclose a leaflet which gives full details of the service and our charges. I will ring you next week to give you example costs for a couple of journeys you have recently made. I am sure you will be pleasantly surprised at how inexpensive it is to extend your working day in this way.

Yours sincerely





## TOOL 3D WRITE YOUR OWN SALES LETTER

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### Purpose

This tool will help you write an effective sales letter.

### When to use the tool

You should use this tool when you are:

- new to writing sales letters;
- concerned that your letters are sounding stale.

If you are responsible for the development of staff within your organisation or department:

- give the tool to new and inexperienced members of the sales team;
- use it as a handout or basis for discussion on sales courses.

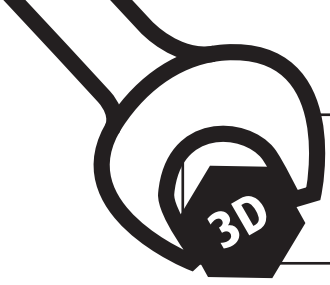
### How to use the tool

Work through each section, completing the form as you go. When you are ready draft the letter.

Use the checklist in Tool 3E to ensure you are applying the principles correctly.

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## Write your own sales letter

Work through the sections below in preparation for writing your sales letter.

What do I want to achieve?

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What can I say about the buying motive of this customer (or general customers)?

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What is special and unique about my product or service?

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What features do I want to emphasise? For each, present it as a benefit.

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Now draft a first paragraph, a last paragraph and the body of the letter.

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## TOOL 3E CHECKLIST

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### Purpose

This tool will help you check that you are applying the principles of writing an effective sales letter.

### When to use the tool

You should use this tool whenever you have written a sales letter, until you always tick the boxes.

Return to the checklist occasionally to ensure that your letters are still effective.

If you are responsible for the development of staff within your organisation or department:

- give the tool to new and inexperienced members of the sales team;
- use it as a handout or basis for discussion on sales courses.

### How to use the tool

Read your letter.

Take each point on the checklist and look for evidence of its application in your letter.

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- Does my letter look interesting before I am close enough to read it?
- Is my letter personally addressed?
- Does the salutation match the name in the address?
- Is it dated with today's date?
- Does the heading describe the contents?
- Does my opening paragraph 'grab' the reader?
- Have I spoken directly to the reader throughout?
- Is every feature presented as a benefit?
- Does the final paragraph lead to action?
- Is it the action I defined when I considered my objective?

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