

**Your Headlines Need Bulgarians:
Writing More Powerful, More Believable Headlines**
By Jonathan Kranz

When you're a business owner or marketing executive, the last thing you want to worry about is headlines. After all, that's an esoteric issue just for ad agencies and copywriters, right?

Wrong. Because as a marketing or communications professional, you probably create lots of written material from formal reports to content such as white papers, articles, press releases and more. And if the headline isn't strong – if it doesn't excite the interest of your prospect or customer – nothing else will get read. A weak headline means a lot of wasted effort.

That's why it's important to get the headline right. Here's how.

Real-life explosive power revealed

This is a true story from the files of a wonderful copywriter and colleague, Bob Cargill.

He was assigned to invigorate a two-page print ad for a weight-lifting program targeted to serious body builders. The previous ad carried a headline something like this:

“Build muscle and strength fast!”

Bob came up with this:

“Who says you can't have the EXPLOSIVE power of the Bulgarians?”

Guess what? Bob's revised ad was a smash hit! Why? Let's take a closer look. The former headline certainly includes a strong benefit – building muscle fast – for the right audience. So what's the problem? It evokes the dreaded, “yeah, right” response. Too many competitors offering too many different things make the same promise, the same way.

Now parse Bob's headline. “Explosive” is a beautiful adjective, no doubt about it. But I think the real key is in the prepositional phrase, “of the Bulgarians.” Instead of, “yeah, right,” it provokes curiosity. It's new, unusual and intriguing. It implies a story.

In fact, there really was a story: despite an athletic budget a fraction of those available to big players like the U.S., Russia and China, Bulgaria was sweeping Olympic medals like nobody's business. The secret was in their training program – the same program exposed in this offer.

Lessons learned:

First, Bob did his homework. He looked deeply into the product he had to promote and found a hook, an interesting piece of evidence or fact that could substantiate his promise. Why believe that his program will work for you? Because it sure as hell worked for the Bulgarians!

Second, Bob applied what he knew to his headline. In fact, we can even define a headline by this formula:

Benefit + Bulgarian = Strong Headline

By “Bulgarian,” I mean a proof point or intriguing “thing” that makes your promise credible or at least provocative. Bulgarians can be:

- **Numbers:** Use statistics to quantify the value of your benefit:
 - *TrackStar’s Automatic Verification Data Eliminates 30% - 35% of Home Delivery Errors*
- **Stories:** Demonstrate your benefit in real-life action:
 - *Learn How Bling Co. Leverages TrackStar to Reach New Markets in Record Time*
- **Secret Ingredients:** Introduce something new and unfamiliar into the benefit message:
 - *Transportation Transformation: TrackStar’s “feedback loop” corrects addressing errors in real-time.*

Recruiting Bulgarians for your materials

So how might our Bulgarians work for you? Let’s consider some of your most common writing projects:

- **Reports:** Many of your projects will involve (or even conclude with) the submission of a report that summarizes research, uncovers key issues or makes recommendations for change. Why not highlight an unexpected finding in your headline to create drama?
 - **Old:** *BallyHoo Inc. Supply Chain Report: Summary and Conclusions*
 - **Bulgarian:** *Master the “Feedback Loop”: Gaining control of the most important part of your supply chain.*
- **Articles:** Getting published in respected trade journals is one of the most effective ways of establishing your authority – and generating new leads. But most article headlines simply state the subject matter. You’ll increase readership by adding a concrete hook to your headline:
 - **Old:** *Emerging Trends in Supply Chain Management*
 - **Bulgarian:** *Closing the “Feedback Loop” Improves Supply Chain Efficiencies by 35%*
- **Press Releases:** If you want your releases read and acted upon by editors, you have to do one thing: show why your issue/idea matters to the editor’s readers. A Bulgarian can give your press release that crucial “reason why.”

- **Old:** *BallyHoo Inc. Retains Loman Consulting Services to Improve Supply Chain Management*
- **Bulgarian:** *BallyHoo Inc. Trims Supply Chain Costs: Loman Applies “Feedback Loop” to Achieve Record Savings*
- **White Papers:** White papers are a mixed blessing. While they can be a rich source of information for your prospects, they can also be seen as intimidating – yet another thing a busy person delays or even avoids reading, despite the best intentions. Bulgarians can increase the likelihood that your work gets read or at least skimmed.
 - **Old:** *Improving Supply Chain Efficiency*
 - **Bulgarian:** *Five Ways to Close the “Feedback Loop” and Cut Supply Chain Costs by 30% and More*

Improving readership is a heavy weight that can be easier to lift. Next time you have a project that needs a headline – be it a letter, brochure, email, web page, press release, etc. – dig deep. Look for a Bulgarian. And put him up there in your headline.

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