

# **How To Write More Effective Letters and Proposals**

## **1. Introduction**

For hundreds of years, letters have been written to a style. Traditional education has taught us how to write 'correctly'; opening correspondence with 'Dear Sir/Madam' and finishing with 'Yours sincerely or faithfully'.

In the 19th century when these style guides were written, the style matched how people spoke to each other. On greeting a lady, a gentleman would tip his hat... "Dear madam, it is pleasing to meet with you again". On parting a gentleman would inform a colleague, "Until next time, I remain your faithful servant".

Over the past century or so, the way we speak has changed substantially. By the time we are taught how to write proper letters at school, we are already extremely practiced in verbal communication. We have developed a hybrid style of speaking derived from the style, habits and idiosyncrasies of our parents, strangers, peers, TV and radio.

The result has been that verbal and written communication has digressed until they have little in common.

Many people find it so easy to talk face to face and know what they want to say, yet sit with pen in hand for hours, unable to translate thoughts to paper.

The following ideas will help you create quotes and proposals that are more effective and position your prospects better for a great sell.

## **2. Format**

Let's look at the progressive steps that will give your proposals more power. There are eight of them. Addressing each in turn will build a process that will lead to a higher conversion rate.

### **Step 1**

Start your letter with a greeting... Hi, Giddyay, Good Morning John.

Build a bit of rapport, tell them you hope they're having a great day. If it is in response to a request as will be usual, thank them for taking the time to talk with you the other day etc..

## **Step 2**

When you're developing a proposal for them or trying to sell a concept, you need to let them know you understand what they want. Try a phrase like:

*"From what we discussed, I understand that there are a few key areas that you wanted to address. You mentioned that ..."*

This will refresh in your prospect's mind what they are dissatisfied about with their current situation and build rapport by communicating that you do understand and are empathetic about their challenges.

## **Step 3**

Build dissatisfaction with their current circumstances. Push their 'hot buttons'. Generally you will find that people move away from pain faster than they'll move towards pleasure.

Make sure you spend time when you speak with prospects, establishing what 'pain' they are in with their current system or circumstance. A good way to make sure you gather that information is to develop a questionnaire that you can cover during your initial needs analysis meeting or discussion.

## **Step 4**

Cover their 'investment' as an introduction to your proposed solution. Don't underline, bold, italicise or highlight your price. That simply draws the reader's eye straight to the price which is bigger than anything else including the benefits of your widget!

*"Based on what we discussed, I believe that a widget would best suit your individual circumstances. Your investment for our widget would only be \$ 1,000 and would include:"*

Cover their investment up front, then spend the rest of the proposal justifying it with benefits. If you're financing it, summarise the option that you believe is best for them. For example you should know whether renting or lease would suit them best and over what period. Giving them a choice is OK but if you do, make sure you include your personal recommendation...

*" [name], I've included the four options that would work well for you. My recommendation based on what you told me would be the 36 month lease. I believe this will give you the best balance of flexibility and cost effectiveness."*

### Step 5

Justify their investment with the benefits of your product and build their vision.

It's important here to understand the difference between 'features' and 'benefits'. Here's some examples of the difference:

Feature	Benefit
Warranty	Confidence that it works
A fully integrated, networkable, scan/copy/fax/print machine with 500 sheet hopper and automatic collation and binding, stackable bypass, 30 second warm-up time etc...	A machine that's been designed to save you around 100 hours a year re-filling it with paper, waiting for it to warm up and trying to find a technician who knows how to fix a jam. This saving alone will have it pay for itself in less than a year!
A 500 page book and interactive CD ROM on how to manage your time, developed by some of the greatest academic minds.	More time to spend with your family.
A car with ABS, SRS, IRS, side intrusion bars, etc..	You and your family have the best chance possible of living through a major accident.

### Step 6

Never, if at all possible, leave the ball in their court. Finish the letter! Tell your reader 'exactly' what they need to do, or what to expect next in the process.

The best letters are often completely undermined by the traditional closing sentence:

*"If you have any queries, please don't hesitate to call".*

Try something like this:

*"I'll give you a call within the next couple of days once you've had time to go over the information. If you can see the benefits of having one of our versatile machines boosting productivity in your business, then I'd like to make a time to visit. This will allow me to work out with you the best position for your copier and check a few other details that we'll need to know so that we can install it with a minimum of disruption to your team."*

It is best if you to take the next step (like the example above). Its so easy for your prospects to have every intention of looking into some information or responding to a quote, only to have it sit in an in-tray for so long that it eventually gets filed in the bin or forgotten.

### Step 7

Close the letter a little differently. Just to stand out:

Until then, I hope you have a...

... brilliantly profitable day.

[sign your name here]

### Step 8

The use of Postscript or 'PS' notes on the bottom of letters has changed over the years. Traditionally they were used on hand written or typed letters because a point was missed and needed to be added as an afterthought. This use has become redundant in today's world of word processors and computers.

However, another use has evolved for the humble PS. The idea now is that it summarises a main point or call to action. It should not introduce 'new' information, simply reinforce a single point.

Statistics suggest that a PS is one part of a letter that is highly likely to be read. A PS you could use might look like this:

PS I believe this is a real winner if you're after efficiency. I look forward to giving you a demo on Monday.

## 3. Wording:

The wording you use in proposals and letters has more power and inference than many realise. Words that you use in your written material, can tell people if you lack confidence in your product, think the price is too high, or believe something is negative. Some key words to check your material for are:

- **Although** says that you are about to detail what you believe is a 'negative' and follow it quickly with a 'positive' to try and distract them.
- **But** says you are about to undermine the 'positive' you just detailed with a 'negative' or something that will prevent the 'positive' from being achieved or attained.
- **However** is used in a similar situation to although but is placed between the 'negative' and the 'positive'.

Some words have a 'feeling' associated with them. Particular words can invoke fear, scepticism, resistance and a mixture of other emotions that may be better avoided if trying to sell your products.

Often a more appropriate or eloquent word may be used instead of the simple one that would be used in everyday speech. Unfortunately, these words can cloud the easy translation of your written words into a vision that needs to exist in your prospects mind before they can buy.

Here are some common words from and suggested replacements that will give your material a better chance of success:

**Avoid:**

Dear ...  
Commence  
Quote  
Herewith  
Attended  
Ascertain  
Acquire  
Endeavour  
Expeditious  
Facilitate  
In the event of  
In order to  
With regard to  
Prior  
Due to the fact that  
Cost or Price  
Contract  
Problem  
Submit

**Use:**

Good Morning  
Get underway, start  
Action Plan, or Proposal  
You'll see I've included (or attached) your...  
Came to / Went to  
Discover, find out, we'll (or you'll) see  
When you use, when you have, when you own  
Will  
Quick  
Make it easier for you  
If  
So that  
About  
Before  
Because  
Investment  
Agreement  
Challenge  
Put together

## **4. Confidence**

Confidence in your material is paramount to send the right message to your prospect or client. The key is to presume the sale has been made and that the letter is purely a confirmation of the details.

An excellent start is to again do a 'find and replace' of certain words in your material:

**Replace:**

Could  
If  
Might

**With:**

Will  
When  
Will

## 5. Ownership

Ownership is about giving your reader possession of the concept or idea that you are trying to communicate.

- Using lots of ‘you’ and ‘your’ will help.
- Rather than saying ‘...provide your company with...’, use ‘...provide you with...’  
After all you are only ever selling to an individual and no matter how many people read your letters or proposals at once, your letter will speak to each of them individually.
- Also look at instances where replacing ‘we’ with ‘I’ would serve better in building a specific relationship with the reader.

If you are writing about what ‘you’ can do, put the reader benefit first then elaborate on how you provide the benefit. You tempt the reader with ‘self interest’ to take notice and read on. Let me give you an example...

“XYZ Pty Ltd is recognised as the market leader in Photocopier systems in Australia, in terms of installed base, reproduction quality and reliability and software support...”

vs.

“You’re guaranteed reproduction quality, reliability and responsive software support when you choose XYZ Pty Ltd. A fact that has made us the recognised market leader in Photocopier systems in Australia.”