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[A Refresher on Headlines and Attitude, Important for Grabbing and Keeping Attention from Your Audience](#)

Posted on April 14, 2011 by [Laura Gutierrez](#)

Having few characters to convey an idea or thought isn't just for Twitter. I was reminded of this last week during the Legal Marketing Association's annual conference.

Feeling energized after talking shop with colleagues for three days, I struggled with what to include in my upcoming blog post. My fellow marketers have already posted many great articles on various sessions and big ideas (the majority are legal-specific, but we can all take away something from keynote Jeff Williford, from the [Disney Institute](#), who talked about Disney's Approach to Business Excellence. Find the recap over on [Lindsay Griffiths' blog](#)). This post isn't about anything that was mentioned in a session or brought up by a colleague, but it's a good reminder for those of us who write—online or anywhere—that the first “impression” and attitude is what makes readers come back.

Background

We had more people than ever join the conversation online at LMA. The Tweet-Up was the biggest yet; we filled the room with a wide-range of experienced and young marketing professionals. It was great! But it got me thinking: the more of us there are, the harder it is to keep up. Whose posts do I look at? Which ones do I read through? This applies to any of us who are on social platforms, or who write any form of the written word (newspapers included)—what can you say, and how can you say it, in as few characters as possible? It's a struggle for all of us, and not just the businesses or people who are using online social platforms. For those that aren't, your consumers *are*. Even if you don't blog you are still producing some kind of content, via email, trade article, website, etc. How do you ensure that your message gets to your intended audience and is accepted positively?

Grabbing Attention

This concept is not a new idea. Let's look at it this way:



Newspapers have always contained headlines so that readers can select the stories they want to read and skip over ones they don't, right? They created sections so that information was even easier to filter. Now, imagine this newspaper included tags to filter that content even further. Imagine that this newspaper that is delivered to you on a regular basis was custom to fit your interests and yours alone.

Great idea, right? It's been done, and it's being done in unique ways. But the trick is to write great headlines to grab your targeted reader's attention. For Twitter, you have 140 characters. On Facebook, you know you just skim over the link headlines and read the introduction paragraph. With RSS feeds (if you don't know what that is or how to set it up, see [my article on W&W's website](#)) you skim headlines. It's all about the first impression! Think about how you filter your information for intake.

Headlines

My definition of headline: an actual headline; a tweet; a blog post title; what you include for a comment when you post a Facebook link; text messages; instant messages; email subject lines; any copy that is "above the fold" (I can go on).

Any journalist will tell you that the two most important aspects of a good story are, in order of importance, (1) the headline and (2) the opening paragraph. The headline is what stops the reader and invites them to read the rest of the content, and the opening paragraph is what keeps the reader interested.

Make sure your headline captures the essence of your content. Read your favorite newspaper and get ideas from the titles. Did they grab your attention while also giving you enough information about what's contained in the body of the copy? It's not easy, and it takes practice. Ask colleagues to look over your headlines – do they make sense with the content?

Opening Paragraph

If you don't know what [inverted pyramid style](#) is, make sure you do. Essentially, it's the idea that the most important information is first, followed by other points ordered by most important to least. Writers—content producers—should not be held down by styles, but the idea that your first paragraph contains the ideas that you're presenting in the rest of the content is important. Do you expect a reader to keep reading if they aren't sure what you're article is about? If you like an article, analyze what it was that kept you reading. Being an aware reader makes for a better writer.

Attitude

As I'm sure most of you are aware, attitude is everything. It's easy to convey excitement, sadness or pain in-person, even over the phone, but via the written word...not so much. What's even harder is conveying attitude with few characters. The words you choose and the order you put them in *matters*, especially when you have few seconds to get someone's attention.



Attitude is much like personality; it should convey more than what the words are getting at. It's important to be consistent in your attitude; the exception should be content that's produced by more than one individual. Take our DuetsBlog authors as an example. Each author has a distinct style and attitude—like Brent's sarcasm and awesome post titles (he should win an award for those).

A word of caution: jokes do not always come across as you'd like them to (this is why I tend to over-use smiley faces). If you're sarcastic, make sure your audience really gets it. If they don't, well, try getting them engaged again. It won't happen.

Do you have any tips to help you get your point across? What kind of attitude does your content convey?



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