



How Long-Windedness and Unnecessary Details Devalue Your Message

By Andy Holtmann

As a writer and grand observer of the world around me, 2008 has been an interesting year for me. And perhaps no time of the year has been more intriguing than right now. Political season is winding down and the holiday “sell, sell, sell” season is already kicking into full gear. We’re inundated with buzz words ... we’re drowned with key phrases ... we’re overwhelmed (and oftentimes bored to tears) with long-winded speeches, writings and other forms of communication.

Even as a writer myself, there are times I just want to turn and run the other way ... to a room of complete silence and darkness where I don’t have to hear anything, read anything or *think* about anything. Yes, we writers can get overwhelmed ... and yet, we’re often among the ones *most* responsible for this.

So allow me to spill my guts a bit here and talk about one area of writing that I myself have often been one of the biggest offenders of — keeping it simple.

First a little explainer: I began my journalism career as an intern and later as a full-time reporter of a daily metro newspaper in Las Vegas. There, my editors and mentors hammered into me the notion that short, to-the-point articles with a key quote were the most effective. Then, I moved on as a reporter and later managing editor of a small-town newspaper. There I found that the majority of citizens and readers weren’t as interested in the short, sweet news, but rather the multi-page feature on a person or topic of interest. I also became an investigative news hound. In doing so, I found that detailing malfeasance, corruption and other nefarious activities required more than just a few graphs and a headline to grab people. To tell the real story and give readers the real facts; I had to back up every claim. I sometimes *had* to be long-winded to *show* the truth.

When I joined a leading gaming industry trade publication in 2000 I noticed that both forms worked ... readers of a business-to-business magazine (industry decision-makers and executives) liked the short-and-sweet news, but they also loved the in-depth coverage of key topics. So I tried to offer both, and the formula seemed to work well. Yet, I found that few outside of my little niche in the gaming industry were really interested in this formula. And I realized something: *most people want the story, the issue, whatever it is you need to sell to them, spoon fed in the simplest way possible.*

That’s right, I said it ... the *simplest way possible*. And now that I’m on the marketing writing side with Raving, I’m finding that realization to be more and more accurate. A long-winded approach will not sell your customers. It will turn them off.

In studying a lot of casinos’ direct marketing mailers and letters recently, I’ve noticed that same long-windedness time and time again. In many cases it takes reading three, four, even five paragraphs of fluff before the reader finds any value or offer ... or anything of substance at all.



MARKETING MIX

Here's an example of how *not* to lead off your message:

Dear Dave,

Here at XYZ casino, you'll truly be amazed by our lavish new casino layout, complete with all the latest slot games and some new table games I'm sure you'll want to play. Enjoy our newly redesigned hotel tower with brand new, state-of-the-art rooms and complimentary breakfasts. Splash around in our Olympic-sized swimming pool, which was recently added to our fourth-floor "play" area. Our pool facilities now also include posh, private cabanas, five poolside bars and live music from the most popular and in-demand acts on the weekends. Come taste our new, expanded buffet with seven action stations and a variety of food from around the world ... blah, blah, blah.

This approach is loaded with details that most of the people you're trying to sell to actually care little about. What's so great about your pool being "Olympic-sized" and what the heck does a "state-of the art room" mean to me? Do I really care that there's five poolside bars or that your casino has the latest games? I would hope it would anyway.

But most importantly, this lead message does little to tell me why I should come. Where's the value? How much are all these new amenities you brag about going to cost me? And, by the way, I don't feel like I've been personally invited.

Try something along these lines instead:

Dear Dave,

Do you and Mary want to get away for awhile? Want to relax for the weekend and not have to worry about the rigors of everyday life? Well here's your chance!

Come over to our house at XYZ Casino this weekend and let us treat you. Your room, dinners and tickets to two entertainment shows of your choice are on us! We'll even throw in a free couples massage at our spa!

From there, then go into *some* details of your newly-renovated property and why you want Dave and Mary to experience it. But don't oversell the details with meaningless buzzwords. Tell a story instead. Tell how Dave could win it big at the invite-only blackjack tournament you just happen to have already reserved a space for him in. Describe the fun Mary will have competing in the slot tournament that just so happens to be going on that same weekend. Put them in a position to imagine it while they're reading about it. Then, near the end, hit them again with the offer to remind them of the value.

If you can communicate via these methods, you're assured that more Daves and Marys will read — with interest — what you've written. And I'm pretty sure you'll find more Daves and Marys showing up at your property as well.

Of course, this is just a generic example and I could certainly go into more detail, but then I'd be getting a little long-winded. And none of us wants that, right?