

AIDA: Attention-Interest-Desire-Action

Inspiring Action With Your Writing

"Free gift inside!"

"Dear Jim, You have been specially selected."

"Calling all Parents."

Every day we're bombarded with headlines like these that are designed to grab our attention. In a world full of advertising and information – delivered in all sorts of media from print to websites, billboards to radio, and TV to text messages – every message has to work extremely hard to get noticed.

That's one reason TOMA, Top of Mind Awareness, is so important for people who are trying to sell a product or service.

As the world of advertising becomes more and more competitive, advertising becomes more and more sophisticated. Yet the basic principles behind advertising copy remain – that it must attract attention and persuade someone to take action. And this idea remains true simply because human nature doesn't really change. Sure, we become increasingly discerning, but to persuade people to do something, you still need to grab their attention, interest them in how your product or service can help them, and then persuade them to take the action you want them to take, such as buying your product or visiting your website.

The acronym AIDA is a handy tool for ensuring that your copy, or other writing, grabs attention. The acronym stands for:

Attention (or Attract)

Interest

Desire

Action.

These are the four steps you need to take your audience through if you want them to buy your product or visit your website.

A slightly more sophisticated version of this is AIDCA/AIDEA, which includes an additional step of Conviction/Evidence between Desire and Action. People are so cynical about advertising messages that coherent evidence may be needed if anyone is going to act!

HOW TO USE THE TOOL

Use the AIDA approach to get others to take action. The elements of the acronym are as follows:

1. ATTENTION/ATTRACT

In our media-filled world, you need to be quick and direct to grab people's attention right off the top in your commercial copy. Use powerful words, or a picture that will catch the reader's eye (or imagination) and make them stop . . . to see what you have to say next.

With most office workers suffering from e-mail overload, action-seeking e-mails need subject lines that will encourage recipients to open them and read the contents. For example, to encourage people to attend a company training session on giving feedback, the email headline, "How effective is YOUR feedback?" is more likely to grab attention than the purely factual one of, "This week's seminar on feedback".

2. INTEREST

This is one of the most challenging stages: You've got the attention of a chunk of your target audience, but can you engage or "hook" them enough so that they'll want to spend their precious time understanding your message in more detail?

Gaining the reader's interest is a deeper process than grabbing their attention. They will give you a little more time to do it, but you must stay focused on their needs. This means helping them to pick out the messages that are relevant to them quickly. For print media, use bullets and subheadings, and break up the text to make your points stand out.

3. DESIRE

The Interest and Desire parts of AIDA go hand-in-hand: As you're building the audience's interest, you also need to help them understand how what you're offering can help them in a real way. The main way of doing this is by appealing to their personal needs and wants.

So, rather than simply saying "Our lunchtime seminar will teach you feedback skills", explain to the audience what's in it for them: "Get what you need from other people, and save time and frustration, by learning how to give them good feedback."

FEATURES AND BENEFITS

A good way of building the audience's desire for your offering is to link features and benefits. Hopefully, the significant features of your offering have been designed to give a specific benefit to members of your target market.

When it comes to the marketing copy, it's important that you don't forget those benefits at this stage. When you describe your offering, don't just give the facts and features, and expect the audience to work out the benefits for themselves: Tell them the benefits clearly to create that interest and desire.

Example: "This laptop case is made of aluminum," describes a feature, and leaves the audience thinking "So what?" Persuade the audience by adding the benefits".giving a stylish look, that's kinder to your back and shoulders".

You may want to take this further by appealing to people's deeper drives "... giving effortless portability and a sleek appearance and that will be the envy of your friends and co-workers."

4. CONVICTION

As hardened consumers, we tend to be skeptical about marketing claims. It's no longer enough simply to say that a book is a bestseller, for example, but readers will take notice if you state (accurately, of course!), that the book has been in the New York Times Bestseller List for 10 weeks, for example. So try to use hard data where it's available. When you haven't got the hard data, yet the product offering is sufficiently important, consider generating some data, for example, by commissioning a survey.

5. ACTION

Finally, be very clear about what action you want your readers to take; for example, "Visit mindtools-dot-com now for more information" rather than just leaving people to work out what to do for themselves.

The AIDA Formula For Copywriting

By Jerry Bullard

Author Red Smith once described the process of writing by saying, "There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein." Fortunately the art of copywriting has some creative alternatives.

One of the most successful techniques for writing copy that gets results is known as the A.I.D.A. formula. Simply put, A.I.D.A. stands for, "*Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action.*" That's all there is to it. Yet when followed sequentially, those four words are the building blocks of most print advertising today.

Let's see how it works.

First we have the '*Attention*' segment. Here is where you write to hook the potential customer with an attention grabbing opening. It could be serious, humorous, factual, playful, historical, or whatever. The point is for the customer to stop, have their curiosity aroused long enough to put down that cup of coffee, and to take a look at your offering. Don't forget that the average person is barraged with around 3,000 messages per day from various sources. Your goal here is to create something that is unique and will pique customer or client's curiosity and get them to continue reading.

The next item on our list is '*Interest.*' It should be organic - a natural, seamless, segue from Attention to Interest. An expansion if you will. At this particular point you'll give some sort of payoff for following your Attention lead. Introduce the product or service here. Then, you'll use your words to provide the benefits of ownership. Don't forget to differentiate between features and benefits. Your reader wants to know about the benefits and how they will affect him or her.

So, what's the difference between a feature and a benefit? Let's take a large screen TV as an example. A 55 inch screen is a feature for a big screen TV. That's all well and good, but how does it relate to your customer? Being able to watch your favorite DVD's together with the family in the comfort of your home and see the action on a huge screen...now that's a benefit for your customer. Notice the difference?

Now comes the '*Desire*' element of the AIDA formula. Now that you have the customer's attention and interest, you now create an emotional element of desire. A sense of the customer saying, "I gotta' have this and have it now." Here you'll build upon the benefits you wrote about earlier or use a new benefit entirely. The Interest and Desire sections often complement each other. Don't be thrown by this. Use your words to paint a picture of the customer enjoying the product or benefiting from ownership or using your particular service. Just be sure to

remember, the focus of your writing is always about the customer's desires, wants, and needs - not yours.

Next we wrap up the business by using the '*Action*' part of the formula. After all this, you want the customer to take some sort of action. Whether it's calling a toll free number for more information, checking out a website, going to the store, placing an order with a salesperson, or clipping a coupon, these are all calls to action. Don't lose out by not asking for the business.

Now, let's see how A.I.D.A. would work in a test case...

Attention:	Can't Afford A New Car Right Now? You're not alone!
Interest:	Dan's Auto Repair Service can help. Why go for a new car when we can update your current one ... just like new? (Benefit)
Desire:	(Benefit) Imagine the savings you can pocket by having your present car completely refinished!
Action:	Head to Dan's Auto Repair today and stop for a free estimate. Dan's ... across from the Boardman Plaza ...

So there you have the basics of the AIDA formula used in copywriting. Follow it and watch the new results of your copy.