

The Power of One — One Big Idea

By Mark Ford



One of the biggest lessons I have ever learned about writing came very late — in fact, more than 20 years after I wrote my first piece of copy.

It happened about a year after I began writing *Early To Rise* (ETR). I was looking over issues I'd written that year and noting which ones readers rated the highest. Without exception, those achieving the highest scores presented a single idea.

It struck me that readers didn't want to hear everything I had to say about a topic every time I wrote. They were looking for a single, useful suggestion or idea that could make them more successful.

That was one of those "a-ha!" experiences for me.

As a reader, I had always most enjoyed stories and essays that tackled one subject effectively and deeply. As a writer, I sensed my readers felt this way too. But it wasn't until I looked at the results that I recognized the power of a narrow focus in writing.

I checked to see if this same phenomenon applied to advertising copy. I pulled out my box of "best promotions of all time." While not all of them were on a single topic, most of the very best hit just one idea strongly.

It seemed I was on to something. I presented this idea as one "powerful secret to publishing success" when Agora had our first company-wide meeting for publishers in France.

Bill Bonner reminded me he'd learned about the Power of One from the great advertising guru David Ogilvy. Ogilvy's concept was that every great promotion has, at its core, a single, powerful idea that he called "the Big Idea."

At about that same time, John Forde was rereading the classic 1941 book, *How to Write a Good Advertisement* by Victor Schwab — the man *Advertising Age* called the "greatest mail-order copywriter of all time."

In that book, Schwab listed his choice for the "Top 100 Headlines." John found that of those 100 top headlines, 90 were driven by single, Big Ideas.

Note how instantly clear and engaging these "Big Ideas" are ...

- "The Secret of Making People Like You"
- "Is the Life of a Child Worth \$1 to You?"
- "To Men Who Want to Quit Work Someday"
- "Are You Ever Tongue-Tied at a Party?"
- "You Can Laugh at Money Worries — If You Follow This Simple Plan"
- "When Doctors Feel Rotten This is What They Do"
- "How I Improved My Memory in One Evening"
- "Discover the Fortune That Lies Hidden In Your Salary"
- "Have You a 'Worry' Stock?"

We decided to make this concept a "rule" for writing. The mandate was clear. Write about one thing at a time. One good idea, clearly and convincingly presented, was better than a dozen so-so ideas strung together.

When we obeyed that rule, our essays were stronger. When we ignored it, they were not as powerful as they could have been.

Here's an example of the Rule of One as applied to an *advertorial* about Bob Bly's success selling e-books ...

Subject Line: The Easiest Product to Sell Online

Dear Reader,

Would you be interested in investing \$175 to make \$20,727?

That's exactly what Bob Bly just accomplished!

See how he did it below ... and how easily you could do the same.

To your success,

Katie Yeakle
Executive Director, AWAI

Dear Friend,

There's no product easier to create or sell online ...

... than a simple, straightforward instructional or how-to **e-book**.

Why are e-books the perfect information product to sell on the Internet?

- 100% profit margin.
- No printing costs.
- No inventory to store.
- Quick and easy to update.
- No shipping costs or delays.
- Higher perceived value than regular books.
- Quick, simple, and inexpensive to produce.

My very first e-book has generated \$20,727 in sales (so far).

My total investment in producing it: just \$175.

Now, I want to show you how to make huge profits creating and selling simple e-books – in my new program, **Bob Bly's Ultimate Guide to E-Book Writing Success**.

Normally this program sells for \$249.

However, to make it affordable for you to get started in e-book publishing, I'm letting you have **Bob Bly's Ultimate Guide to E-Book Writing Success** for only \$124.50 today – a savings of 50% off the list price!

For more information ... or to order on a risk-free trial basis ... just [click here now](#).

Sincerely,

Bob Bly

P.S. But, I urge you to hurry. This special 50% discount is for a **limited time only**. And once it expires, it may never be repeated again.

Let me explain how the Power of One operates here.

The lift letter (signed by Katie Yeakle) asks a question and then tells a single sentence story. The question is an inverted promise. The story validates the promise.

The sales letter follows. This, too, is a beautifully simple piece of copy. It leads with a statement that expresses one clear idea: 'The easiest way to make money on the Internet is to market e-books.'

That statement is supported by a number of bulleted "facts." Then, Bob validates the statement by mentioning his own experience.

The reader is already sold. Bob makes the sale irresistible with a strong, one-time-only offer.

Short, sweet, and *simple*.

The Power of One is *not* only one big, central idea. It's a fully engaging piece of copy with five necessary elements. Using Bob's example:

- **One good idea:** "There's no product easier to create or sell online than a simple, straightforward instructional or how-to e-book."
- **One core emotion:** "It is simple! I bet I can do it!"
- **One captivating story:** Told brilliantly in 11 words: "My very first e-book has generated \$20,727 in sales (so far)."
- **One single, desirable benefit:** "Now, I want to show you how to make huge profits creating and selling simple e-books."
- **One inevitable response:** The only way to get this program for 50% off is "click here now."

To create blockbuster promotions time after time, you must understand the difference between good copy and great copy. The Power of One is the driving force behind great copy.

Veteran advertising consultant James Loftus, who's worked with Anheuser-Busch, Holiday Inn, McDonald's, and many other clients, agrees:

"Also keep in mind that the more points you try to cover, the less effective each point, and therefore your ad, will be. An effective ad will actually have only one central focus, even if you discuss it from two or three perspectives. If your points are too diverse, they compete with each other, and end up pulling the reader's attention in separate directions."

When challenged with an advertising assignment, most writers conjure lists of features and benefits, then mention as many as possible. Their thinking goes, "I wonder which of these benefits will really push the buttons I want? I'll throw them all in. That way if one doesn't work, another one will."

This is "B-level" copywriting. It's *not* the way to create breakthrough advertising.

The Power of One is commonplace now at Agora ... it's taught by AWAI ... and you'll see that most top copywriters follow it.

You can use the Power of One to create your own blockbuster copy. Ask yourself: "What is the Big Idea here?" "Is this idea strong enough to capture the hearts of my customers?" Or "Are my ideas all over the place?"

The challenge is to find that one good idea the reader can grasp immediately. And stick to it. So the idea has to be strong, easy to understand ... *and* easy to believe.

Put the Power of One to work for you in all your communications. You'll be amazed at how much stronger — and successful — your copy will be.

What questions do you have about the Power of One? Do you see how it will make your writing better? Share your thoughts below.

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3 Responses to "The Power of One — One Big Idea"

I think I'll be looking at every promotional piece that comes my way in a whole new light now. And I can see how the five required elements contribute to compelling copy.

I'm wondering what you might do if a client is adamant that every single key benefit be highlighted. Would it make sense to suggest separate pieces be created for each major idea and possibly even work with them to determine the best audience for each?

Candice – over a year ago

I finished the Accelerated Program two weeks ago.

I wrote the Basket Ball Yoga Blast . I submitted for COS Peer Review on June 20th,2017. I was rated under 3.2.

I reviewed my copy then found out that I did not have One Big Idea.

I mentioned so many things that confused the readers.

So I rewrote the piece with One Single Big Idea with

-one core emotion

-one captivated story

-one desirable benefit and one inevitable response Jennie(Tweety)

jennie – over a year ago

Hi Rebecca and Mark,as we noticed the difference,in good copy an great copy that Power of One is we have, your attention,you want to see what else we going to write.

Guest (Darrick) – over a year ago

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