

Leonardo da Vinci's Five Hundred Year Old Sales Letter

What do you think of when you hear the name Leonardo da Vinci?
Architect, Engineer, Painter, Sculptor,
Anatomist, Inventor, Genius...?
How about Copywriter?

The truth is when Leonardo was out of work (that is, when he wasn't telling jokes to Mona Lisa, experimenting with helicopters and drawing nude men), he had to seek out new employment just like the rest of us.

It was at one of these times that Leonardo put pen to paper and wrote to The Duke of Milan to advertise his numerous skills and inventions. I've included a translation of his letter for you further down in the article.



When I first read Leonardo's letter, I was genuinely astonished. I was amazed that THE Leonardo da Vinci, a man renowned in his day for great knowledge and wisdom, was making remarkable efforts to sell his own work. He wasn't relying solely on his reputation, skills or products to do the job for him. Instead, he presented himself attractively by using carefully crafted, persuasive and informative words.

Three main copywriting techniques stood out to me in his letter. You'll spot them as you read his letter later on. They were:

1. **An emphasis on benefits.** Leonardo always, always, always stresses the benefits and not the features of his inventions. He purposely avoids technical details and instead puts himself in the shoes of his reader. His services are as clear and concise today as they would have been five hundred years ago.
2. **He has a USP.** Leonardo compares himself with his competitors and explains why he is different. By doing so he is creating his own **Unique Selling Point**. Something every successful brand, service and product should create.
3. **He offers a free, no-risk demonstration.** Leonardo finishes his letter with an offer of a free trial – a demonstration at the Duke's local residence and at Leonardo's own personal expense. This is the final weapon in Leonardo's armoury of powerful direct selling.

So, without further a do, here is the letter, dated 1482, from Leonardo da Vinci to the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza...

"Most illustrious Lord, having now sufficiently seen and considered the proofs of all those who count themselves masters and inventors of instruments of war, and finding that their invention and use of the said instruments does not differ in any respect from those in common practice, I am emboldened without prejudice to anyone else to put myself in communication with your Excellency, in order to acquaint you with my secrets, thereafter offering myself at your pleasure effectually to demonstrate at any convenient time all those matters which are in part briefly recorded below.

1. I have plans for bridges, very light and strong and suitable for carrying very easily, with which to pursue and at times defeat the enemy; and others solid and indestructible by fire or assault, easy and convenient to carry and place in position. And plans for burning and destroying those of the enemy.

2. When a place is besieged I know how to cut off water from the trenches, and how to construct an infinite number of bridges, battering rams, scaling ladders, and other instruments which have to do with the same enterprise.

3. Also if a place cannot be reduced by the method of bombardment, either through the height of its glacis or the strength of its position, I have plans for destroying every fortress or other stronghold unless it has been founded upon rock.

4. I also have plans for making cannon, very convenient and easy of transport, with which to hurl small stones in the manner almost of hail, causing great terror to the enemy from their smoke, and great loss and confusion.

5. And if it should happen that the engagement was at sea, I have plans for constructing many engines most suitable either for attack or defence, and ships which can resist the fire of all the heaviest cannon, and powder and smoke.

6. Also I have ways of arriving at a certain fixed spot by caverns and secret winding passages, made without any noise even though it may be necessary to pass underneath trenches or a river.

7. Also I can make armoured cars, safe and unassailable, which will enter the serried ranks of the enemy with their artillery, and there is no company of men at arms so great that they will break it. And behind these

the infantry will be able to follow quite unharmed and without any opposition.

8. Also, if need shall arise, I can make cannon, mortars, and light ordnance, of very beautiful and useful shapes, quite different from those in common use.

9. Where it is not possible to employ cannon, I can supply catapults, mangonels, trabocchi, and other engines of wonderful efficacy not in general use. In short, as the variety of circumstances shall necessitate, I can supply an infinite number of different engines of attack and defence.

10. In time of peace I believe I can give you as complete satisfaction as anyone else in architecture in the construction of buildings both public and private, and in conducting water from one place to another.

Also I can execute sculpture in marble, bronze, or clay, and also painting, in which my work will stand comparison with that of anyone else whoever he may be.

Moreover, I would like to undertake the work of the bronze horse, which shall endue with immortal glory and eternal honour the auspicious memory of the Prince your father and of the illustrious house of Sforza.

And if any of the aforesaid things should seem impossible or impractical to anyone, I offer myself as ready to make trial of them in your park or in whatever place shall please your Excellency, to whom I commend myself with all possible humility.

Leonardo da Vinci"

After this letter was written and delivered, Leonardo da Vinci was later summoned to court of the Duke of Milan. Clearly this is a five hundred year old direct marketing success!

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