

Presell Advertorials: Three Formats for Physical Products

A founder story, a mechanism-led editorial and a reasons-why listicle, each with a note on the mechanics

Neil Addison

Spec work for three fictional brands, written for the US market. None of it has run, so there is no performance data attached to it. Product details, prices and customer quotes are illustrative. In a live build they come from the client, and nothing goes on the page that cannot be substantiated. Statements about the world (steel hardness ranges, sleep research, sunrise times) are accurate to the best of my knowledge and would be source-checked before anything ran. The comparison with cheaper wake-up lights in the third piece is a claim a client would need to stand behind.

The three pieces differ on the things that decide how an advertorial should be built: the format, the category, and how much the reader already knows when they land.

- 1. Brackenfold Elder Bed.** A founder story for an orthopedic dog bed. The reader has noticed the problem and explained it away.
- 2. Kesso No. 1.** A mechanism-led editorial for a chef's knife. The reader has bought the category several times and no longer believes its claims.
- 3. Auben Dawn.** A reasons-why listicle for a wake-up light. The reader has seen the product and is carrying objections.

Each section has the same three parts: a short brief (the traffic, the reader, and the one belief the page exists to install), the page as it would run, and a note on what the page is doing and what I would test first. Image and proof slots are marked in square brackets. The proof slots say what I would ask the client for, in order of preference, and the quotes beneath them are placeholders.

1. Brackenfold Elder Bed

Founder-story advertorial for an orthopedic dog bed

Traffic and reader. Cold paid social, owners of dogs aged eight and over. On Schwartz's awareness scale this reader is problem-aware and not yet solution-aware: they have noticed the dog slowing down and filed it under age. A product-first page has nothing to say to them, because they do not think they have a problem a product can solve.

The one belief. Some of what looks like old age in a dog is what he has been sleeping on. The page exists to install that belief and hand the reader to the product page already holding it.

THE PAGE

ADVERTISEMENT

I blamed my dog's age for a year. I was half right.

What I learned about where older dogs sleep, and how I ended up building a bed for one.

By Tom Rennick, founder of Brackenfold

Boone was eleven when he stopped coming upstairs.

There was no injury and no bad news from the vet. One night he stood at the bottom of the stairs, looked up, thought about it, and went back to his bed in the kitchen. Same thing the next night. After a week I quit calling him.

I told myself what everybody tells themselves. He's eleven. That's old for a Lab. He's earned it.

[Image: an older Lab at the foot of a staircase. A real dog in natural light, no studio polish.]

The part I missed

What I hadn't noticed was how he was lying down.

A young dog just drops. An old dog negotiates. Boone would circle his bed three or four times, lower his back end, stop halfway, shift, and let himself go the last few inches with a grunt. Getting up in the morning was worse. Front legs first, a long pause, then the back end following like it belonged to a different dog.

I had watched this every day for months without seeing it. If you have an older dog, you may have been watching it too.

His bed at the time was a good one, or so I thought. Big, soft, about fifty bucks at the pet store, stuffed with polyfill. One evening, for no particular reason, I pressed my hand flat into the middle of it.

I felt the kitchen floor.

My seventy-five-pound dog, with eleven-year-old hips, had been spending most of every day lying on a tile floor with a pillowcase over it.

Why most dog beds go flat

I went looking for the reason, and it turned out to be simple.

Most dog beds are filled with loose polyester fiberfill, the same stuff that's in a cheap throw pillow. It feels generous in the store because it's full of air. Put a big dog on it every day and the air leaves, the fill mats down, and within a few months the middle of the bed, where the dog actually lies, is maybe half an inch thick. The edges stay plump, which is why the bed still looks fine from across the room.

So his weight goes where weight always goes on a hard surface: hips, elbows, shoulders. The same places an older dog is already stiff.

I'm not a vet, and a bed is not a treatment. If your dog is stiff, limping or doesn't want to move, take him to your vet first. I did. She couldn't make Boone's joints any younger, and she said so. But she pointed out that I was the one deciding what those joints rested on for most of the day.

What I did about it

I'd spent twenty years building furniture in Hickory, North Carolina, so I did the obvious thing and cut Boone a slab of the foam we used for sofa seats. High-density, four inches deep, the kind that pushes back.

He didn't circle. He stepped on, lay down in one motion, and slept until I woke him up.

I'd love to tell you he bounded up the stairs the next day. He didn't. He was still eleven. What changed was the mornings. He got up like a dog who had slept, instead of one who had spent the night on the floor. About three weeks later he came upstairs on his own, one time, to see what we were up to. I'll take it.

The Elder Bed

Friends with old dogs asked for one. Then their friends did. That's how Brackenfold got started, and the Elder Bed is still more or less what I cut for Boone, with the problems fixed.

- Four inches of solid foam: a three-inch high-density support base with an inch of memory foam on top. There's no loose fill, so there's nothing to go flat. If it does within five years, we replace it.
- A front edge just over two inches high, so a stiff dog walks on instead of climbing in.
- A waterproof inner liner, because old dogs have accidents and foam doesn't forgive them.
- A cover that zips off and goes in the washer.
- A non-slip base. A bed that skates across hardwood or tile is no use to a dog who is already unsteady.

[Image: the bed in a real kitchen with a dog on it, cover slightly rumped.]

What other owners noticed

[Proof slot: three verified reviews, used verbatim, with name, breed and the dog's age. Choose reviews that describe a behavior the owner saw ("she stopped circling") over general praise ("great bed"). Placeholders below.]

"Maggie is a thirteen-year-old border collie mix. First night on it she didn't get up once. She'd been up and down three or four times a night for months." – Karen R., Boise, ID

"I was skeptical at the price. My retired greyhound has not voluntarily left it since it showed up, so I'm done being skeptical." – David M., Columbus, OH

Give it 60 nights

An old dog can't tell you whether a bed is working, so you need time to watch. Put the Elder Bed where his current bed is and give it 60 nights. Watch how he lies down. Watch how he gets up.

If you can't see a difference, send it back, dog hair and all, and we'll refund you in full. We schedule the pickup and we pay for it. Returned beds get cleaned and donated to a shelter or rescue, so you don't need to feel bad about that either.

A fiberfill bed runs \$50 or \$60 and is flat within the year. The Elder Bed starts at \$149, and shipping is free.

Boone made it to fourteen. He spent a good part of those last three years asleep, which is what old dogs do. I couldn't change his age. I could change what he was lying on, and I wish I'd done it a year sooner.

[Button: See the Elder Bed and pick his size]

Tom Rennick

P.S. Here's something you can do tonight, whether you buy anything or not. Press your flat hand into the middle of your dog's bed, right where he actually lies. If you can feel the floor, so can he.

This is a paid advertisement for Brackenfold. The Elder Bed is not a veterinary product and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any condition. If your dog shows signs of pain or lameness, talk to your veterinarian.

WHAT THIS PAGE IS DOING

Sequence. The product is not named until the reader has accepted a new cause for a problem they thought they understood. The first 350 words are about a dog. That is the correct ratio for a reader at this stage of awareness, and it is the main thing clients cut when they edit advertorials, which is why so many of them read as product pages with a story bolted to the top.

Emotion. The driver in this category is guilt, and guilt is easy to overplay. The page never accuses the reader. The founder convicts himself (“I had watched this every day for months without seeing it”) and the reader recognizes their own dog at one remove. The guilt is then given somewhere to go, which is the only honest reason to raise it.

Mechanism. Loose fill loses its air, the middle goes flat, the edges stay plump. It is simple, it is true of most beds on the market, and it explains why the reader has not noticed. A mechanism has to do that last job as well, or the reader’s next thought is “I’d have spotted that.”

The admission. “I’d love to tell you he bounded up the stairs the next day. He didn’t.” A page that concedes the limit of the product is believed on everything else. It also keeps the copy clear of implied veterinary claims, which in this category get ads rejected and accounts restricted. The compliance line sits inside the story in the founder’s voice, where it reads as candor, as well as in the footer where the FTC and the ad platforms expect it.

The demonstration. The hand test appears twice: once as the founder’s discovery, and once in the P.S. as something the reader can do tonight. It costs nothing and takes ten seconds. Proof the reader generates for themselves outranks anything the page can tell them, and a reader who has felt the floor through the bed comes back.

Risk reversal. The guarantee is written against the two real objections: “how would I know it’s working?” and the awkwardness of returning a used dog bed. “Dog hair and all” and the shelter donation deal with the second, which a standard money-back line never touches.

Localization. The American details are small and deliberate: a Lab, a seventy-five-pound dog, a furniture man from Hickory, polyfill from the pet store, a scheduled pickup for a return too bulky to take to a UPS counter. None of them is there for color. Each one removes a moment where a US reader would otherwise sense the page was written somewhere else.

What I would test first. This headline against one that leads on the hand test (“Press your hand into the middle of your dog’s bed. If you feel the floor, read this.”), and the founder byline against a third-person version of the same story.

2. Kesso No. 1 Chef's Knife

Mechanism-led advertorial for a jaded market

Traffic and reader. Cold and lukewarm paid social, plus native. Home cooks who have bought knives before, more than once: the block set from the wedding registry, the pull-through sharpener, maybe a “Japanese-style” knife from an Instagram ad. They have heard “razor sharp” and “professional grade” from every brand they have owned. Eugene Schwartz called this a sophisticated market, and in one a bigger promise is ignored. What still works is a new explanation of why the previous purchases failed.

The one belief. Your knives went dull because of the steel they were made from, and that steel was chosen to suit the manufacturer.

THE PAGE

SPONSORED BY KESSO

Why every kitchen knife you've owned went dull, and why it wasn't your fault

The answer is a number most manufacturers leave off the box.

You put the knife to a ripe tomato and press, and the skin dents instead of splitting. You press harder. The tomato gives way all at once, and you're left with seeds all over the cutting board and something that was supposed to be a slice.

The knife was sharp when you got it. It may have been expensive. It came in a block of six off your wedding registry, or in a box with a Japanese-sounding name on it, and for the first few weeks it went through onions like they weren't there.

Then it quit. And if you're like most people you decided, somewhere in the back of your mind, that it was on you. You don't sharpen right. You used the wrong cutting board. Somebody ran it through the dishwasher.

Some of that didn't help. None of it is the main reason.

The number that isn't on the box

Knife steel is rated for hardness on the Rockwell C scale, written HRC. It's the best single predictor of how long an edge will last, and the principle is easy: harder steel holds a fine edge longer, softer steel rolls over and goes dull.

Most knives sold in block sets at department stores and big-box stores land somewhere between 52 and 56 HRC. The knives Japanese chefs work with all day are 60 and up.

The gap looks small on paper. At the edge of a blade, which is a few ten-thousandths of an inch across, it is the difference between steel that stands up and steel that folds over within weeks of normal use. You can't see a rolled edge. You can feel it in a tomato.

Why would anyone make a knife out of soft steel?

Because it works for the people making it.

Soft steel is cheaper to buy and a lot cheaper to work. Blades can be punched out of sheet metal like cookies instead of being forged and ground. Soft steel also survives abuse. It can go through a dishwasher, get dropped in the sink and be used to pry open a can without chipping, and all of that keeps returns down.

The knife in your drawer was designed around the factory and the returns department. How long it stayed sharp in your kitchen came in third.

This is also why the sharpener didn't fix it. A pull-through sharpener scrapes a new edge onto the blade, and on soft steel the new edge lasts about as long as the old one did. You weren't bad at taking care of your knives. You were taking care of something that couldn't hold what you gave it.

[Image: macro photograph of two edges side by side after equal use, one rolled, one intact. Shot for the page, not stock.]

What 61 looks like

The Kesso No. 1 is an 8-inch gyuto, the Japanese version of the chef's knife, and it was designed starting from that number.

The cutting core is high-carbon stainless steel hardened to 61 HRC, clad on both sides in softer stainless to protect it. The edge is ground to 15 degrees per side, against the 20 or so typical of a Western knife, so there is less metal to push through the food. It's made in small batches in Seki, Japan, where they have been making blades for more than 700 years.

We print the hardness on the box and etch it on the blade. If a knife brand won't tell you its HRC, that tells you something.

In the kitchen, what you notice is how long "new" lasts. Customers who cook most nights typically go close to a year before the No. 1 needs sharpening. When it does, mail it to us in the prepaid sleeve that comes in the box. We sharpen it by hand on whetstones and ship it back within the week, free, for as long as you own it.

What it won't do

A hard edge comes at a price, and you should know it before you buy.

Hard steel is more brittle than soft. The No. 1 is not for bones, frozen food or prying things open, and it never goes in the dishwasher. Twist it hard inside a butternut squash and it can chip. Wash it by hand, dry it, put it away. That takes twenty seconds.

If you want a knife you can beat up, the one you already own is great at that. Keep it around for the rough jobs.

What owners say

[Proof slot, in order of preference: an independent hardness test certificate shown as an image; a named working chef with a quote about edge life on the line; verified customer reviews that mention a period of time. Placeholder below.]

"Fourteen months in. I used to sharpen my old knives every few weeks and hated doing it. This one I've mailed back to them once." - Priya S., Austin, TX

One knife instead of six

Most of a knife block never gets used. Professional cooks do the vast majority of their work with a single chef's knife, and so can you.

The Kesso No. 1 is \$139 with free shipping. A decent block set runs \$200 and up and gives you six soft knives, of which you'll use two.

Cook with it for 100 days. If on day 100 it isn't the sharpest knife you've ever owned, send it back for a full refund. Return shipping is on us.

When it shows up, start with a tomato.

[Button: See the Kesso No. 1]

This article is a paid advertisement for Kesso.

WHAT THIS PAGE IS DOING

Sophistication. Roughly half the page is spent before the product is named, and all of it on one question: why did the last three knives fail? A reader who has been promised sharpness by everyone has stopped hearing the promise. They will still read an explanation, provided it is new to them and it accounts for their own experience, including the sharpener that didn't help.

Absolution. The reader arrives with a private theory that the dull knives were their own fault. The page states that theory in their words, then takes it off them and hands it to the factory. This matters commercially as much as

emotionally: someone who believes they ruin knives will not spend \$139 on another one.

The buying criterion. HRC is real, checkable and missing from almost every competitor's box. Once the reader has it, they carry it to every other product page they visit and find it absent. "If a knife brand won't tell you its HRC, that tells you something" does more selling than any description of the knife, and it keeps selling after the reader has left.

The cost of the benefit. "What it won't do" is the most valuable block on the page. Hard steel chips, and saying so makes every earlier claim more credible, heads off the one-star review from the customer who put it in the dishwasher, and sets up the joke at the old knife's expense. Clients tend to want this section cut. I would argue hard to keep it.

Numbers. 52 to 56 against 61. Fifteen degrees against twenty. Seki, 700 years. The category runs on adjectives, so the page uses almost none.

Frame. The tomato opens and closes the page. It is the test every reader has failed, so it serves as the problem, the proof and the instruction for the day the box arrives. The last line gives the reader a picture of owning the knife, which a button on its own does not.

Localization. The wedding registry is the detail doing the work. For a large share of American households that is where the knife block came from, which means the reader did not choose it, has no loyalty to it, and has quietly resented it for years. The rest is housekeeping: inches, a prepaid sleeve for the sharpening service because nobody wants a trip to the post office with a knife, and free shipping both ways, which the US buyer treats as a baseline.

What I would test first. The headline against "The number knife brands leave off the box," and the position of "What it won't do": above the offer, where it is now, against directly beneath it.

3. Auben Dawn Wake-Up Light

Reasons-why listicle for paid social traffic

Traffic and reader. Cold and retargeted paid social. This reader is product-aware or close to it: they have seen the ad, they know roughly what a sunrise alarm is, and they are carrying objections. Does light really wake you up? Isn't there a \$30 one on Amazon? Is this another gadget that wants an app and a subscription? The listicle is the workhorse format for this traffic because a scanning reader can collect the whole argument from the subheads, and each reason can retire one objection without the page ever looking defensive.

The one belief. How you are woken up matters as much as how long you slept.

THE PAGE

ADVERTISEMENT

6 reasons people are retiring their phone alarm for this \$99 light

It wakes you up the way mornings did before alarms existed. Here's what changes.

If you get a reasonable seven or eight hours and still wake up feeling like you got hit by a truck, the hours may not be the problem. How you're woken up has a lot to do with how the first part of your day feels, and most of us are woken by the worst method available: a sudden noise, in the dark, from a phone.

The Auben Dawn is a bedside light that does it differently. These are the reasons people give for making the switch.

[Live star rating and review count here, linked to the reviews.]

1. It wakes you gradually, which is what your body is expecting

For the 30 minutes before your alarm time, the Dawn brightens from nothing to full warm daylight, smoothly enough that you don't notice it happening. Light passes through closed eyelids, and your brain treats it as what it has always been: the signal that the night is over. By the time the sound comes on, most people are already surfacing. A lot of them wake up before it.

That smoothness is most of what you're paying for. The \$30 versions brighten in steps you can see through your eyelids and top out not much brighter than a night-light.

And if you're a heavy sleeper, the backup alarm is as loud as you set it. This is still an alarm clock.

2. That groggy first half hour has a name, and light helps with it

Sleep researchers call it sleep inertia: the fog after waking, which is worst when an alarm yanks you straight out of deep sleep. It commonly lasts fifteen minutes to half an hour and can hang around longer. Several studies of dawn-simulation lights have found that people woken by gradually increasing light report feeling more alert than people woken in the dark. The studies are small, but they point the same way, and you'll know within a week whether it holds for you.

3. For half the year, there is no dawn to wake up to

If your alarm goes off at 6:30, you're getting up before the sun for about half the year almost anywhere in the country. In late December, sunrise in Seattle or Detroit isn't until close to eight. And every March, right when the mornings are finally getting light, daylight saving time moves the clocks and hands you another few weeks of dark.

Your body is being asked to start the day at what it has every reason to believe is the middle of the night. The Dawn gives you a sunrise at 6:30 (or 5:15, if that's your life), no matter what's going on outside.

[Image: the light at full brightness on a nightstand, dark window behind it.]

4. It gets the phone out of your bedroom

This is the reason people don't expect to care about and end up caring about most. If your phone is your alarm, your phone is next to your bed. That makes it the last thing you look at at night and the first thing you look at in the morning, and you know how both of those go.

The Dawn is a clock, an alarm and a reading light. The phone can charge in the kitchen.

5. It's a better bedside lamp than the one you have, and it never asks you to log in

At night the Dawn runs the other way, fading from a warm reading light down to dark over 20, 30 or 45 minutes, so you can fall asleep without reaching for a switch. There are twenty brightness levels and real buttons you can find with your eyes closed.

There's no app, no account, no Wi-Fi, and no subscription to unlock features you already paid for. It works out of the box, and it will keep working no matter what happens to anybody's servers.

6. You get 60 nights to find out if it works for you

Waking up to light works well for most people and not for everyone, and the only way to find out is to sleep next to it. Give it 60 nights, through a stretch of dark mornings if you can. If you aren't getting up easier, send it back for a full refund. Return shipping is on us.

What owners say

[Proof slot: verified reviews, verbatim, chosen to cover different reasons from the list above so the reviews repeat the argument in customers' words. Placeholders below.]

"I was the guy with four alarms set five minutes apart. Now I have one, and I'm usually awake before it goes off." – Marcus T., Minneapolis, MN

"Bought it for the winter mornings. Kept it because it got my phone out of the bedroom." – Anna W., Portland, OR

The Auben Dawn is \$99 with free shipping and a two-year warranty.

[Button: Try the Auben Dawn for 60 nights]

This is a paid advertisement for Auben. The Auben Dawn is not a medical device and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any sleep disorder, seasonal affective disorder or other medical condition. If you have ongoing problems with sleep or low mood, talk to your doctor.

WHAT THIS PAGE IS DOING

Subheads first. Most paid social traffic scans. Read on their own, the six subheads make the complete argument, and the copy beneath each is for the reader who stops. I write the subheads as a single paragraph and test whether that paragraph persuades before writing anything under them. Every one states a benefit or a fact. None is a label such as "Design" or "Features," which is where most listicles waste their most-read lines.

Order. One and two establish that the thing works, because a reader who suspects a gimmick won't reach the rest. Three makes it seasonal, which supplies urgency without a countdown timer. Four is the turn. Five deals with the price by replacing a second object the reader already owns. Six removes the risk. Each reason also retires one objection, in roughly the order a skeptical buyer raises them, so the page needs no FAQ.

The American objections. In the US this product's real competitor is the \$30 version one click away on Amazon, so the page meets it early, inside reason

one, and turns the price gap into the explanation of what the buyer is paying for. The other local objection is subscription fatigue. American buyers have been trained by the category to expect an app, an account and a monthly fee, which is why “it never asks you to log in” is promoted to a subhead here. In a UK version it is a passing line.

Number 4. The strongest reason on the list has little to do with the product’s main function. It attaches the purchase to a change many readers already want to make and have failed at, and it gives them a second justification that holds even if the light does less for them than they hoped. A buyer with two reasons returns less than a buyer with one.

Claims. Sleep copy drifts into medical territory quickly, and that gets ads pulled. The research is cited at the strength it has (“small, but they point the same way”), the test is handed to the reader (“you’ll know within a week”), and no condition is mentioned outside the footer. Reason six says outright that it doesn’t work for everyone. A skeptical reader trusts the understated version more, so the compliant page and the persuasive page turn out to be the same page.

Voice. The register is a well-informed friend, dry in places (“like you got hit by a truck,” “if that’s your life,” “you know how both of those go”). Listicles in this category usually shout. Against that background a calm page reads as the confident one.

What I would test first. Reason four promoted to first position for retargeting audiences, who already understand the mechanism. Then two seasonal headlines. From November, geo-targeted to northern metros: “In December the sun doesn’t come up in Seattle until eight. This does.” And for the week after the clocks change in March: “Daylight saving just took your morning light. This gives it back.”