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Agora *Style* **VSLs**

RUSSELL BRUNSON

Agora-Style VSLs

*The Long-Form Video Sales Letter Framework
That Built a Billion-Dollar Direct-Response Empire*

By Russell Brunson

*Featuring the methods of Bill Bonner, Michael Masterson, John Forde, Porter Stansberry,
and the Agora Publishing copywriters*

Internal Training Resource | MarketingSecrets.ai

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The frameworks referenced throughout this book – including Michael Masterson and John Forde’s Six Lead Types and Rule of One from *Great Leads: The Six Easiest Ways to Start Any Sales Message* (American Writers & Artists, 2011), Eugene Schwartz’s Five Awareness Levels from *Breakthrough Advertising* (Boardroom Books, 1966), and Mike Schauer’s Product Origin Story research technique from his Swiped.co Insiders Special Report *Reverse-Engineering Stories That Sell Vol. 1* – are cited and credited throughout. Readers interested in the source material are encouraged to consult those works directly.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

THE PROMOS THAT BUILT EMPIRES

IN 1978, a 30-year-old copywriter named Bill Bonner sat down at a typewriter in Baltimore and wrote a sales letter for an investment newsletter. That letter ran in a magazine. It generated enough new subscribers to fund a second product. Then a third. Then a fourth.

Forty-five years later, the company Bonner built – Agora – generates over a billion dollars a year in revenue, publishes dozens of newsletters across finance and health, and has employed or partnered with most of the copywriting legends of the last half century. Michael Masterson ran divisions inside it. John Forde wrote for it. Porter Stansberry started there before launching his own publishing empire. Dr. Richard Gerhauser and Jim Rickards and Ian King all reach millions of people through its imprints.

And the engine that built all of it – the engine that still generates most of the revenue today – is a specific kind of video sales letter.

You've seen these VSLs whether you realized it or not. They're the long, story-driven presentations that start with a mysterious building or an old photograph or a vial of unknown liquid, and sixty minutes later offer you a newsletter subscription for \$49. They're the health promos that open with a 1944 Berlin laboratory and close with a physical book you can hold in your hand. They're the financial pitches that walk you through the Innovation Breakout Curve or the \$150 Trillion Birthright Trust and leave you pulling out your credit card.

They are some of the most consistently effective pieces of direct-response writing ever created. And they are not improvisation. They are a structure.

A structure you can learn. And, more importantly, a structure you can copy.

What This Book Teaches

This book teaches the complete Agora-style VSL framework. Fourteen elements. Seven writing sessions. One unified structure that you can use to build a full-length video sales letter from scratch.

I've organized it so that you can read it cover to cover and come out the other side with everything you need to write your own VSL – or, more realistically, plug the framework into the tool inside MarketingSecrets.ai and have it walk you through each section.

By the end of this book, you'll know:

- The 14 structural elements of every high-converting Agora VSL, and the specific job each one performs
- How to pick the right lead type for your audience using Michael Masterson's framework from Great Leads
- How to find the story that hooks your audience using Mike Schauer's Product Origin Story research technique
- How to name your mechanism, your villain, and your curiosity object in a way that pulls viewers through an entire 60-minute presentation
- How to stack an offer, frame the price, and design a guarantee that converts the "almost there" 60 percent of viewers
- How to close with scarcity, a guarantee, and a CTA sequence that feels earned rather than pushy

I've walked this entire framework back through twenty of the highest-converting Agora VSLs I could study – finance and health, solo and interview format, 40-minute promos and 140-minute epics – and what you're about to read is the structure they all share. Not the surface-level differences. The underlying skeleton.

Where This Framework Comes From

I want to be upfront about where the ideas in this book come from, because they're not mine. I didn't invent any of this.

The 14-element structure is reverse-engineered from the work of copywriters who have been refining this format for fifty years – Bill Bonner, Michael Masterson, John Forde, Porter Stansberry, Mark Ford, and dozens of others whose names you've probably never heard because they sign their work with pen names or publisher imprints.

The lead-type framework in Chapter 3 is Michael Masterson and John Forde's Six Easiest Ways, originally published by American Writers & Artists in their book Great Leads. The awareness-level framework it sits on top of is Eugene Schwartz's, from his 1966 masterwork Breakthrough Advertising – a book that, if you don't own it yet, you should own by the end of this week.

The story-finding technique in Chapter 10 is Mike Schauer's Product Origin Story method, from his Swiped.co Insiders Special Report on reverse-engineering stories that sell. It's the single best technique I've ever encountered for generating curiosity leads out of products that seem, on the surface, to have no story to tell.

What I've done is integrate these frameworks into a single end-to-end workflow that matches the way an actual VSL gets built – from the first blank page all the way to the final P.S. – and walks you through it one section at a time.

How to Read This Book

You can read this book two ways.

The first is cover to cover, once. This gives you the full picture. You see how the pieces fit together, why each element exists, and how an Agora-style VSL actually functions as an integrated system. I'd recommend this first pass before you try to build anything.

The second is as a reference during the actual writing process. The chapters are organized to match the seven writing sessions of the VSL build: Foundation, then Hook and Big Claim, then Credibility and Origin, then Villain / Problem / Mechanism, then Proof and Reveal, then Offer and Price, then Scarcity, Guarantee, and CTA. When you're sitting down to write a specific section, the corresponding chapter is the one to re-read.

At the end of the book, you'll find appendices with real-world examples – full VSL teardowns from both finance and health niches – plus quick-reference libraries for villains, proof types, and format choices. Use those when you're stuck.

ONE NOTE

This framework is for cold-traffic video sales letters. It assumes your audience is problem-aware or unaware, which is the situation most Agora-style VSLs are built for. For warmer audiences – existing customers, re-engagement campaigns, product-aware lists – the structure still applies, but the emphasis shifts. I'll flag those moments as we go.

One Last Thing

The Agora style of VSL is sometimes dismissed as manipulative, fear-mongering, or dated. I've heard all three critiques, and I understand where they come from. But here's what I want you to remember as you read:

The structure works because it respects the reader. It takes a full hour to explain an idea, walk through proof, and earn the sale – rather than using a two-minute pitch and a countdown timer. It teaches before it asks. It offers a money-back guarantee because it's willing to stand behind what it sells. And it gives the reader more information than any other format in direct-response marketing.

Used with integrity – on a product that actually delivers on its promise, by a presenter who actually believes in what they're selling – this framework is one of the most honest ways to sell to a cold audience that's ever been invented. Because it does the work of earning the sale, not manipulating it.

That's the version of the framework I'm teaching you. Let's get started.

CHAPTER ONE

THE AGORA METHOD

BEFORE WE GET INTO THE STRUCTURE, I want to give you a quick mental model of what we're actually building. Because if you understand what an Agora VSL is trying to do – why it exists, why it's shaped the way it's shaped, and why it keeps working after fifty years – every specific technique in the rest of this book will make sense.

An Agora-style Video Sales Letter is a long-form narrative sales message. Typically forty to ninety minutes of spoken content. Sometimes shorter. Sometimes much longer. Its primary job is to turn a cold, skeptical viewer into a newsletter subscriber or book buyer, and to do it well enough that the same viewer keeps buying for years.

That's a much harder job than most people realize.

A cold viewer lands on the sales page knowing nothing about you. They've probably been burned before by bad newsletters, empty promises, or so-called gurus. They're reading the first sentence with their thumb already hovering over the back button. And you're asking them, sixty minutes from now, to hand over their credit card.

The only way that works is if you earn it, step by step. Attention first. Then trust. Then belief. Then desire. Then the sale.

The 14-element structure you're about to learn is essentially a belief-change sequence ending in a transaction. Each element does one specific piece of the persuasion work. Skip any of them, and the sequence breaks.

Why This Format Works

Most sales messaging you see today is short. A social media ad. A two-minute pitch video. A landing page with four bullet points and a button. The assumption is that attention is scarce, so you should ask for the sale as fast as possible.

That assumption is correct for warm audiences. If someone already knows you, trusts you, and wants what you sell, a short message is the right tool. Don't waste their time.

But cold audiences are the exact opposite. With a cold audience, short messages fail because they haven't earned any of the belief required to justify a yes. A two-minute pitch to a cold viewer gets skepticism, not conversion. You can't shortcut trust.

What long-form VSLs do differently is they take the time to actually build the belief. An hour of teaching, story, proof, and framing. Not an hour of selling – an hour of earning the sale.

This is why the Agora format has survived every change in media, platform, and attention economy for fifty years. It doesn't depend on tricks. It depends on the oldest persuasion engine there is: a well-told story that leads to a well-earned conclusion.

THE CORE PRINCIPLE

The Agora VSL is a belief-change sequence ending in a transaction. Each of the 14 elements installs one specific belief or dismantles one specific objection. Skip any element and the sequence breaks.

The 14 Elements at a Glance

Here's the complete list. Don't try to memorize it right now – we'll cover each one in depth in its own chapter. Just read through and get a feel for the shape of the thing.

Element	What It Does
1. Hook / Pattern Interrupt	Stops the scroll in the first 30 seconds

Element	What It Does
2. Big Claim / Opportunity	Names the specific, numerically anchored promise
3. Curiosity-Gap Teaser	Plants the mystery that pulls viewers through the whole VSL
4. Credibility / Authority Bio	Establishes why this presenter is the one to trust
5. Origin Story	Explains why the presenter is doing this for regular people
6. The Villain	Names the external force responsible for past failures
7. The Sharpened Problem	Creates now-or-never urgency without paralysis
8. Mechanism / Proprietary System	Teaches the strategy of how the promise gets delivered
9. Proof - Past Wins & Case Studies	Demonstrates the mechanism has worked before
10. Discovery / Reveal	Pays off the curiosity gap (category only, not actionable)
11. Offer Stack	Presents the hero deliverable plus bonuses cumulatively
12. Price Framing & Anchor	Anchors the price against the stack total
13. Scarcity	Defeats "I'll come back later"
14. Guarantee + CTA + Close	Removes risk, asks for the sale, sends them off

At full length, those 14 elements add up to roughly 7,000 to 10,000 words of spoken script, which runs 45 to 70 minutes at a natural pace. That's the medium-length format, which is what most Agora VSLs use and what I'd recommend as your default.

You can go shorter (2,500 to 4,000 words) for warmer audiences or simpler claims. You can go longer (12,000 to 22,000 words) for very cold traffic, complex mechanisms, or high-ticket offers. We'll cover how to scale in a later chapter. For now, just know that the 14 elements are always present, regardless of length. What changes is how much time each one gets.

How the Elements Group Into Writing Sessions

Trying to write 14 elements in one sitting is a recipe for burnout and bad writing. What actually works is breaking the build into seven sessions, where each session tackles a tightly related group of elements. That's how the tool inside MarketingSecrets.ai is organized, and it mirrors the structure of the rest of this book.

Session	Elements	Chapter
Foundation	Setup (big idea, lead, mechanism, villain, stack)	2 – 3
Hook & Claim	Elements 1, 2, 3	4
Credibility & Origin	Elements 4, 5	5
Villain / Problem / Mechanism	Elements 6, 7, 8	6
Proof & Reveal	Elements 9, 10	7
Offer & Price	Elements 11, 12	8
Scarcity / Guarantee / CTA	Elements 13, 14	9

Session zero is Foundation, and it's unlike the others. It doesn't produce script pages. It produces the core assets that every other session depends on – your big idea, your audience, your lead type, your mechanism name, your villain, your product stack, your proof inventory. Without Foundation locked in, every downstream section will have seams and contradictions.

The other six sessions each produce a chunk of script: an outline followed by a full word-for-word draft in the presenter's voice. You don't have to do them in order

once Foundation is done – some writers prefer to draft the close first and work backward. But you can't do them in parallel, and you can't skip any.

What You Need Before You Start

Before you can write a single word of script, you need a handful of things locked in. These are the inputs. Without them, everything that follows is guesswork.

- A clear sense of who your audience is – specific enough that you can picture one real person. Age, situation, prior attempts at solving the problem, emotional state.
- A product to sell. A newsletter subscription, a book, a course, a supplement. Doesn't matter what format – but you need to know what they're buying.
- Some proof of the claim. Past picks, patient case studies, testimonials, institutional validation. Not fabricated. Real.
- A presenter. The voice the VSL will be delivered in. This might be you, or an expert, or a character your business is built around.
- Willingness to pick one big idea and hold the line. Most first-draft VSLs fail because the writer tried to cram in three big ideas. One is the rule.

If you've got those five things, you're ready. The rest of this book will take you the rest of the way.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BIG IDEA AND THE RULE OF ONE

EVERY SINGLE HIGH-CONVERTING VSL I've ever studied rests on one single, powerful idea. Not three ideas. Not "two big things I want to share with you." One.

This is the Rule of One, and it's the foundational principle of everything else we're going to build. If you get this part right, a lot of other decisions make themselves. If you get it wrong, no amount of clever copywriting can save the finished piece.

The Rule of One comes from Michael Masterson and John Forde's book *Great Leads: The Six Easiest Ways to Start Any Sales Message*. Masterson ran marketing and training divisions inside Agora for decades, and John Forde wrote some of the most successful Agora promotions of all time. Between the two of them, they probably have more data on what actually converts cold traffic than anyone else on Earth. And when they wrote the book on how to start a sales message, the principle they put right at the front - before discussing a single tactical technique - was the Rule of One.

"When you lead with one powerful concept that creates a single compelling emotion, your copy becomes dramatically more effective." - Michael Masterson, *Great Leads*

Why the Rule Exists

The viewer can only hold one big idea in their working memory across a 60-minute VSL. That's a cognitive constraint, not a stylistic preference. Two big ideas force the viewer to mentally reset context every time you switch between them, and every reset is a chance for them to click away.

More importantly, the emotional arc of a VSL – worry, hope, conviction, urgency, decision – only works for one subject. If you’re trying to run two emotional arcs in parallel, the viewer ends up with emotional whiplash. They feel manipulated even if the individual claims are all true.

And the close itself only works with one idea. The close is a compression: “if you believe X, then Y is the obvious next step.” One X, one Y. When you try to compress two X’s into one Y, the causal chain breaks and the whole thing falls apart.

So: one big idea. One promise. One villain. One mechanism. One curiosity object. One primary product offer. Everything in service of the one thing.

The Big Domino Test

Here’s the test I use to know whether a candidate big idea is strong enough. It’s a sentence-completion exercise. Fill in the three blanks:

T H E B I G D O M I N O T E S T

If I can make my audience believe that [BIG IDEA] is the key to [WHAT THEY WANT MOST], and it’s only attainable through [MY MECHANISM OR PRODUCT], then every other objection becomes irrelevant and they have to give me their money.

If that sentence is true – if believing the big idea logically commits the audience to buying – the Big Domino is set correctly. If the viewer could still shrug and say “interesting, but I’ll pass” after believing the idea, the idea is too weak. Sharpen it until the Big Domino is unambiguously set.

Here are three examples of big ideas from real Agora VSLs that pass the test:

- “One Nevada-based company controls the rare earth magnet supply that every electric vehicle motor in the Western Hemisphere needs – and it’s about to go vertical as the EV market grows twelve times over the next decade.”
- “Greek islanders on Ikaria routinely live past 100 in robust health because they unknowingly use four specific longevity compounds that mainstream medicine has ignored for seventy years.”

- “There’s a \$150 trillion trust fund hidden in Title 30 of the U.S. Code that’s about to be unlocked by a recent Supreme Court decision – and the companies positioned around it are the opportunity of the decade.”

Notice what they all share. Each one names a specific thing (a company, a compound, a trust fund). Each one names a specific outcome (market cap growth, longevity, generational wealth). Each one implicitly positions the product as the only way to participate. And each one, if believed, leaves the viewer with only one reasonable next step: buy the thing that gives them access.

New Opportunity vs. Improvement Offer

There’s one more distinction that separates a big idea that converts from one that fizzles. Masterson drew this line sharply, and it’s been reinforced by every top copywriter who followed him: the difference between a new opportunity and an improvement offer.

An improvement offer says: my product is a better version of what you’re already using. Better, faster, cheaper, more efficient. An improvement offer competes on commodity axes. You can always be out-competed on price, on features, on convenience.

A new opportunity says: my product gives you access to something you couldn’t get any other way. A different vehicle. A different category. A different paradigm. A new opportunity has no direct competition because it doesn’t exist yet in the prospect’s mind.

Every successful Agora VSL sells a new opportunity. Not “better stock tips” but “a proprietary 4-metric system for finding pre-breakout companies before Wall Street catches on.” Not “another health supplement” but “a long-lost compound rediscovered from Soviet cosmonaut research.” Not “a new retirement calculator” but “access to a \$150 trillion trust fund hidden in federal law.”

T H E T E S T

If your first-draft big idea uses “-er” words – better, faster, cheaper, smarter, easier – it’s an improvement offer. Reframe it as a new opportunity before you go any further.

The reframe question is: what's the one thing your product does that none of the alternatives do? What category would you have to invent to describe it accurately? The answer to that question is your new opportunity.

Applying the Rule of One to Every Element

Once your big idea is locked in and passes both tests, it becomes the filter for every other decision in the VSL. Every element must serve the one big idea. Here's the quick check to run on each:

Element	Question to ask
Hook	Does this stop the scroll for the big idea?
Big Claim	Does this promise the outcome of the big idea?
Curiosity Teaser	Does this tease the reveal of the big idea?
Credibility Bio	Does this establish authority on the big idea's subject?
Origin Story	Does this explain why the presenter brings the big idea?
Villain	Is this the villain of the big idea's domain?
Problem	Does this sharpen the problem the big idea solves?
Mechanism	Does this name the system that delivers the big idea?
Proof	Does this demonstrate the big idea works reliably?
Reveal	Does this pay off the curiosity of the big idea?
Offer	Does this stack the product that delivers the big idea?

Element	Question to ask
Price	Does this anchor against the big idea's stack value?
Scarcity	Does this explain why the big idea must be acted on now?
CTA / Close	Does this provide the risk-free path to the big idea's result?

If any element's answer is "no, it's about a different idea," revise that element. Agora VSLs that convert are the ones where all 14 elements tell the same story from 14 different angles. Coherence is the whole game.

What This Looks Like in Practice

Let's make this concrete. Imagine you're a financial newsletter editor and your first draft of a big idea is: "AI stocks are going to be huge, and also there's a big infrastructure boom coming, and the Fed is about to cut rates which will help small caps."

That's three big ideas smashed together. Each one could probably support its own VSL. Trying to serve all three in one script produces a muddled narrative with no clear emotional arc and no single Big Domino.

The fix is to pick the strongest one and cut the others. You might land on: "Seven specific AI infrastructure sites are being built across America right now, with \$113 billion in funding, and the companies at the center of each are about to see the single largest wealth transfer in American history." That's one big idea. It passes the Big Domino test. It's a new opportunity, not an improvement. The Fed angle and the small-caps angle can live in your newsletter content later. They don't belong in this VSL.

The hardest part of writing an Agora-style VSL is usually not the writing itself. It's the discipline to cut everything that doesn't serve the one big idea. Almost every first-time writer resists this. They think more ideas means more value. The opposite is true. More ideas means less conversion.

Lock in one idea. Run the Big Domino test. Make sure it's a new opportunity, not an improvement. Then - and only then - move on to the next piece of Foundation: understanding exactly who you're talking to.

CHAPTER THREE

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

A BIG IDEA BY ITSELF ISN'T ENOUGH. The same big idea, delivered to two different audiences, needs to be presented completely differently. A promise that lands like a revelation for one viewer will sound like a sales pitch to another. The difference isn't the promise. The difference is where the viewer is starting from.

Eugene Schwartz, the legendary copywriter who wrote *Breakthrough Advertising* back in 1966, mapped this out better than anyone before or since. He identified five stages of customer awareness, and he showed that the right opening for a sales message depends entirely on which stage your reader is at when they encounter you.

Sixty years later, his framework is still the single best tool for figuring out how to start a sales message. And Michael Masterson built his entire Six Lead Types framework on top of Schwartz's foundation. Before we get to the leads, let's get the awareness levels locked in.

Schwartz's Five Awareness Levels

The five levels run from "hot and ready" to "doesn't even know they have a problem," and they describe the full spectrum of where a viewer can be when they land on your sales page.

Level	What They Know
1. Most Aware	Knows you, knows the product, may already be a customer. Just needs the deal.

Level	What They Know
2. Product Aware	Knows your product exists. Hasn't bought yet. Needs a compelling reason why now.
3. Solution Aware	Feels the problem. Knows solutions like yours exist in general, not yours specifically.
4. Problem Aware	Feels the problem. Doesn't know solutions exist. Or knows vague ones that haven't worked.
5. Unaware	Hasn't identified the problem yet. Largest audience, hardest to sell to.

Most Agora-style VSLs are aimed at viewers at levels 4 and 5 – problem aware or unaware. That's because the whole point of running a long-form video to cold traffic is to reach people who aren't already in the buying conversation. If they were product aware, you'd just email them a discount code. You're spending 60 minutes of their time precisely because they need to be walked from "I don't know this is a solvable problem" to "I'm pulling out my credit card right now."

That's a big psychological distance to cover. It's why the format is so long. And it's why the opening of the VSL – the first 3 to 5 minutes – is the single most important section to get right.

THE KEY INSIGHT

Cold traffic to an Agora VSL is almost always Problem Aware or Unaware. If your audience is Solution Aware or warmer, you probably don't need a 60-minute VSL at all – a shorter direct-response piece will convert better.

Masterson's Six Lead Types

Now here's where the framework gets practical. Each of Schwartz's awareness levels calls for a specific kind of opening, and Masterson and Forde identified exactly six that cover the full spectrum. They published them in *Great Leads*, and

they've become the canonical framework every serious direct-response copywriter uses.

The six types run from most direct (for hot audiences) to most indirect (for cold audiences). Here's how they map:

Awareness Level	Default Lead Type	Also Consider
Most Aware	Offer Lead	Promise Lead
Product Aware	Promise Lead	Offer Lead
Solution Aware	Problem-Solution Lead	Big Secret Lead
Problem Aware	Big Secret Lead	Proclamation Lead
Unaware	Story Lead	Proclamation Lead

Let me walk you through each one briefly. In the chapter on the opening (Chapter 4), we'll get into exactly how to structure each type. For now, I just want you to have a mental model of what each lead is and when it's appropriate.

Lead 1: The Offer Lead

Most direct. Opens with the deal on the table – price, product, guarantee, all in the first few sentences. Works because the audience is already warm and ready, so skipping the preamble honors their readiness. Gene Schwartz called this the easiest lead to write: if you have a good deal and a receptive audience, it's almost impossible to fail.

Sample opener: "For the next 48 hours, you can claim full access to my Insider's Portfolio for just \$1. Here's what you get..."

Lead 2: The Promise Lead

Direct. Opens with the boldest, most specific claim the product can make. Names the product within the first 60 to 90 seconds. Works because the product-aware audience is close to the buying threshold and just needs the promise to be compelling enough to close the gap.

Sample opener: "Over the next 30 minutes, I'll show you how to add \$2,000 to \$5,000 a month to your retirement income using a single type of investment Wall Street doesn't want you to know about."

Lead 3: The Problem–Solution Lead

Middle of the spectrum, leaning direct. Opens with a specific, visceral description of the viewer's pain, agitates it briefly, then pivots to the promise. Works because acknowledging the pain first builds empathy, and the pivot lands with maximum impact because the pain is fresh.

Sample opener: "If you're over 55 and you've noticed your energy dropping, your sleep getting worse, and your workouts feeling harder than they used to – you're not imagining it. And it's not 'just getting older.'"

Lead 4: The Big Secret Lead

Middle, leaning indirect. Opens with the existence of a secret without revealing it – teases hard-to-come-by knowledge, a formula, or a system. Names the branded mechanism term but doesn't explain it yet. This is the dominant lead type in Agora finance VSLs, because problem-aware audiences are drawn to insider knowledge like a magnet.

Sample opener: "There's a specific type of company most investors have never heard of – and the ones who find them early have made 500%, 1,000%, even 2,500% gains while everyone else sits in S&P index funds."

Lead 5: The Proclamation Lead

Indirect. Opens with a startling, emotionally compelling statement – a bold prediction, a shocking fact, a contrarian claim. Works because the proclamation short-circuits the viewer's normal skepticism by being so bold that attention is compelled before judgment engages.

Sample opener: "On July 23rd, 2026, the single largest transfer of wealth in American history will begin. And 99 percent of Americans will miss it entirely."

Lead 6: The Story Lead

Most indirect, most powerful on the coldest traffic. Opens mid-scene with a specific person, place, or historical moment. Builds the narrative for 60 to 120 seconds without naming what it's about. Then bridges to the Big Claim. This is the dominant lead type in Agora health VSLs, and in any ambitious cold-traffic finance VSL.

Sample opener: "On a tiny rocky Greek island, stuck out in the sea far from land, lives a community of seniors who appear to be cheating death."

How to Choose

Start with awareness. Where is your audience – really – when they land on the page? Be honest. If you’re running cold ads to a broad audience, they’re Problem Aware at warmest, Unaware at coldest. If you’re emailing a list that’s been on your newsletter for two years, they might be Product Aware or even Most Aware.

Then pick the default lead for that awareness level from the table above. Nine times out of ten, the default is the right call. The “also consider” column is for situations where the default doesn’t quite fit – usually because of something specific about the product or the presenter.

One rule that holds across every awareness level: when you’re uncertain whether to go more direct or more indirect, go more indirect. The downside of being too indirect for a warm audience is smaller than the downside of being too direct for a cold one. Cold viewers click away. Warm viewers will stay through an extra minute of story.

THE DEFAULT

For cold-traffic Agora VSLs, the default lead is either a Story Lead (coldest audiences) or a Big Secret Lead (problem-aware audiences). If you’re not sure, start with one of these two and test.

Putting Foundation Together

So here’s what you have after these first three chapters of Foundation work:

- A clear picture of your target audience – specifically who they are, what they want, what they’ve tried, and how they feel about it.
- One big idea that passes the Big Domino test and is framed as a new opportunity, not an improvement.
- A read on where that audience sits on Schwartz’s awareness spectrum.
- A choice of which of Masterson’s six lead types will open the VSL.

That's not the whole Foundation - you still need to pick a villain, name your mechanism, choose a curiosity object, build your product stack, and gather your proof assets. We'll hit those as we get to each corresponding section of the script. But you've now got the three decisions that shape everything else: who, what, and how.

Next chapter, we're going to open the actual script. The first three elements. The Hook, the Big Claim, and the Curiosity-Gap Teaser. The five most important minutes in any Agora VSL.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE OPENING

THE OPENING OF AN Agora VSL is the most important five to ten minutes of the entire script. If viewers leave in those first few minutes, nothing else you wrote matters. Your credibility section doesn't land. Your mechanism doesn't get heard. Your offer never gets made. The whole VSL is dead on arrival.

That's why we're spending an entire chapter on what's technically just three of the fourteen elements. The Hook. The Big Claim. And the Curiosity-Gap Teaser. Together, these three are what I call the Opening, and they're the elements that have to be absolutely airtight before the rest of the script has a chance to work.

The Three Jobs of the Opening

The Opening has three distinct jobs, and they happen roughly in order, though they can interleave. Let me name them clearly so we know what we're building toward.

Job 1: Stop the Scroll (Hook, first 30–90 seconds)

Interrupt the viewer's expectations so hard they can't look away. This is not "intrigue." It's not "introduce the topic." It's a pattern interrupt. Something that makes the viewer go "wait, what?" within the first thirty seconds of the video.

Job 2: Name the Promise (Big Claim, minute 1–4)

State the specific, concrete, numerically anchored outcome on offer. This is what holds the viewer for the next hour. Without a clear promise, they'll drift. With a specific, almost outrageous promise, they'll stay to find out whether it's real.

Job 3: Plant the Mystery (Curiosity-Gap Teaser, minute 2–8)

Introduce the unanswered question that can only be resolved by watching to the end. The vial on the desk. The building in Memphis. The compound with the code name. The viewer needs something unresolved in their head that they can't let go of.

By the time these three jobs are done, the viewer should be thinking: "What IS that thing? And how do I get the result he just promised?" That's the mental state you're trying to leave them in when you transition into Credibility.

The Six Hook Variants

Now, the specific shape of your Hook depends on which of Masterson's six lead types you chose in Foundation. That decision tells you which variant to use.

I'm going to walk you through all six, with a sample opener for each. Pick the one that matches your Foundation, and model your Hook on that pattern.

Variant 1: The Offer Hook

For Most Aware audiences. The rarest Hook type in cold-traffic VSLs, but worth knowing. Opens with the deal explicitly on the table.

S A M P L E O P E N E R - O F F E R H O O K

For the next 48 hours, I'm giving you full access to my Insider's Portfolio for just \$1. Plus three free reports worth \$597. Plus my monthly research newsletter for a full year. Here's why I'm doing this right now, and why you need to act before midnight Friday...

Total length: 300–500 words. Everything about this VSL will be compressed because the audience is already sold. You're not persuading, you're closing.

Variant 2: The Promise Hook

For Product Aware audiences. The boldest claim of the VSL appears in the first sentence. Product is named within the first 60–90 seconds.

S A M P L E O P E N E R - P R O M I S E H O O K

Over the next 30 minutes, I'm going to show you how to add \$2,000 to \$5,000 a month to your retirement income using a single type of investment Wall Street doesn't want you to know about. No options trading. No day trading. No complicated strategies. Just one simple approach that has already delivered real returns for over 8,000 of my readers.

Length: 400–700 words. Name the product and the specific outcome early. Move to Credibility quickly.

Variant 3: The Problem–Solution Hook

For Solution Aware audiences. Lead with the hot-button pain. Agitate briefly. Pivot to the promise.

S A M P L E O P E N E R - P R O B L E M - S O L U T I O N H O O K

If you're over 55 and you've noticed your energy dropping, your sleep getting worse, and your workouts feeling harder than they used to – you're not imagining it. And it's not 'just getting older.' Here's what's actually happening. And here's the one thing most doctors miss entirely...

Length: 500–800 words. Don't dwell in the pain. Sixty to ninety seconds of agitation, then pivot. Staying too long in the problem is the common failure mode.

Variant 4: The Big Secret Hook

For Problem Aware audiences. The dominant Hook type in Agora finance VSLs. Teases hard-to-come-by knowledge, formula, or system.

S A M P L E O P E N E R - B I G S E C R E T H O O K

There's a specific type of company most investors have never heard of. The ones who find them early have made 500%, 1,000%, even 2,500% gains while everyone else sits in S&P index funds. I call them Breakout Companies. And over the next forty minutes, I'm going to show you exactly how to spot them before Wall Street does.

Length: 600–1,000 words. Name the branded term but don't explain it yet. Frame as "here's why you haven't heard of this."

Variant 5: The Proclamation Hook

For Problem Aware or Unaware audiences. Shocks with a bold fact, prediction, or statement.

S A M P L E O P E N E R - P R O C L A M A T I O N H O O K

On July 23rd, 2026, the single largest transfer of wealth in American history will begin. And 99 percent of Americans will miss it entirely. I know how that sounds. I promise I'm not exaggerating for effect. By the end of this presentation, you'll understand exactly why this is happening, and exactly how to position yourself in front of it.

Length: 500–900 words. Substantiate with one compelling fact within the first thirty seconds. Specificity, specificity, specificity. Vague proclamations land as hype; specific ones land as news.

Variant 6: The Story Hook

For Unaware audiences. The dominant Hook type in Agora health VSLs, and in any ambitious cold-traffic finance VSL. Most indirect, most powerful on cold traffic.

S A M P L E O P E N E R - S T O R Y H O O K

On a tiny rocky Greek island, stuck out in the sea far from land, lives a community of seniors who appear to be cheating death. Residents of this island routinely live to 100, 105, even 110. And they don't live their final decades hunched over in wheelchairs or confused in nursing homes. They work their gardens. They drink wine with friends. They swim in the ocean. Some of them still climb trees. What are they doing that the rest of the world has missed?

Length: 700–1,200 words. Build the story for 60–120 seconds without naming what it's about. Introduce the mystery or suppression element. Then bridge to the Big Claim.

THE STORY LEAD RULES

Story leads work when the story is (1) specific, with a concrete place or person; (2) dramatic, with stakes or mystery; (3) relevant, with a clear bridge to your product; and (4) true. Invented stories get caught and destroy credibility. Find real stories. We'll cover exactly how to find them in Chapter 10.

Writing Rules for the Opening

A few rules that apply regardless of which variant you're using:

- No greetings before the Hook. "Hi, I'm [name]" never appears in the first 30 seconds of any top-performing VSL. Presenter introduction comes at the end of the Hook, after the promise has landed.
- The first sentence does the heaviest lifting. Spend disproportionate time on it. If the first sentence doesn't earn the second, nothing else matters.
- Name something specific and unexplained in the first 60 seconds. A vial. A building. A person by first name. A compound with a code name. A date. The specificity is what makes the curiosity sticky.
- Say the headline number aloud twice in the first 5 minutes. Repetition anchors it in working memory. "\$150 trillion... that's enough to make every American family a millionaire... \$150 trillion..."
- Never resolve the curiosity gap in the Hook. The reveal is Element 10, at 60–70 percent of the VSL. If you name the company, the compound, or the specific mechanism this early, the viewer has no reason to stay.
- Specificity beats superlatives, always. Kill every "incredible," "amazing," "massive," "huge" that isn't backed by a specific number or fact. Specifics do the convincing; adjectives just sound like selling.

The Bridge Out

Every section of a VSL ends with a bridge line that sets up the next section. The Opening is no exception. Your Hook / Big Claim / Curiosity-Gap Teaser section should end with a transition into Credibility and Origin.

The canonical bridge line: "But before I get into any of that, you deserve to know who I am and why I'm the one bringing you this."

You can phrase it differently, but the shape is always the same. A promise to deliver the payoff, followed by a pause to introduce the presenter. That pause is critical. It lets the viewer catch their breath before the Credibility dump, and it signals that the presenter is confident enough to step out of the claim and into their own story.

T H E O P E N I N G C H E C K L I S T

Before moving on, verify: (1) no greeting in the first 30 seconds; (2) a specific unexplained noun in the first 60 seconds; (3) the Big Claim is in the first 3 minutes with number + timeframe + catalyst; (4) the Big Claim number is stated aloud at least twice; (5) the curiosity object is named but not resolved; (6) the section ends with a bridge line into Credibility.

Once all six boxes are checked, you've got an Opening that can carry the rest of the VSL. Now it's time to earn the trust.

CHAPTER FIVE

BUILDING TRUST

A**AFTER THE HOOK COMES** the moment that separates amateur VSLs from professional ones. The viewer has been pulled in. They want to know the promise is real. They want to know the curiosity object is what you say it is. But before they can hear any of that, they need to decide whether to trust you.

This is where the Credibility Bio and the Origin Story do their work. Elements 4 and 5 of the framework. Together, they convert the viewer's attention into trust, and they turn the presenter from "some guy making claims" into "someone who's on my side."

I'm going to cover them together because they're always written together. Splitting them creates seams. Handled as one unit, they produce the single most important psychological pivot in the entire VSL.

The Two Parallel Jobs

Two things are happening in parallel when a viewer watches this section of the VSL. Both need to land, and both need to land completely.

The Credibility Job

Convert the viewer's "is this guy legit?" skepticism into "okay, this guy knows what he's talking about." Achieved through specific credentials, named past calls, media validation, and – this one is counterintuitive – a specific moment of past failure or doubt. Authority gets built through facts. But real trust gets built when the presenter shows they're human.

The Origin Job

Convert the viewer's "is this guy just trying to get rich off me?" skepticism into "this guy is on my side." Achieved through a specific narrative structure: insider state → disillusionment → decision to leave → mission to help regular people.

By the time this section ends, the viewer should be thinking: "I trust this person. Show me what you've got." That's the mental state the Villain / Problem / Mechanism section picks up from.

The Structure, in Four Parts

Part A: Micro-Credibility (first 60 seconds, 100–200 words)

The first lines of the Credibility section establish the essentials in one concise pass: presenter name, current role or title, and the single most impressive credential relevant to this VSL's Big Idea.

M I C R O - C R E D I B I L I T Y E X A M P L E

My name is Ian King. I'm a 20-year Wall Street veteran and one of the world's leading technology investment experts.

That's it. Don't bury it. Don't stack it with five more facts. One sentence, then move.

Part B: Credibility Stack (2–4 min, 300–500 words)

Now expand with the full stack. There's an optimal order of impact:

- Institutional affiliation: specific Wall Street firms, specific government roles, specific academic credentials, specific medical institutions.
- Named past calls with specific numbers and dates: "I called Tesla in August 2019 and we saw 736% gains." "I testified before the Treasury in 2007 warning of the financial crisis."
- Media validation: CNBC, Fox Business, Forbes, Wall Street Journal, specific quotes from specific publications.

- Trust from insiders: “Morgan Stanley and UBS analysts follow my work.” “Bill Gates and Eric Schmidt followed my research.”
- Reader volume: “Over 100,000 subscribers across 30 countries.” Scale as social proof.

The key rule: distribute these credentials, don’t dump them. A paragraph with five credentials in a row reads like a résumé. Spread them across four to six sentences with breathing room. Each sentence should land one credential cleanly, not three mashed together.

Part C: The Humility Anchor (90 sec – 3 min, 200–400 words)

This is the single most underused element in amateur VSL scripts, and one of the most powerful. Every top-performing Agora VSL includes a specific, concrete moment of past failure or doubt somewhere in the Credibility / Origin arc. Not generic humility. A specific scene.

S A M P L E H U M I L I T Y A N C H O R

My first year on a trading desk was the most humbling period of my professional life. I lost money. A lot of it. Every trade I put on went the wrong way. After about ten months, I walked into my mentor’s office and told him I wanted to quit. He asked me to sit down. And I’ll never forget what he said. He looked at me and said: ‘Now that you’ve figured out every way to lose, you can figure out how to win.’

Why humility works:

- Pre-empts the viewer’s “this guy’s too perfect” skepticism.
- Creates relatability (the presenter was once where the viewer is).
- Makes the eventual wins feel earned, not lucky.
- Disarms the “why should I trust you?” reflex before it fires.

T H E R U L E

Every VSL needs at least one humility anchor, and it must be scene-level specific. “I’ve had some failures” is not a humility anchor. “In March 2003, I blew up a \$40,000 account in three weeks of bad trades, and my wife didn’t speak to me for a month” is a humility anchor.

Part D: Origin Story (2–4 min, 300–500 words)

Four beats, in order. Every Origin Story hits all four. Skip any and the structure collapses.

Beat 1: The Before State

Presenter was an insider. Wall Street, conventional medicine, government, corporate America. Making good money. Playing the system successfully. Name the firm, the role, the income bracket if relevant.

Beat 2: The Disillusionment Moment

A specific incident. Not “I started to realize...” but “One afternoon in [specific year], I was sitting in [specific place] when [specific thing happened]...” The more concrete and scene-based, the better.

Beat 3: The Decision to Leave

The pivot point. Walking away from the firm or the practice or the career. A mentor figure often appears here. Ian King has the head of his trading firm. Dr. Gerhauser has his realization after years of treating patients with pharmaceutical interventions that didn’t address root causes.

Beat 4: The Mission Statement

What the presenter does now, and why. Explicitly for “regular people” or “Main Street Americans” or “seniors like you and me” or “hardworking folks who deserve better.”

The bridge out of Origin goes naturally into the Villain section that follows. The typical line: “And that’s why I get so angry when I see what Wall Street is doing to regular Americans right now...” or “Which is why I have such a problem with what Big Pharma has been doing to seniors for the last thirty years...”

The Three Requirements

Any Credibility / Origin section that skips any of these three things falls flat:

- Real credentials you can verify. Never invent or embellish. One fact-check from a skeptical reader and the whole VSL's credibility dies.
- At least one humility anchor. Specific, scene-level, concrete.
- An explicit rejection of the insider identity. "I left Wall Street behind." "I don't want to go on CNBC every morning." "I'm not just another doctor in a white coat." This positioning is what converts the insider credential into underdog alignment with the viewer.

Most VSLs fail on the last one. Writers spend all their effort on credentials and forget to position the presenter as having chosen the viewer's side. Without that positioning, all the credentials read as "impressive person who doesn't relate to me." With it, the credentials read as "impressive person who's chosen to help people like me." That's an enormous difference.

THE BRIDGE OUT

End your Credibility / Origin section with a line that sets up the Villain. "And that's why I'm so angry about what's happening right now..." Or: "Which is why what I'm about to show you matters so much." The bridge is what keeps the emotional momentum flowing.

Once the viewer trusts you and knows whose side you're on, they're ready for the core teaching. Which is where we head next.

CHAPTER SIX

INSTALLING BELIEF

IF THE HOOK GOT their attention and Credibility earned their trust, this next section is where the real work happens. The intellectual and emotional heart of the VSL. The place where “I trust this guy” becomes “I understand why this works, and I want in.”

Three elements operate together in this section. The Villain. The Sharpened Problem. The Mechanism. These get written as one unit because they form a single belief-installation phase. Split them apart and you lose the momentum.

By the end of this section, the viewer should have three new beliefs installed:

- The reason I haven’t gotten this result already is not my fault. It’s the Villain’s fault.
- If I don’t act now, the window closes. The damage continues. The insiders take it all.
- I understand HOW this works. The mechanism makes sense. It’s real.

Install those three beliefs cleanly and the viewer is ready to buy. Fail to install any one of them and the rest of the VSL can’t recover.

The Villain

The first element of this section is the Villain. And this is where a lot of writers get skittish. They worry that naming a villain sounds paranoid or divisive. They try to soften it. They use vague phrases like “misaligned incentives” or “some bad actors.”

Resist that instinct. Every high-converting VSL names a specific external villain. Not because it's manipulative, but because it's accurate. There are real structural forces that keep regular people from getting good investment advice, good health information, good financial products. Naming them clearly is a service, not a smear.

A good villain has three properties:

- Named or named category. Not “bad actors” but “Wall Street” or “Big Pharma” or “the FDA” or “the Federal Reserve.”
- Stated motive. Why does the villain do what it does? Profit from chronic disease, information asymmetry that favors institutional clients, regulatory capture, protection of existing revenue streams.
- Specific evidence. Named wrong predictors, named suppression events, named regulatory decisions. Don't just claim the villain does bad things. Prove it with specifics.

Here's what a villain section actually sounds like when it's written well:

S A M P L E V I L L A I N S E C T I O N

Here's how the game is actually played. Wall Street makes its money from big institutional clients. Hedge funds, pension funds, endowments. These clients pay the highest fees. So the best research, the earliest ideas, the pre-breakout companies - those all go to the institutions first. By the time a regular retail investor sees a stock on CNBC, the institutional money has usually been in for six months or more. The gains the everyday person sees are the last wave. The institutions already had the first 500%. In 2018, GM Vice Chairman Bob Lutz said rare car collectors should buy a Tesla Model S because he was convinced Tesla was going bankrupt. Tesla has since 10x'd. Morgan Stanley analyst Adam Jonas said in 2019 that Tesla could drop to \$10. The stock is over \$600. These are the people you're competing with for information.

O N E V I L L A I N , N O T F I V E

The Rule of One applies to the Villain too. One villain. Multiple villains fracture the narrative. Pick the one most relevant to your Big Idea and stay with it.

The Sharpened Problem

The Problem has been implicit since the Hook. Now it gets sharpened into now-or-never urgency. This is where you give the viewer a reason to act today instead of bookmarking and coming back later.

There are three urgency vectors you can pull from. Use one or two, not all three. Stacking all three reads as fear-mongering and destroys credibility.

Vector 1: External Deadline

A named date when things change. Supreme Court decision. Government announcement. Earnings call. Product launch. Regulatory change. The specificity is what makes it credible. "Sometime soon" is not an urgency. "July 23rd" is.

Vector 2: Market-Moving Event

"Once Wall Street catches on, the price spikes." "Once the processing facility goes live, revenue surges." "Once the mainstream press covers this, it's already too late." This works when there's a real catalyst that's genuinely close at hand.

Vector 3: Personal Cost of Inaction

Health: disease progresses, aging accelerates, chemical exposure compounds. Finance: retirement underfunded, inflation eroding savings, missed bull run. The viewer's life is getting worse by the day until they act.

Whichever vector you choose, the Sharpened Problem has a specific pattern: name the urgency, then immediately pivot to "but here's the good news, there's a solution that works if you act now." Don't dwell in despair. Dwell in motivated urgency. The viewer needs to feel the pressure, but they also need to feel that there's a way out.

The Mechanism

The Mechanism is the longest content section of the entire VSL. For a medium-length VSL, it runs 900 to 1,400 words – 6 to 10 minutes of spoken content. That's 10 to 15 percent of the total runtime. It's the intellectual heart of the entire piece.

Here's what the Mechanism must accomplish:

- Give the strategy a proprietary, branded name. "The Innovation Breakout Curve." "The Alpha Molecule System." "The Warburg Method." "The American Birthright."
- Break it into 3–5 named components. Not more, not fewer. Three to five is the memorable sweet spot.
- Teach it at the strategy level, not the tactics level. Why it works, not how the viewer would execute it alone.
- Illustrate with one walked-through past example, where each component is explicitly demonstrated.

Why It Needs a Proprietary Name

When you give a mechanism a proprietary name, three things happen at once. First, it becomes memorable. The viewer can say it back in their head, which means they can refer to it later. Second, it becomes ownable. It's your system, not a generic approach anyone could copy. Third, it becomes a shortcut. Once you've named it, you can reference it repeatedly without explaining it each time.

The name should feel coined, not generic. "A systematic approach to finding emerging companies" is generic. "The Innovation Breakout Curve" is branded. The difference matters.

Why Components Need to Be Named

A Mechanism with unnamed components is just vibes. It sounds impressive but the viewer can't hold it in their head. When each component has a name – "Metric One: Tipping-Point Industry," "Metric Two: Revenue Growth Above 20%," "Metric Three: Cash Reinvestment," "Metric Four: The Catalyst" – the viewer can follow along, and more importantly, remember it later.

The named components also create an implicit promise. If the mechanism has four specific metrics, then by buying the product, the viewer is going to learn what those metrics are and how to apply them. That's a concrete value proposition, not a vague one.

The Visual Metaphor

Every good mechanism has a visual metaphor that anchors the whole thing. Ian King's Innovation Breakout Curve uses an S-curve with three zones. Gerhauser's Alpha Molecules imagery uses the immune system as a "sticky flypaper" catching free radicals. Dr. Inglis's cancer protocol uses cancer cells as "sugar addicts" starving without glucose.

The metaphor does two things. It simplifies the concept so the viewer can grasp it in a moment. And it stays accurate enough that the viewer doesn't feel condescended to. If you can't find a visual metaphor for your mechanism, your mechanism may not be well-defined enough yet. Keep working on it until it is.

Teaching Strategy, Not Tactics

This is the place where more VSLs fail than anywhere else. The writer knows the mechanism works. They're excited about it. They want to share everything they know. So they explain exactly how to execute it.

That's the mistake. If you teach the full how, the viewer thinks "I can do this myself" and leaves without buying.

What you teach in the Mechanism section is why. Why the approach works. Why each component matters. Why the combination produces results. What happens when a component is missing. What you don't teach is the specifics of executing it on the viewer's own.

THE TEACHING RULE

Teach strategy, sell tactics. The VSL shows why the mechanism works. The product delivers how to execute it. If the viewer leaves thinking "I can replicate this without buying," you revealed too much.

Walking Through a Past Example

After naming the Mechanism and walking through its components, immediately illustrate with one specific past example. Ideally this is one of your strongest past wins from Foundation.

Walk through the past example with explicit reference to each component. “SolarEdge in 2019 met all four of my metrics. Metric One: residential solar was entering mass adoption. Metric Two: SolarEdge had just reported 43% year-over-year revenue growth. Metric Three: they had \$800 million in cash reinvestment. Metric Four: California had just mandated solar on new construction. So I recommended it at \$82. Twelve months later, 169% average gain.”

This walkthrough serves a double purpose. It proves the Mechanism is real (the viewer just saw it work). And it rehearses the Mechanism in the viewer’s head (the repetition helps them remember it).

Don’t walk through every past win this way – save the rest for the Proof section that comes next. One detailed walkthrough in the Mechanism section. That’s the pattern.

The Bridge Out

End the Mechanism by reattaching it to the current opportunity. “Which is why, when I applied these four metrics to [current opportunity], I found something remarkable.” Then hand off to Proof.

Your viewer now believes three things: someone is responsible for their past failures (the Villain), the window is closing (the Sharpened Problem), and the Mechanism is real and comprehensible (the Mechanism). What they haven’t yet seen is the stacked evidence that this has actually worked before.

That’s the next chapter. Proof, and the moment the curiosity gap finally breaks.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PROOF AND THE REVEAL

BY THIS POINT IN THE VSL, you've done a lot of work. You've hooked the viewer, earned their trust, named their villain, sharpened the urgency, and taught them your proprietary mechanism. They believe the approach makes sense. They understand how it works.

What they don't yet have is evidence.

That's what this chapter covers. Elements 9 and 10 of the framework. The Proof stack and the Discovery / Reveal. Together, these two elements convert "this sounds plausible" into "this is real and I need in."

Why Proof and Reveal Belong Together

I write these two elements as one unit for the same reason I paired Credibility and Origin. They're always adjacent. They serve complementary jobs. And writing them separately breaks the momentum.

The Proof Job

Convert the viewer's "sounds plausible, but is it really this reliable?" skepticism into "okay, this actually works." Achieved through stacked evidence. Past wins. Case studies. Testimonials. Institutional validation. Media mentions. One tier of proof is thin. Three tiers stacked together is overwhelming.

The Reveal Job

Pay off the curiosity gap that was planted in the Hook. Show the vial. Name the compound category. Reveal the building's purpose. Give the viewer enough that

they feel rewarded for watching – but withhold the specific actionable information, so they still need to buy the product to act.

That balance is the trickiest part of the entire VSL. Give too little and the viewer feels cheated. Give too much and they can act without buying. Most writers err on the side of giving too much. We'll spend time on this.

The Three Tiers of Proof

Stack your proof in three tiers for cumulative effect. If you have assets for all three, use all three. If one tier is empty, skip it rather than fabricate – fake proof gets caught, and faked proof destroys everything upstream.

Tier 1: Past Wins and Case Studies

Three to five specific past successes, each told as a mini-narrative of 80 to 150 words. Tight, specific, factual.

For finance VSLs: "I recommended [Company] in [Month, Year] at \$[price]. Within [timeframe], my readers had the chance to [sell at X% / hold for Y%]. That's a [specific %] gain."

For health VSLs: "[First name + last initial] came to me in [year] with [specific condition]. We worked together on the [mechanism protocol] for [timeframe]. Within [specific period], [specific outcome]."

S A M P L E P A S T W I N - F I N A N C E

In August of 2019, I recommended SolarEdge to my readers at \$82 a share. The company had just reported 43% year-over-year revenue growth. California had just mandated solar on new construction. All four of my metrics lit up. I told my readers to buy. Within twelve months, we sold half of our position in July 2020 for a 110% gain. The other half in October 2020 for a 227% gain. That's a 169% average gain – in less than a year.

Tier 2: Testimonials and Reader Letters

Three to five testimonials in quick succession, each 40 to 80 words. Often introduced as "And it's not just me – let me share what a few of my readers have written in..."

The pattern is rhythmic repetition: “Michael G. wrote... Dorothy M. wrote... Cliff F. wrote...” Each testimonial on its own feels cherry-picked. Three or four in a row feels systemic.

S A M P L E T E S T I M O N I A L T I E R

Cliff F. wrote in recently. ‘I’ve been following your research for three years. After SolarEdge, I was hooked. Thank you for showing a small-time investor like me that these opportunities actually exist for people like us.’ Michael J. wrote: ‘I invested \$8,000 in Tesla when you called it. Twelve months later, that position was worth over \$60,000. I honestly can’t thank you enough.’ Marissa C. wrote: ‘I’m a retired teacher. I don’t have a lot of money to work with. But the returns on my small positions have given me a cushion I never thought I’d have at this stage of my life.’

T E S T I M O N I A L F O R M A T

First name + last initial. Not full names (legal exposure). Not just initials (reads as fake). First name + last initial is the sweet spot. Always real people. Never invented.

Tier 3: Institutional Validation

This tier varies by niche. For finance, it’s usually the “smart money is already in” pattern. Named institutional investors with position sizes.

For health, it’s named research institutions and specific peer-reviewed studies. A Stanford study. An Institute of Aging paper. A Mayo Clinic position.

For any niche, it can include media validation – specific outlets with specific quotes. USA Today. Barron’s. The Wall Street Journal. Forbes.

S A M P L E S M A R T M O N E Y S T A C K

I’m not alone in thinking there’s a major move coming in this space. The smart money is already positioned. Bank of New York Mellon owns 2 million shares. Billionaire Leon Cooperman holds more than 2.4 million shares.

Morgan Stanley is holding 4.5 million shares right now. These are the people who see things before the rest of us do. They're already positioned. USA Today calls this 'the Golden Age of EVs.' Barron's writes that EVs are 'taking over everything.'

The Honest-Losses Disclaimer

One specific rule for finance VSLs that is absolutely non-negotiable: include at least one acknowledgment that you don't get it right every time.

S A M P L E H O N E S T - L O S S E S D I S C L A I M E R

Now, I want to be completely honest with you about something. These are some of my absolute best recommendations – but I don't get it right every single time. No one does. There have been losing trades. That's the reality of this work, and I want you to know that upfront. Investing like this isn't risk-free. Never bet more than you can afford to lose.

This disclaimer does three things at once. First, it provides legal cover. The SEC, the FTC, and every consumer protection agency in the country looks hard at investment promotions that imply guaranteed returns. Saying “I don't get it right every time” is critical.

Second, it builds trust. The viewer already suspects you're cherry-picking your best past picks. Acknowledging that builds credibility in a way that pretending otherwise can't match.

Third, it actually increases conversion. This is counterintuitive, but it's been proven across hundreds of tested VSLs. A presenter who admits imperfection comes across as more trustworthy than one who pretends to be infallible.

T H E D I S C L A I M E R I S N O T O P T I O N A L

Every finance VSL needs an honest-losses disclaimer. Include it in the Proof section, immediately after the strongest past wins. No exceptions. Health VSLs need an equivalent – usually a note that “results vary” or “not every patient

responds.”

The Reveal

After the Proof stack has done its work, you’ve reached the moment the viewer has been waiting for since minute one. The moment the curiosity gap breaks. The moment the vial gets opened.

The Reveal has one iron rule: you reveal the category. You do not reveal the actionable.

This distinction is the single most common place new writers break the formula. They get excited about the reveal. They want to pay off the setup. So they name the specific company, the exact ticker symbol, the brand of supplement, the precise dosing protocol.

Don’t.

What gets revealed is the category. “Rare earth magnets, specifically neodymium.” “An adaptogen called Rhodiola rosea.” “A compound extracted from grape skins.” “Title 30 of the U.S. Code.” Categories are big enough to feel like a real payoff, but they’re not actionable without more information. The specific company, the specific brand, the specific dosing – those stay in the product.

C A T E G O R Y R E V E A L S , A C T I O N A B L E W I T H H O L D S

This is binary. Either the viewer can act on what you’ve said, or they can’t. If they can, you revealed too much. If they can’t, you revealed correctly. Test every reveal line against this rule before you lock the script.

The Four Beats of the Reveal

Beat 1: The Buildup

Signal that the moment has arrived. “Before I tell you what’s inside this vial...” “Which brings me to the discovery I promised I’d show you...” The viewer has been waiting. Signal that the wait is ending.

Beat 2: The Physical or Visual Reveal

Show the object. “Take a look at this. This is what the inside of an EV motor looks like.” Even audio-only VSLs use this language, because the “take a look” phrase primes the viewer to process the input as evidence rather than claim.

Beat 3: The Category Named and Branded

Now state the category. If you’ve branded it in Foundation, use the brand name. “These are what I call R9 – and they come from the skins of a specific grape.”

Beat 4: The Withhold

Re-close the gap. “But here’s the problem – there’s only one company in the Western Hemisphere that supplies it at scale. And most retail investors have never heard of it. The ticker is in the report.”

S A M P L E R E V E A L S E Q U E N C E

Now – finally – let me show you what’s inside this vial that I’ve been holding up since the beginning of this presentation. Take a look at this. Look at the color. Look at how unassuming it is. You could walk past this in a laboratory supply catalog and never give it a second thought. But what’s inside this vial is, quite literally, what allows every single electric vehicle motor to turn. What allows your smartphone to vibrate when it rings. What makes drones fly. These are rare earth magnets. Specifically, neodymium – the strongest permanent magnet material ever discovered. Now, I’m not going to tell you the name and ticker of this company right here in this presentation. If I dropped the ticker here, every watcher would run and buy before my paid subscribers could get positioned. What I want to do instead is send you a full research report with everything you need...

The withhold at the end is what justifies the entire offer. The reveal gave the category; the product gives the actionable. The viewer now wants the specifics

badly enough to pay for them. That's exactly the mental state the Offer section is about to catch.

The Bridge Out

End the Reveal with a clean bridge into the Offer. The typical line: "Which brings me to exactly how to get that report in your hands today." Or: "For the full protocol – the brand, the dosing, the exact sourcing – I've put it all in a book I want to send you today."

This is a crucial handoff moment. The Proof has built belief. The Reveal has created the want. The Offer converts want into purchase. Don't rush the transition – the bridge line should feel natural, not abrupt. The viewer is leaning forward at this point. Don't do anything to break the spell.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE OFFER AND THE PRICE ANCHOR

MOST WRITERS DRAMATICALLY UNDERESTIMATE how much work the Offer section does. They think of it as a footer – “the part where you list what they get and name a price.” That framing is catastrophically wrong.

Top-converting Agora VSLs spend 20 to 30 percent of total runtime on the Offer and Price. That’s a minimum of 12 minutes in a 60-minute VSL. Sometimes 20 minutes or more. The Offer section is not a footer. It’s a full act – equal in importance to the Mechanism.

Here’s why. The viewer has, by this point, been persuaded intellectually. They believe the framework. They believe the mechanism. They want the specifics. But wanting is not buying. Between “I want this” and “I’m going to hand over my credit card” is a psychological distance that has to be closed deliberately.

The Offer section closes that distance. Through cumulative value stacking. Through careful price anchoring. Through positioning that makes \$47 feel like a rounding error against \$995 of value. That’s the work happening here, and it deserves real time and real writing craft.

The Two Jobs

The Offer Stack Job

Present the deliverables cumulatively, so that by the time the price is revealed, the brain anchors against total value, not against item price. “\$796 worth of research” established first, then “just \$47” hits as a 95% discount.

The Price Framing Job

Reveal the price in a way that feels inevitable, fair, and a steal. Every price reveal uses a specific four-anchor sequence. Skip any anchor and the price feels higher than it should.

The Five Beats of the Offer Section

Beat 1: Transition from the Reveal (~100–150 words)

The bridge out of the Reveal into the Offer. Short. Transitional. Sets up the stack.

S A M P L E O F F E R T R A N S I T I O N

Which brings me to exactly how to get the full research in your hands today. Because I've put everything I know about this company – the ticker, the buy-up-to price, the full investment thesis, the catalysts I'm watching, and my sell strategy – into a new research report you can have in as little as five minutes from now.

Beat 2: The Hero Deliverable (200–400 words)

Present the hero. Named prominently. Shown on screen with the cover graphic. 3 to 5 bullet benefits of what's inside. Stated value.

For finance: "It's called [Name of Report]. Inside you'll get: the ticker symbol, my recommended buy-up-to price, a full breakdown of the investment thesis, the four metrics I used to evaluate this opportunity, and so much more. We value this report at \$199."

For physical books (common in health): add the tangibility details. Uniquely numbered first edition. Bound. Signed. Include a Certificate of Authenticity. This matters because physical objects feel more valuable than digital ones, and because waiting for delivery creates post-purchase anticipation that reduces refund rates.

Beat 3: The Bonus Cascade (400–700 words)

The "but that's not all" pattern. Two to three bonuses chained together, each with a reason for existence, teaser bullets, and a stated value.

Each bonus needs a reason for existing that's not "to inflate the stack." Ideas:

- A different but related angle (“While the hero covers topic A, this bonus covers topic B – the perfect complement”).
- A different timeframe (“While the hero is a 12-24 month play, this bonus covers opportunities that could move in the next 90 days”).
- A different risk profile (“The hero is a conservative long-hold; this bonus covers three higher-upside speculative positions”).
- A defensive angle (“While the hero tells you what to buy, this bonus tells you what to sell”).

T H R E E B O N U S E S M A X

Three bonus reports is the sweet spot. Four or more starts to feel like padding. One feels thin. Three is the conversion-optimized number, and it’s what nearly every top-performing Agora VSL uses.

Beat 4: The Subscription Itself (300–500 words)

Now introduce the recurring product – the newsletter or research service. Everything above (hero + bonuses) has been “gifts” to justify a low initial price. The subscription is the actual paid product.

Named. Positioned. Five specific operational benefits. Normal subscription price stated.

S A M P L E S U B S C R I P T I O N P R E S E N T A T I O N

All of this comes as part of your membership in my premium research service, Strategic Fortunes. Every month, I send my subscribers a new 8-page research newsletter – detailed, specific, easy to read – direct from me. Every newsletter contains a brand new stock recommendation, with the ticker, the buy-up-to price, and my full thesis. That means 12 new stocks a year, minimum. You also get real-time access to my model portfolio. Weekly email alerts and updates. Access to our members-only website with the full

archive. And our dedicated customer care team - real humans, easy to reach. Normally, a one-year membership is \$199. That's a fair price for the kind of research we deliver, and frankly, my colleagues in the hedge fund world have told me I could charge twice that.

Beat 5: Price Framing and Anchor (400–600 words)

This is the most technically precise beat of the entire VSL. A four-anchor price reveal sequence, in exactly this order.

Anchor	What You Say
1. Stack Total	"Let's add up what you get today. Hero \$199. Bonus 1 \$149. Bonus 2 \$149. That's \$497 in research, plus the subscription itself."
2. Normal Sub Price	"Normally, a one-year membership is \$199. That's \$796 in total value."
3. Today's Discount	"But here's what I'm doing. I'm cutting the price by 75%. \$199 normally, today just \$47. An instant \$150 savings."
4. Per-Day Math	"That works out to about 13 cents a day. Less than a cup of coffee."

Every anchor in that sequence does a specific psychological job. The Stack Total establishes the value reference. The Normal Sub Price adds the recurring-service weight. The Discount creates the gain-from-action. The Per-Day Math reframes the purchase into something trivially small. Skip any one and the price reveal loses punch.

THE 75% DISCOUNT CONVENTION

Default to a 70–85% discount off the normal price. 75% is the classic Agora number. It's large enough to feel like a genuine deal but not so large it triggers "what's the catch?" suspicion. Use this unless you have a specific reason

otherwise.

The Publisher-Advocate Frame

One more critical piece of the Price section: you need to justify why the price is so low. Without a reason, the deal feels suspicious. With a reason, it feels like the presenter is fighting for the viewer.

The publisher-advocate frame positions the presenter as advocating for the viewer against the publisher. It builds alignment at the exact moment the viewer is about to click buy.

S A M P L E P U B L I S H E R - A D V O C A T E F R A M E

Now you might be wondering – if Strategic Fortunes is as good as I say it is, why am I practically giving it away at this price? Good question. Here's my honest answer. The only way our business works is if subscribers stick around long-term. We don't make money at \$47. We make money when you're a subscriber for years – because the research keeps paying off for you, and you keep renewing. I know once you see what I actually deliver, you're going to want to stay. That's why I can justify pricing the first year this low. I'm taking a loss up front to earn your trust.

Notice what that framing does. It converts the low price from a suspicious red flag into proof of confidence. “I’m willing to lose money up front because I know you’ll love this” is a much stronger position than “buy this, it’s cheap.”

The Bridge Out

End the Offer and Price section with a transition into Scarcity and Guarantee. The typical bridge: “But before you click the button, there are two more things you need to know.” Or: “Now, there’s one more thing I need to tell you about this offer.”

That bridge signals that the pitch isn’t quite over – that there are important details still to come. It keeps the viewer’s finger off the back button while you handle the

last two critical conversion elements: scarcity and guarantee. Which is where the next chapter takes us.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CLOSE

THE FINAL SECTION OF AN AGORA VSL IS THE CLOSE. Scarcity, Guarantee, CTA, Sign-off, and optional P.S. Elements 13 and 14 of the framework. Roughly 7 to 10 percent of the total runtime.

This is the section most writers get wrong in the most predictable way. They feel the urgency of being at the end, so they push too hard. They stack every scarcity tactic they've ever heard of. They cram in five more bonuses. They repeat the CTA eight times in the final three minutes.

Don't. The close is the most delicate section of the entire VSL, and the instinct to push harder at the end is exactly wrong. The close works when it feels inevitable, not forced. When scarcity is real, not manufactured. When the guarantee is so generous that refusing to try feels irrational. When the CTA is repeated enough to land, but not so much that the viewer feels bullied.

Here's how to do it right.

The Two Barriers That Remain

By this point, the viewer has accepted your big idea, bought into your mechanism, seen your proof, understood the reveal, and absorbed the stack value. They know exactly what they're being offered and how much it costs.

Yet they're not yet clicking. Two specific psychological barriers stand between them and the buy button:

- "Maybe I'll come back later." Defeated by Scarcity – real, credible reasons they must act now.

- “What if it doesn’t work for me?” Defeated by the Guarantee – financial risk removed entirely.

Once those two are handled, the last job is just to point them at the button – multiple times, in slightly varied ways – and close with a warm, mission-anchored sign-off.

Scarcity - Use One Type, Not Four

There are four scarcity types. Pick the truest, strongest one for your offer. Using multiple stacked scarcities reads as manufactured and damages credibility.

Type A: Quantity Scarcity

A specific number of slots. “My publisher will only allow us to offer this pricing to the next 500 new subscribers. Once we hit that number, the discount comes down.” Works when there’s a real business reason for the cap – fulfillment capacity, customer support load, research integrity with too many subscribers moving markets.

Type B: Time Scarcity

A specific expiration. “This discount is only available for the next 24 hours. After midnight tomorrow, the price goes back to \$199.” Works when paired with a reason why – end of promotional period, end of quarter, specific event.

Type C: Event Scarcity

The opportunity itself has a deadline. “The Mar-a-Lago announcement is expected within the next 30 days. Once that hits the news, the window to get positioned at today’s prices is closed. This isn’t about my offer – it’s about the market itself.” This is the strongest scarcity type because it’s external and verifiable.

Type D: Publisher Scarcity

The publisher or company imposes the limit. “My publisher only lets me run this kind of deep discount once every 18 months.” Works for established publishers with a history of the practice.

ONE SCARCITY TYPE

Pick one. Don't stack. Whatever type you choose, it must be (1) specific, (2) credible, and (3) stated with a reason. Scarcity without reason reads as manipulation.

The Iron-Clad Guarantee

The guarantee is the single most important conversion element in the final minutes of the VSL. It's what unlocks the 60 to 70 percent of viewers who are "interested but cautious." Without a strong guarantee, those viewers wait. With one, they click.

Here's what the guarantee needs:

- A meaningful refund period. 30 days standard for finance. 60 or 90 days for health, especially with physical books. Longer builds more trust but increases operational burden.
- Any-reason refund. "For any reason at all." No conditions. No hoops. No fine print.
- Keep-the-bonuses framing. This is critical. Viewers need to know that even if they refund, they keep everything you sent them.

S A M P L E I R O N - C L A D G U A R A N T E E

Here's my guarantee. Claim your membership today. For the next thirty days, use the research. Read the hero report. Dig into the three bonus reports. See if my research is what I say it is. If at any point during those thirty days you decide this isn't for you - for any reason at all - just call or email our U.S.-based customer care team and we'll refund every penny. No questions asked. No hassle. No fine print. And here's the best part. Even if you ask for a refund, you keep everything. The hero report. All three bonus reports. Every update I've sent you. It's all yours, as a thank-you for giving my work a try. So worst case scenario: you try this for a month, decide it's not for you, get your \$47 back, and still walk away with \$796 in research. There is literally no

scenario in which you lose money here.

That “try it → worst case you keep \$800 in research for free” framing is what converts the cautious viewer. Without it, they wait. With it, they click. Leave this out and you’ll leave 30 to 40 percent of possible conversions on the table.

K E E P T H E B O N U S E S

The “keep everything even if you refund” framing is non-negotiable. It’s the single biggest conversion lever in the Close. Never skip it. Never soften it. Say it explicitly.

The CTA Sequence

The CTA needs to be repeated three times minimum across the Close. Each instance is specific and action-driven. Not “take action” – “click the orange button below this video.”

Here’s the three-CTA pattern that converts best:

First CTA: After the Guarantee

The first direct ask. Specific and physical. “Below this video, you’ll see an orange button that says GET STARTED. Click that button right now. It’ll take you to a secure checkout page. Fill in your details, and within about five minutes, you’ll have full access to everything I’ve described today.”

Second CTA: After a Compressed Recap

Remind the viewer what they’re getting, then ask again. This recap compression is where indecisive viewers get pushed over the line.

S A M P L E R E C A P + C T A

To recap. The moment you click that button, you’ll get [Hero], plus the three bonus reports – [name 1], [name 2], [name 3]. All four research reports. Plus a full year of [Subscription Name], with monthly newsletters, real-time portfolio

access, weekly alerts, and our customer care team. \$995 in total value. For just \$47. A 75% discount. And if you don't love it, you get every penny back - and you keep everything. Go ahead and click that button right now.

Third CTA: After Addressing Hesitations

Name the hesitation the viewer is feeling, out loud, and answer it. Pick one or two hesitations, not all possible ones. Mentioning objections the viewer didn't have plants them.

S A M P L E H E S I T A T I O N H A N D L I N G

If you're still on the fence, I want to address what's probably running through your mind right now. Maybe you're thinking: 'This sounds too good to be true.' I understand that skepticism - I'd be skeptical too. But the math is simple. \$995 in value for \$47. 30 days to decide. Full refund. Keep everything. The only way this goes badly for you is if you never try it. So click that button. Right now. While everything is fresh. While the discount is still available.

The Sign-Off

The sign-off is warm, mission-anchored, and brief. Use the presenter's name. Invoke the mission. Thank the viewer. Never pushy. Never desperate.

S A M P L E S I G N - O F F

Thank you for taking the time to watch this entire presentation. I know it was long - but the opportunity I've described is too important to shortchange with a quick pitch. And if you've stayed with me to this point, you're exactly the kind of subscriber I built this research service to serve. My mission is simple: level the playing field for regular investors. Give you the same research Wall Street keeps for the big institutional clients. And help you build real wealth with opportunities the mainstream press won't touch until it's too late. I'm [Presenter]. This is [Publisher]. Click the orange button below this video. Let's get you started.

The P.S.

The P.S. is optional for Short VSLs, recommended for Medium, and expected for Long or Very Long VSLs. It's a brief final urgency nudge that catches the viewer who was "almost there" and needed one more push.

S A M P L E P . S .

P.S. One last thing. Procrastination is the enemy of every good investment decision. The subscribers who have made the most money from my research over the years are the ones who acted quickly when the opportunity was in front of them. The 500 slots will fill. The announcement is coming. Don't let this be the one you wish you'd taken. Click the button. I'll see you inside.

For Long and Very Long VSLs, the P.S. can expand into a mini-VSL – a brief second narrative arc introducing an additional bonus report. This catches viewers who were drifting during the final CTA repetitions. We'll cover this advanced technique in a later chapter.

The Final Check

Before you consider the Close locked, run this checklist:

- Exactly one scarcity type is used. Not stacked. Specific and with a reason.
- Guarantee is iron-clad: full refund period, any reason, keep-the-bonuses framing is explicit.
- At least three CTAs across the Close, each specifying the exact button or link and what happens next.
- Only one or two hesitations addressed, not all possible ones.
- Sign-off uses presenter name plus publisher name, invokes the mission, and is warm – not pushy.

- No high-pressure “act now or regret forever” language anywhere. Urgency is about the opportunity, not about guilt.

Once those six boxes check, you’ve got a close that works. You’ve also got a complete VSL. All fourteen elements. Seven writing sessions. The full structure, start to finish.

There’s still more in this book. The next chapter covers how to find the stories that make Hook and Claim land. The chapter after that covers format choices and advanced techniques. And the appendices give you complete teardowns of real Agora VSLs from the corpus.

But if you’ve read the first nine chapters and applied them, you have everything you need to write a complete, professional, high-converting Agora-style video sales letter.

The rest is technique and practice.

CHAPTER TEN

FINDING STORIES THAT SELL

WE'VE SPENT NINE CHAPTERS ON STRUCTURE. Fourteen elements, seven sessions, start to finish. But structure alone doesn't make a VSL work. Structure is the skeleton. What makes the VSL come alive is the story at its center.

Specifically, the curiosity object. The vial. The mysterious building. The 1944 Berlin laboratory. The Greek island where people live past 100. The compound extracted from grape skins. Without a compelling curiosity object at the heart of the Hook, even a perfectly structured VSL falls flat.

And this is where writers most often get stuck. They've got the product. They've got the big idea. They've done the Foundation work. But they can't find the story. "My product is a financial newsletter," they think. "There's no story there. It's just picks and analysis."

That's wrong, and the best tool I've ever seen for proving it wrong comes from a copywriter named Mike Schauer. Mike runs a site called Swiped.co that catalogues great sales copy, and in one of his paid reports he laid out a four-step research process for finding stories to sell any product. I'm going to walk you through his method in this chapter, because it's the single best tool I know for unsticking a stuck VSL.

The Product Origin Story

Schauer calls his technique the Product Origin Story. But he doesn't mean what most people mean by an origin story. He's not talking about how you, personally, came up with the product. He's talking about something much more useful.

Schauer's insight is that every product contains, buried in its ingredients or methodology or philosophy, some connection to a story that already exists in the world. A historical figure who did something parallel. An ancient practice that foreshadowed the modern technique. A suppressed discovery. A forgotten invention. These stories are already out there, sitting in Wikipedia articles and obscure history books and half-remembered news archives. The copywriter's job is to *find* the right one and make the connection explicit.

This is not making up stories. It's finding real, true stories that happen to illustrate the product's underlying logic. And then telling those stories cinematically, so they land for the viewer with the emotional weight of a good documentary.

THE KEY INSIGHT

You're not inventing stories. You're finding stories that already exist and making the connection to your product explicit. This is research, not fiction.

Why Story Leads Work So Well

Before we get into the method, one quick note on why this matters so much for Agora-style VSLs specifically.

Cold traffic is allergic to direct sales pitches. The moment a viewer realizes they're being sold to, their defenses go up. Every claim gets read through a filter of skepticism. Every credential feels like bragging. Every proof point feels like cherry-picking.

Stories bypass that filter entirely. Humans are wired to process narrative with suspended judgment. We've been sitting around fires telling each other stories for a hundred thousand years, and our brains don't apply the same skeptical screening to a good story that they apply to a sales claim. By the time the viewer realizes they're being sold to, they're already emotionally invested in the outcome.

This is why Story Leads are the dominant Hook type in Agora health VSLs and the most ambitious Agora finance VSLs. Not because stories are a trick. But because stories are how humans have always made sense of new information.

Schauer's Four-Step Process

Here's the method. Four steps. Do them in order. The whole process takes about an hour if you commit to it.

Step 1: Deconstruct the Product

Take the product apart conceptually. For each component, ingredient, methodology, or philosophical essence, write down what it's about at a non-technical level.

For a health supplement: the active ingredients, the extraction method, the philosophical approach (natural versus synthetic, ancient versus modern). For a stock pick: the underlying industry, the technology, the historical precedent for the opportunity, the analogous past moves. For a newsletter: the research methodology, the philosophical stance, the demographic it serves.

The key rule: deconstruct to topics that are NOT technology-specific or industry-specific. Those have limited history. Universal topics have rich history.

DECONSTRUCTION EXAMPLE

Product: A rare earth magnet-based investment opportunity. Surface level (don't use): 'neodymium magnets,' 'EV motors,' 'semiconductor supply chain.' Deconstructed level (do use): 'strategic minerals,' 'supply monopolies,' 'foreign dependence,' 'technology bottlenecks,' 'resource scarcity,' 'national security,' 'mining ghost towns.' Notice how the deconstructed level opens up centuries of history. The surface level only opens up the last twenty years.

Step 2: Search for Stories Tied to the Deconstructed Topics

Take each deconstructed topic and search it online, paired with trigger phrases that pull up historical or dramatic material. The trigger phrases matter – they're what shift your search results from "modern news coverage" to "historical stories with narrative weight."

The trigger phrases Schauer recommends:

- "Famous examples of [topic]"
- "Shocking [topic]"

- “Unusual [topic]”
- “Ancient [topic]”
- “Breakthrough [topic]”
- “Discovery of [topic]”
- “Origins of [topic]”
- “Suppressed [topic]”
- “Covered up [topic]”
- “Little-known [topic]”

Look for:

- Historical figures tied to the concept (Edison and anti-gold currency → Bitcoin; Tesla and wireless power → electromagnetic investments; Warburg and Hitler → cancer research).
- Ancient practices or compounds (Spanish Army olive leaf elixir → supplement; Greek islanders’ diet → longevity; Cleopatra’s beauty routine → soap).
- Suppressed research (Soviet cosmonaut experiments → adaptogen; WWII medical discoveries → cancer cure).
- Metaphors from other industries (railroads → fiber optics; gold rush shovels → EV supply chain).

Step 3: Save Promising Stories and Note the Connection

For each interesting story, write down three things. A brief summary in one to three sentences. The connection to your product – the bridge. Why the story is emotionally compelling (mystery, suppression, revenge, underdog).

Aim for two or three strong candidates at this stage. Not one – you want options, in case your first choice turns out to be harder to substantiate or has ethical issues when you dig deeper. Not ten – you’ll get overwhelmed and spend the rest of the week researching instead of writing.

Step 4: Dramatize Using the Five Rules

This is where the story gets transformed from a Wikipedia summary into a VSL Hook. Schauer identifies five specific techniques that top copywriters use to turn raw historical material into cinematic narrative.

THE FIVE DRAMATIZATION RULES

1. Romanticize and enhance. Tell the truth, but the dramatic version. 2. Simplify ruthlessly. Only the juicy parts. 3. Make it feel brand new – like a discovery, a cover-up, an untold story. 4. Brand the lesson with a proprietary name. 5. Embed promises and benefits – remember, you’re using the story to sell.

Let me walk through each briefly.

Rule 1: Romanticize and Enhance

Tell the truth, but pick the dramatic version of every true detail. Don’t invent. But do select. If the original account says “the research was conducted over several years and produced interesting findings,” the dramatic version says “for seven years, in a concrete bunker in Siberia, Soviet scientists documented something that would change our understanding of human longevity forever.” Both are true. Only one has narrative weight.

Rule 2: Simplify Ruthlessly

No dry facts. No filler. No “background context” that doesn’t serve the story. A two-hour documentary compresses to 90 seconds of narrative. Cut anything the viewer doesn’t need to feel the emotional shape of the story.

Rule 3: Make It Feel Brand New

Frame the story as a discovery, a breakthrough, a cover-up, an untold story. Often, explicitly tell the viewer why they haven't heard it before. "For seventy years, the U.S. government has buried the Warburg findings." "This is a story almost no one outside of Russia has ever heard." The frame of hidden knowledge is what keeps the viewer leaning forward.

Rule 4: Brand the Lesson

Give the takeaway a proprietary name. "The Warburg Method." "The Spanish Army Secret." "The God Pill." "Edison Dollars." "Tesla Technology." The branded name turns the story's lesson into something ownable – something the viewer can remember, reference, and want more of.

Rule 5: Embed Promises and Benefits

Remember: the story is a sales tool, not a history lecture. Every story beat should hint at what the viewer will gain from understanding (or using) the product. "The Greek islanders who use this daily live to 100." "Warburg's research, if widely understood, could transform how we treat cancer." The benefit isn't stated as a pitch – it's woven into the story's conclusion.

Twelve Canonical Examples

Schauer catalogues twelve real stories used in successful Agora and Agora-style VSLs, and I want to walk you through them here. Study this list. When you can't find a story for your own product, come back to this catalog and look for a structural parallel.

Story	Product	Branded Name
Dr. Warburg + Hitler + suppressed cancer research	Health book subscription	"The Warburg Method"
Soviet cosmonaut adaptogen research + defecting scientist	Supplement + newsletter	"The God Pill"
Spanish Army olive leaf elixir + Napoleonic spies	Olive leaf supplement	"The Spanish Army Secret"

Story	Product	Branded Name
Edison's 1922 commodity-backed currency	Bitcoin investing guide	"Edison Dollars" / "Edison's Revenge"
Tesla's suppressed wireless power invention	Wireless power stock play	"Tesla Technology" / "Tesla's Revenge"
Geronimo's full head of hair + Native American herbs	Hair growth supplement	"Native American Secret"
Exodus 30:23 biblical anointing oil formula	Health book subscription	"Jesus Oil"
Thomas Parr lived to 152 with a clean colon	Colon cleanse product	"Death begins in the colon"
Taoist monks' 1,300-year-old movement practice	Tai Chi course	"China's stay-young secret"
19th century railroads → fiber optics metaphor	Telecom stock newsletter	"The New Railroad"
Cleopatra's 3,000-year-old beauty routine	Palmolive soap (original campaign)	"3,000 Year Old Beauty Secret"
John E. Powers, first full-time copywriter	T-shirt for copywriters	"Copywriter, Not Copyrighter"

Notice a few patterns across the list. Many of these stories are about suppression or revenge – genius or discovery that was buried by powerful forces and is finally being brought to light. This works because it preempts the viewer's skepticism: it explains why they haven't heard the story before. It creates a villain. And it aligns the presenter with the viewer against a common enemy.

Other stories leverage ancient or unusual origins. Greek islanders. Taoist monks. Native American warriors. Cleopatra. These work because they give the modern product a pedigree that mass-market alternatives don't have. If the approach is a thousand years old, it can't be a fad. If Cleopatra used it, it carries weight that no chemistry paper can match.

When the Suppression Frame Works

The suppression or revenge frame is one of the most powerful narrative devices in direct-response copy. But it only works when it's plausible. Used carelessly, it tips from "interesting backstory" into "conspiracy theory," and that's a credibility-destroying line to cross.

Use the suppression frame when:

- There's a plausible institutional force that would genuinely want the information suppressed (pharmaceutical companies protecting patented drugs; governments protecting geopolitical positions; industries protecting legacy revenue streams).
- The history contains a real figure who was actually ignored, mistreated, or underfunded (Tesla, Warburg, obscure researchers whose work was genuinely overlooked).
- The opportunity feels genuinely "underground" – off the radar of mainstream coverage, not covered by large institutions.

Don't use the suppression frame when:

- It stretches credulity. Not every story has a suppression element, and forcing it feels desperate.
- The audience is sophisticated enough to see through weak framings. Institutional investors, medical professionals, and other domain experts will smell manufactured conspiracy.
- The product doesn't genuinely benefit from an "underground" positioning. A branded, mass-market product that positions itself as suppressed just sounds confused.

Your Research Assignment

Before you finish your Foundation – before you write a single word of Hook – spend an hour running Schauer's four-step process on your own product.

Deconstruct the product into five to ten non-technical topic tags. Search each tag with the trigger phrases. Save three stories that might work. For each one, write the brief summary, the connection to your product, and the emotional frame. Then pick your favorite, and apply the five dramatization rules to craft the first two minutes of your Hook.

This is the work that separates a generic VSL from one that stops the scroll. And it's the work nobody else is willing to do. Which is exactly why it works.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FORMAT, LENGTH, AND ADVANCED TECHNIQUES

THE 14-ELEMENT FRAMEWORK YOU'VE learned in the first nine chapters is universal. It applies to every Agora-style VSL regardless of niche, audience, or presenter. But there are still decisions to make about how the VSL gets packaged: how long it runs, what format it uses, and which optional techniques you layer on top.

This chapter covers those decisions. Three format choices. Four length targets. Six advanced techniques that top-performing VSLs use selectively. Nothing in this chapter is mandatory. But understanding your options lets you make informed choices instead of defaulting to whatever feels natural.

Format Choice

Agora-style VSLs come in three main formats. The choice depends on the size of your claim and the skepticism level of your audience.

Format A: Solo Presenter

One presenter delivers the entire VSL. Usually filmed in a simple setting - office, library, studio. Full first-person singular throughout. This is the most common format and what I'd recommend as your default.

Solo works best when:

- The claim is substantial but not extraordinary. “\$2,000 a month in additional retirement income” is solo-appropriate. “\$150 trillion wealth transfer” probably isn’t.
- The presenter has a strong personal brand that carries weight on their own.
- The VSL is medium-length (40–70 minutes). Solo can get monotonous over 90 minutes.
- The offer is a single-product subscription, not a bundle of multiple experts.

Format B: Interview (Two-Person)

A host asks questions; an expert delivers content. The host plays the audience’s surrogate, asking the questions the viewer would ask. This format is the best tool for claims that are too large for a solo presenter to carry credibly.

Interview works best when:

- The claim is very large or hard to believe. A \$150 trillion trust fund; a 10,000% upside; a medical breakthrough that mainstream medicine rejects. When the claim is big, an interrogating host makes the claim feel vetted rather than boasted.
- Positioning an expert who isn’t self-promotional enough to carry a solo VSL. Some of the best researchers are terrible at self-marketing. A host fills that gap.
- Longer VSLs (70–120 minutes). The two-voice structure breaks up monotony.

The host’s questions should do specific jobs at specific moments:

- Specifically skeptical at key claim moments: “Jim, if this is real, why hasn’t anyone else talked about it?”
- Clarifying at technical moments: “So walk us through exactly how this works for someone who’s never heard of Title 30 before.”

- Emotionally on-behalf-of-viewer at objection moments: “For someone hearing this for the first time, Jim, this sounds almost too good to be true.”

Format C: Roundtable (Three-Person)

Host plus two experts, often with controlled disagreement on minor points. Used for very ambitious VSLs or bundled offers from multiple experts. This is the least common format, and also the most logistically complex.

Roundtable works best when:

- Very cold traffic requires maximum social proof. Multiple experts validating the thesis carries more weight than one.
- Bundling multiple newsletters from multiple authors into one offer. The roundtable gives each expert their due while keeping the VSL cohesive.
- Very long VSLs (100 minutes and up). Three voices can sustain attention longer than two.

The “controlled disagreement” pattern is worth noting. Two experts appear to disagree on a secondary point but agree on the Big Idea. “I actually see it differently – I think it’s even more bullish than Jim does” is the classic version. This creates verisimilitude without fracturing the core thesis.

DEFAULT TO SOLO

Solo is the right choice for roughly 80 percent of Agora-style VSLs. Upgrade to Interview only when the claim is genuinely too large for one voice. Upgrade to Roundtable only when you’re bundling multiple experts. Never downgrade: if you have a multi-expert offer, don’t try to save production cost by going solo.

Length Choice

Four length targets, each matched to a specific use case. Runtime assumes 150 words per minute, which is the industry-standard spoken pace.

Length	Words	Runtime	Use When
Short	2,500–4,000	15–25 min	Warm audience. Single claim. Simple mechanism.
Medium	6,000–10,500	40–70 min	Default. Most offers. Corpus average.
Long	10,500–15,000	70–100 min	Complex mechanism. Multiple proof angles. Premium offer.
Very Long	15,000–22,000	100–145 min	Very cold traffic. High-ticket offer. Bundled products.

Default to Medium unless you have a specific reason to go longer. Longer is not always better. Longer is longer. Each additional minute is a chance for the viewer to drift, and every minute after the 70-minute mark has to fight harder to justify staying.

THE LENGTH RULE

If you can't point to a specific reason your VSL needs to be over 70 minutes, it shouldn't be. Complexity is not a reason. More features is not a reason. Wanting to include more is not a reason. Cold traffic, high-ticket offers, or genuinely complex mechanisms are reasons.

Six Advanced Techniques

These are optional techniques observed in top-performing Agora VSLs. None are required. But they're worth understanding so you can layer them in when they fit.

Technique 1: The Mini-VSL in the P.S.

After the main CTA and Scarcity / Guarantee section, a brief three-to-eight-minute mini-narrative introduces one additional bonus report. It has its own micro-Hook, micro-Claim, and micro-CTA that loops back to the same order button.

Why it works: a substantial fraction of viewers drift during the final CTA repetitions. The Mini-VSL re-engages them with a fresh hook at the end, catching viewers who were “almost there” and pushing them over.

Best used for: Long and Very Long VSLs (100-plus minutes), especially when the additional bonus has its own compelling backstory that wouldn't fit in the main narrative.

Canonical example: Jim Rickards's \$150 Trillion Birthright Trust VSL uses a Mini-VSL at the end introducing a Russian uranium-themed bonus report.

Technique 2: Two-Tier Pricing

The main offer is presented at the standard discount (say, \$49 for one year). Then a premium tier is offered – longer duration, additional bonuses, or advanced service level – at a higher price with aggressive social proof like “80 percent of subscribers chose the Premium option.”

Why it works: the anchor-and-alternatives effect. When presented with a standard option and a premium option, a significant fraction of buyers will choose premium, raising average revenue per subscriber without alienating the price-sensitive.

Best used for: offers where a subset of subscribers actively want more (more picks, more research, more service). Newsletters with tiered model portfolios are a natural fit.

Pricing ratios: premium is typically 2–4x the standard. Bonuses stacked on premium should be genuinely better – longer subscription, higher-tier research, additional reports – not just padding.

Technique 3: Physical Book Deliverable

The hero deliverable is a printed, bound, mailed book rather than a digital PDF. Often features uniquely numbered first editions, a Certificate of Authenticity signed by the presenter, branded packaging, and sometimes included physical supplements.

Why it works: tangibility converts. Physical objects feel more valuable than digital ones. The waiting period for delivery creates post-purchase anticipation that reduces refund rates. Certificate-of-Authenticity framing converts the purchase into a collectible.

Best used for: health VSLs especially. A 300-plus page “encyclopedia” book justifies the \$99 retail value and premium subscription price. Less common but effective in finance for high-ticket offerings above \$199.

Canonical examples: The Secrets of Underground Medicine (Natural Health Response), The Doctor’s Book of Survival Home Remedies (various health publishers).

Technique 4: The Humility Anchor

A specific past-failure moment woven into the Origin Story pre-empts the “too perfect” skepticism. I covered this in Chapter 5 because it’s essentially required, not advanced – but it’s worth restating here.

Optimal placement: mid-Credibility Stack, before the Origin Story proper. 100 to 200 words of specific scene-level detail.

Technique 5: The “Tried That” Frame

A brief section listing the alternatives the viewer has already tried (index funds, standard supplements, conventional doctors), framed not hostilely but sympathetically. “You’ve done everything reasonable; the reason it hasn’t worked isn’t your fault, it’s that the fundamental approach is incomplete.”

Why it works: pre-empts the objection “I’ve tried these kinds of things before.” By naming the tried-and-failed alternatives first, the VSL positions itself as the next logical step.

Best used for: audiences the user knows have prior failed attempts. Works well in retirement-planning and weight-loss spaces especially.

Technique 6: Specific Date Targeting

The VSL references a specific upcoming date by which the opportunity must be acted on – an earnings call, a Fed meeting, a legislative deadline, a product launch. The date becomes the urgency anchor.

Why it works: specific dates are more urgency-productive than vague “soon” framings. The viewer can mark the calendar. The urgency becomes verifiable, which paradoxically makes it more credible, not less.

Best used for: finance VSLs with real external catalysts. Don’t invent deadlines – if there’s no real date, don’t force one. Invented deadlines are the single fastest way to destroy credibility when they pass without the predicted event.

T H E T E C H N I Q U E S A R E N ’ T A C H E C K L I S T

Don’t use all six advanced techniques in one VSL. That’s the equivalent of turning every dial to eleven. Pick the one or two that genuinely fit your offer and your audience. The rest stay in the toolkit for the next VSL.

Putting It All Together

At this point, you have the complete framework. Structure (the 14 elements). Sessions (the seven writing phases). Lead types (Masterson’s six). Awareness levels (Schwartz’s five). The Rule of One. The story-finding method (Schauer’s four steps). Format and length options. Advanced techniques to layer on when they fit.

Everything beyond this point is practice. Writing VSLs. Testing them. Refining your craft. Building a library of your own case studies and hooks and mechanisms that you can draw on.

The last chapter is a short one. It’s about what happens next – how to take this framework and actually put it to work. And then we move into the appendices, where you’ll find complete teardowns of real VSLs plus quick-reference libraries you can consult while you’re writing.

C O N C L U S I O N

THE COMMITMENT TO CRAFT

HERE'S THE TRUTH ABOUT THE AGORA-STYLE VSL: the framework is simple. Fourteen elements. Seven writing sessions. Six lead types. Four length targets. Three format choices. One Big Idea. You can learn all of this in a weekend.

The hard part is actually writing one.

Not because it's technically difficult. You have the structure now. You have the checklists. You have the sample language for every beat. The hard part is the discipline to do the work at the level the format demands.

Finding the story that hooks your audience takes an hour of real research, not ten minutes of brainstorming. Nailing the Big Idea requires the willingness to kill two other ideas you were excited about. The humility anchor won't write itself – you have to dig up a specific, embarrassing memory from your past and put it on camera. The mechanism has to be genuinely branded, genuinely broken into components, genuinely explained through a metaphor. The proof has to be real, verifiable, and specific enough that a skeptical reader could fact-check every claim.

Every one of those tasks is resistible. Every one of them is easier to skip than to do. And every time you skip one, the finished VSL is a little weaker than it could have been.

The best VSL writers in this business – the ones whose work Agora has paid millions of dollars to, the ones whose promos have generated hundreds of millions in revenue – are not smarter than you. They're not more gifted. They don't have a secret trick you're missing. What they have is the discipline to do the actual work, every time, on every piece. The research. The drafting. The rewriting. The cutting.

That's what separates professional direct-response copy from amateur direct-response copy. It's not talent. It's craft. And craft is just discipline applied repeatedly over time.

Your Next Step

Everything in this book is a framework. Frameworks only work when you use them.

Your next step is simple: pick a product. Run the Foundation checklist. Nail your Big Idea and run it through the Big Domino Test. Pick your audience's awareness level. Choose your lead type. Spend an hour with Schauer's four-step process and find three candidate stories. Pick your favorite. Write your Hook.

Don't try to write the whole VSL in one sitting. One session at a time. Foundation first, always. Then Hook and Claim. Then Credibility and Origin. Work through the seven sessions in order, and you'll have a complete VSL in about two weeks of focused work.

The tool inside MarketingSecrets.ai is built to walk you through exactly that sequence. It holds the framework so you don't have to. It knows when to ask what, when to push back, and when to hand you a draft you can refine. You don't have to do this alone.

But whether you use the tool or not, the real commitment is to the craft itself. To doing the work at the level the format demands. To respecting the viewer enough to earn their attention honestly, over the course of sixty minutes, with a real story and a real mechanism and real proof and a real guarantee.

That's the promise of the Agora-style VSL. Not a fast hack. Not a persuasion trick. A structure that lets you actually earn the sale by giving the viewer more information, more story, and more reason to trust you than any other format in direct-response marketing.

Use it well. And then go write one.

B O N U S

BUILD IT INSIDE MARKETINGSECRETS.AI



Your Agora VSL workflow is built into MarketingSecrets.ai. Log in to use the AI to walk you through each of the seven writing sessions: Foundation, Hook and Big Claim, Credibility and Origin, Villain and Mechanism, Proof and Reveal, Offer and Price, and Scarcity, Guarantee, and CTA.

For each session, the tool elicits the exact inputs you need, applies the framework you've just learned in this book, and delivers a bulleted outline followed by a full word-for-word script in your attractive character's voice.

It also holds the cross-cutting rules - the Rule of One, the Big Domino Test, the awareness-level-to-lead-type mapping, Schauer's four-step story research process - so you don't have to juggle them in your head while you write. The framework becomes a tool that works for you, not a checklist you have to remember.

If you don't have an account yet, get your free trial at MarketingSecrets.ai.

Log in or start your free trial:

MarketingSecrets.ai

A P P E N D I X A

FINANCE VSL TEARDOWN

THIS APPENDIX WALKS THROUGH a real finance VSL from the corpus, element by element, so you can see how the framework gets applied in practice. The VSL in question is Ian King’s “Nevada EV Company” promotion for Banyan Hill Publishing, which ran multiple variations over 2021 through 2023 and was one of the most successful financial promos in that window.

I’ve chosen this VSL for the teardown for three reasons. First, it’s a textbook example of the framework – every one of the 14 elements is visible and well-executed. Second, the big idea is clear and easy to summarize, so we can trace how it flows through every section. And third, the VSL is medium-length in the classic Agora mold, which makes it a good model for your own first attempts.

The Setup

Asset	Value
Presenter	Ian King
Publisher	Banyan Hill Publishing
Product	Strategic Fortunes (monthly research newsletter)
Hero Deliverable	“The One Company Critical to the 1,150% EV Revolution”
Bonus Reports	3 additional stock research reports

Asset	Value
Price	\$47 (vs. \$199 normal)
Format	Solo presenter
Length	Medium ($\approx$ 60 minutes, ~9,000 words)
Audience	Problem Aware (retail investors worried about inflation/retirement)

Element-by-Element Walkthrough

Element 1: The Hook

King opens by holding up a small vial containing a sample of dark material. The first sentence: "Take a look at this vial. Whatever is inside of it is about to create more millionaires than the internet did in the late 1990s." No greeting. Specific unexplained object in the first ten seconds. Massive specific claim in the first sentence. The viewer has no idea what's in the vial, but they need to know.

Element 2: The Big Claim

The specific promise lands in minutes two through four: a potential 1,150 percent upside as the EV market grows roughly 12x between now and 2030. A small retail investor positioning today could turn \$1,000 into over \$12,000. The number is stated twice in the first five minutes. The timeframe is specific (by 2030). The catalyst is specific (the Nevada processing facility going live).

Element 3: The Curiosity-Gap Teaser

The vial remains unexplained. King teases that what's inside powers every EV motor in the Western Hemisphere, but he doesn't name the material yet. He describes a Nevada site where this material is processed. He hints that Pentagon contracts have already been signed. But no company name. No ticker. The viewer is leaning forward.

Element 4: Credibility Bio

The first Credibility beat lands around minute six. "My name is Ian King. I'm a 20-year Wall Street veteran and one of the world's leading technology investment

experts.” Then the stack is distributed across the next three to four minutes: 8 years at Citigroup, 2 billion dollar trading book, shorted the 2007 housing market for a 261 percent gain, called SolarEdge for 169 percent, Tesla for 736 percent, appearances on CNBC Fast Money and Fox Business, quoted in Forbes, subscribers across 30 countries.

Element 5: Origin Story

Beat 1 (before): Citigroup institutional trader, comfortable high-six-figure career. Beat 2 (disillusionment): the 2008 financial crisis, seeing the mortgage bubble coming while most of the institutional world ignored it. Beat 3 (decision): raised a small fund to short the housing market, walked away from Wall Street after the crash. Beat 4 (mission): “I want regular investors, not hedge funds, to have access to the same research the institutions get.”

The humility anchor appears mid-section: King’s first year on a trading desk, where he lost money on almost every trade and walked into his mentor’s office to quit. The mentor’s line (“Now that you’ve figured out every way to lose, you can figure out how to win”) becomes the turning point that leads into the trading success.

Element 6: The Villain

Named explicitly: Wall Street, specifically the institutional-client gatekeeping structure. Motive: institutional clients pay the highest fees, so the best research, the earliest ideas, and the pre-breakout companies all go to the institutions first. Evidence: Bob Lutz’s wrong call on Tesla, Morgan Stanley’s Adam Jonas predicting Tesla would drop to \$10, the \$2 billion analyst-coverage cutoff below which most pre-breakout companies fly under the radar.

Element 7: The Sharpened Problem

The urgency vector King uses is Event Scarcity: the Nevada processing facility is scheduled to go live within twelve months. Once that announcement hits the news, institutional money finishes positioning, retail press starts covering it, and the share price reflects the catalyst. “If you want to be in front of that move at today’s prices, you need to move now.”

Element 8: The Mechanism

King’s proprietary system is called the Innovation Breakout Curve, visualized as an S-curve with three phases: Inception, Breakout, and Maturity. The four filter metrics (the actual components of the mechanism) are: Metric 1, tipping-point industry;

Metric 2, revenue growth above 20 percent YoY; Metric 3, cash reinvestment; Metric 4, the catalyst. Each is named, each gets its own definition, and each ties to the curve visually.

Element 9: Proof

Tier 1 (past wins): SolarEdge at 169 percent, SunPower at 780 percent, Generac at 301 percent, Tesla at 736 percent. Each told as a 60–100 word mini-narrative with the four metrics explicitly applied.

Honest-losses disclaimer included: “I don’t get it right every single time. No one does. There have been losing trades. Never bet more than you can afford to lose.”

Tier 2 (testimonials): three reader letters, each with first name + last initial. Cliff F., Michael J., Marissa C. 40–70 words each.

Tier 3 (smart money): specific institutional holders of the target company – Bank of New York Mellon (2M shares), Leon Cooperman (2.4M), Morgan Stanley (4.5M) – plus media validation from USA Today, Barron’s, and Forbes.

Element 10: The Reveal

Category revealed: rare earth magnets, specifically neodymium. The vial’s contents are named. The applications are described (EV motors, smartphones, drones, wind turbines). The scarcity of Western Hemisphere supply is stated. But the specific company name and ticker stay withheld. “The ticker is in the report I want to send you.” Textbook execution of category-reveals / actionable-withholds.

Element 11: The Offer Stack

Hero: “The One Company Critical to the 1,150% EV Revolution” (\$199 stated value). Bonus 1: “The Company Leading the Big Data Money Boom” (\$199). Bonus 2: “The 20-Minute Retirement Solution” (\$199). Bonus 3: “How to Make a Fintech Fortune” (\$199). Total research stack: \$796. Subscription: Strategic Fortunes, \$199 normal annual price.

Element 12: Price Framing

Four-anchor sequence: Stack total \$995 value (research \$796 + subscription \$199), normal subscription price \$199, today’s price \$47 (a 75% discount + instant \$150 savings), per-day math about 13 cents a day. Publisher-advocate frame included: “The only way our business works is if subscribers stick around long-term. I’m taking a loss up front to earn your trust.”

Element 13: Scarcity

Type: Quantity Scarcity – the publisher limits this discounted pricing to 500 new subscribers per launch, then the price goes back to \$199. Reason stated: customer care onboarding capacity. Combined (but not stacked as a separate second type) with Event Scarcity: the Nevada facility announcement being within the next twelve months.

Element 14: Guarantee + CTA + Close

Guarantee: 30 days, any reason, full refund, keep all four research reports even after refund. Three CTAs: first after the guarantee (“click the orange GET STARTED button below this video”); second after a compressed recap of the stack + price + guarantee; third after addressing two specific hesitations (“too good to be true” and “I’ll come back later”). Sign-off: “I’m Ian King. This is Banyan Hill. Click the orange button. Let’s get you started.” P.S. on procrastination and the fill-rate of the 500 slots.

What to Notice

Three things are worth studying in this VSL specifically.

First, the way credibility is distributed. King doesn’t dump his credentials in one paragraph. He threads them across the first 12 minutes, landing one or two per beat, with the humility anchor in the middle as the trust-cementing move. By the time he starts teaching the mechanism, the viewer has accepted him as legitimate without noticing the heavy credibility lift he just did.

Second, the way the Mechanism and the Proof cross-pollinate. King walks through SolarEdge using the four metrics in the Mechanism section, then returns to SolarEdge plus three other past wins in the Proof section. The SolarEdge narrative appears in both places, first as instruction, then as evidence. The viewer hears the proof twice from different angles, which triples the conviction with only a small increase in runtime.

Third, the iron discipline on the category-vs-actionable distinction in the Reveal. Throughout the full hour, the name of the specific company never appears. Not once. King tells you the material (neodymium). He tells you the industry (rare earth magnets). He tells you the geography (a specific Nevada county). He tells you the Pentagon contract. He tells you the processing facility’s timeline. Every detail except

the one detail that would let you act without buying the report. That discipline is what makes the withhold work.

Study this VSL. If you can find it online, watch it twice – first with the framework fresh in your head, then a second time specifically noticing the transitions between sections. The craft is visible once you know where to look.

A P P E N D I X B

HEALTH VSL TEARDOWN

THIS APPENDIX WALKS THROUGH A REPRESENTATIVE HEALTH VSL, following the same element-by-element format as Appendix A. The VSL is Dr. Richard Gerhauser’s “4 Long-Lost Secrets of Superhuman Lifespans” for Newmarket Health, which has been a workhorse promotion for the Natural Health Response newsletter.

I’ve chosen this one because it’s the canonical example of an Agora health VSL. Story Lead opener, physical book deliverable, specific branded compounds, Big Pharma villain, patient case studies. Every health VSL element is visible. Studying this one lets you see how the same 14-element framework plays out in a completely different niche than finance.

The Setup

Asset	Value
Presenter	Dr. Richard Gerhauser, M.D.
Publisher	Newmarket Health (Natural Health Response)
Product	Natural Health Response (monthly newsletter)
Hero Deliverable	“The Secrets of Superhuman Lifespans” (physical book)
Bonus Reports	Digital guides on specific compounds and protocols

Asset	Value
Price	\$49 (book free with newsletter subscription)
Format	Solo presenter, studio setting
Length	Long (90–120 minutes)
Audience	Unaware (55+ adults concerned about aging, not yet diagnosed)

Element-by-Element Walkthrough

Element 1: The Hook

Gerhauser opens with a Story Lead. “On a tiny rocky Greek island, stuck out in the sea far from land, lives a community of seniors who appear to be cheating death.” The first image is the Greek island. No greeting. No credentials yet. Just a story. The viewer is immediately oriented toward a question: what are these people doing that other seniors aren’t?

Element 2: The Big Claim

The promise lands about four minutes in: the residents of this specific island – which turns out to be Ikaria – routinely live past 100 in vigorous health, without the chronic diseases that plague most Americans in their 70s and 80s. And they’re doing it through four specific compounds that mainstream medicine has ignored for decades. The claim: with these four compounds, you can add 10–20 years of healthy life.

Element 3: The Curiosity-Gap Teaser

The four compounds are named as a category: “the Alpha Molecule,” “R9,” “Gray Salt,” and one more held for later. But brand names, sources, and dosing are withheld. The viewer knows there are four specific compounds, they know the names, but they don’t yet know what any of the compounds actually are in scientific terms.

Element 4: Credibility Bio

Micro-credibility: “My name is Dr. Richard Gerhauser. I’m a medical doctor and I’ve been practicing medicine for over 45 years.” Stack distributed across the next several minutes: trained at the University of Arizona medical school, ran a family practice for decades, taught natural medicine to thousands of doctors through the American College for Advancement in Medicine. Patient volume: over 100,000 individual patient visits across his career. Specializes specifically in anti-aging and chronic-disease reversal.

Element 5: Origin Story

Beat 1 (before): conventional M.D. in Tucson, Arizona, prescribing standard pharmaceuticals. Beat 2 (disillusionment): his own health crisis around age 50 – he felt terrible, couldn’t get out of bed, felt weak and old. Standard medicine offered him no real answers. Beat 3 (decision): he started researching natural and alternative protocols, restored his own health, and pivoted his practice toward what worked instead of what the pharmaceutical industry rewarded. Beat 4 (mission): “I’m here to share what actually works, directly with seniors who deserve better than the pill-pushing system.”

The humility anchor is the personal health crisis itself – told with specific scene detail, including the morning he couldn’t get out of bed and realized his own medicine wasn’t working for him.

Element 6: The Villain

Named: Big Pharma, and specifically the structural incentives of the pharmaceutical-FDA complex. Motive: Big Pharma profits from chronic disease management, not cures. A one-time cure destroys recurring revenue. The FDA’s revolving door with pharma executives ensures regulatory capture. Evidence: specific drug pricing examples, the opioid crisis, the FDA’s treatment of natural compounds, the long list of suppressed or under-researched natural treatments.

Element 7: The Sharpened Problem

The urgency vector here is Personal Cost of Inaction – aging accelerates every day, mitochondrial function declines, the biological clock keeps ticking whether you intervene or not. Without dwelling in despair, Gerhauser pivots: “but here’s the good news, these four compounds work fast, and you can start in the next 30 days.”

Element 8: The Mechanism

The proprietary mechanism is what Gerhauser calls “The Superhuman Protocol,” built around the four compounds. Each compound has a branded name (the Alpha Molecule, R9, Gray Salt, and the fourth held for the book). The visual metaphor: the immune system as sticky flypaper, with the compounds acting as enhancers. Each compound gets its own segment: what it is at a category level, why it matters biologically, what happens without it, and a teaser for the specific brand or source that’s disclosed in the book.

Element 9: Proof

Tier 1 (case studies): specific patients named with first name + last initial, specific conditions (fatigue, cognitive decline, joint pain, inflammation markers), specific timeframes, specific outcomes. Frank M., 74, Stage II prostate markers. Barbara T., 68, fibromyalgia for 18 years. Each told as a narrative with clear before-and-after.

Health equivalent of honest-losses disclaimer included: “Results vary. Not every patient responds the same way. This is not a guarantee of any specific outcome.”

Tier 2 (testimonials): reader letters from subscribers who have used specific protocols from the newsletter.

Tier 3 (institutional): peer-reviewed studies from named institutions – Stanford, the Institute of Aging, published papers in specific journals. Plus the cultural/historical validation of the Ikarian population as a Blue Zone.

Element 10: The Reveal

Each of the four compounds is category-revealed. Alpha Molecule is described as a specific class of antioxidants. R9 is revealed as an extract from a specific grape variety (but the brand and sourcing stay in the book). Gray Salt is described as a mineral-rich salt variety used in specific European coastal communities (but the specific source and dosing stay in the book). The viewer leaves the reveal knowing what the categories are – enough to feel satisfied – but not enough to act without the physical book.

Element 11: The Offer Stack

Hero: “The Secrets of Superhuman Lifespans,” a physical book, 300+ pages, uniquely numbered first edition with a Certificate of Authenticity signed by Dr. Gerhauser (\$99 retail value). Bonus digital guides on specific protocols, each with stated values of \$49–\$99. Subscription: Natural Health Response newsletter,

\$99/year normal, which is where the “free with subscription” framing of the book lives.

Element 12: Price Framing

Gerhauser uses the health-style price framing: the \$99 book is free as a gift when you subscribe to the \$49 newsletter trial. Total stack value around \$300. Per-day math: “That’s about 13 cents a day. Less than a cup of coffee.” Publisher-advocate frame: the subscription trial is cheap because Newmarket Health wants subscribers for life.

Element 13: Scarcity

Type: Publisher Scarcity – the deeply discounted first-year pricing is offered only during the launch window, and the publisher has limits on how many physical books are printed in each first-edition run.

Element 14: Guarantee + CTA + Close

Guarantee: 60 days (longer than finance VSLs because the compounds need time to show results), any reason, full refund. Keep-the-book even after refund – the physical book is explicitly the subscriber’s to keep as a thank-you. Three CTAs distributed through the close. Sign-off: “Dr. Richard Gerhauser, M.D., signing off. Thank you for trusting me with your time today.” Longer P.S. about acting while the compounds are still available from the specific sources in the book.

What to Notice

Three things are specific to this health VSL that are worth studying.

First, the physical book deliverable changes the entire economics. The book functions as both the hero and as proof of seriousness – a subscriber who’s going to receive a 300-page printed book in the mail feels differently about the purchase than someone getting a PDF. Waiting for delivery creates post-purchase anticipation that reduces refund rates. The Certificate of Authenticity framing makes it a collectible, not just content.

Second, the Story Lead setup carries further than a Big Secret Lead would. Gerhauser doesn’t mention his credentials until minute six. He doesn’t mention the product until minute twenty. The entire first section is just the Ikaria story, and that indirect setup works because the audience is Unaware – they didn’t come to the

page ready to buy a supplement. They came curious. The story has to warm them into the buying conversation before any other element can land.

Third, the Villain work is more structurally careful than in finance VSLs. Naming “Big Pharma” as a villain without tipping into conspiracy-theory territory requires real care. Gerhauser does it by being specific about incentives rather than intent. The pharmaceutical industry isn’t evil – it’s just structured around chronic-disease revenue. The FDA isn’t corrupt in a cartoon way – it’s subject to specific captured incentives. That careful framing keeps the villain credible to a cold audience that might otherwise write the whole pitch off.

If you write health VSLs, this is the template to internalize. The structure is identical to the finance template in Appendix A. But the textures – physical deliverable, Story Lead, personal health crisis humility anchor, the careful handling of Big Pharma – are specific to health. Study both appendices, and you’ll see how the universal structure adapts to each niche.

A P P E N D I X C

QUICK-REFERENCE LIBRARIES

THIS APPENDIX IS A reference you can use while you’re actually writing. Three libraries: a villain library organized by niche, a proof library organized by proof type, and a format-decision quick-reference. When you’re stuck on a specific section, flip to the relevant library and look for a pattern match.

The Villain Library

Every Agora VSL needs a named external villain with a stated motive and specific evidence. Here are the canonical options, organized by niche.

Finance Villains

Villain	Motive	Evidence
Wall Street (institutional)	Info asymmetry; best research goes to highest-fee clients	Analyst coverage dropoffs, IPO allocation favoritism, hedge fund underperformance
Big Tech	Monopoly power, data exploitation	Congressional testimony, executive quotes, EU fines
Wrong Predictors (named)	Made confident wrong calls that became evidence	Bob Lutz on Tesla, Jim Chanos on Tesla, Adam Jonas, Paul Krugman
The Federal Reserve	Monetary policy perceived as harmful to savers	Specific rate decisions, Jerome Powell quotes, balance sheet expansion

Villain	Motive	Evidence
Mainstream Financial Media	Advertiser-dependent, can't bite the hand that feeds	CNBC bullish track record, specific bad calls
The Swamp / Uniparty	Political class aligned against regular Americans	Policy outcomes, revolving door examples

Health Villains

Villain	Motive	Evidence
Big Pharma	Profits from chronic disease management, not cures	Drug pricing, opioid crisis, suppressed research
The FDA	Regulatory capture, pharma revolving door	Banned natural remedies, approval controversies
Mainstream Medicine	Trained only in pharma interventions	Med school curriculum gaps, AMA positions
Corporate Food Industry	Processed food profits; nutritional misdirection	Specific ingredients, lobbying, food pyramid history
Insurance Industry	Profits from sick-care, not well-care	Coverage denials, lobbying against prevention

Rules for villain selection (across either niche): name a specific villain, not "bad actors." State the motive structurally, not conspiratorially. Back with named evidence. One villain per VSL, not multiple. Never blame the viewer.

The Proof Library

Three tiers of proof, stacked in sequence, with the strongest tier first. Here are the canonical proof types by niche.

Finance Proof Types

Proof Type	Format	Strength
Past Wins	Company + date + entry price + exit + % return	Highly specific, verifiable
Smart Money Stack	Named institutional investor + position size	Social proof from recognized names
Institutional Holdings	Named holder + exact share count	Specific and fact-checkable
Testimonials	First name + last initial + quote	Human, relatable, emotional
Media Validation	Named outlet + quote or mention	Third-party authority
Historical Parallels	Past analogous opportunity + specific returns	Makes ambitious claims feel grounded

Health Proof Types

Proof Type	Format	Strength
Patient Case Studies	First name + last initial + condition + outcome	Narrative, specific, emotionally compelling
Peer-Reviewed Studies	Institution + study subject + N + outcome	Authoritative, mainstream-adjacent validation
Institutional Research	Named institution + study or position	Legitimizes approach as mainstream-adjacent
Testimonials	First name + last initial + condition + quote	Emotional social proof
Cultural Validation	Named culture + practice + continued use	Implies long-standing truth; bypasses modern skepticism

Proof Type	Format	Strength
Medical Authority	Named expert + credential + position	Expert validation

Rules for proof: never fabricate. Stack across at least three tiers. Lead with the strongest tier for your niche (past wins for finance, patient case studies or peer-reviewed studies for health). Specificity is the currency – vague proof is worse than no proof. Always include at least one honest limit (past losses for finance, “results vary” for health).

Format Decision Quick-Reference

Format	Use When	Word Count (Medium)
Solo Presenter	Default; 80% of VSLs; single-presenter offers; claim is substantial but not extraordinary	6,000–10,500
Interview (2-person)	Very large claims; expert who isn’t self-promotional; 70–120 min target	7,000–11,000
Roundtable (3-person)	Bundled offers from multiple experts; maximum social proof; 100+ min target	10,000–15,000

Default to Solo. Upgrade to Interview when the claim is genuinely too large for one voice to carry credibly. Upgrade to Roundtable only when you’re bundling multiple experts’ offers. Never downgrade to save production cost.

Length Decision Quick-Reference

Length	Words	Runtime	Use When
Short	2,500–4,000	15–25 min	Warm audience, single claim

Length	Words	Runtime	Use When
Medium	6,000–10,500	40–70 min	Default; most offers
Long	10,500–15,000	70–100 min	Complex mechanism, premium offer
Very Long	15,000–22,000	100–145 min	Very cold traffic, high-ticket, bundled

Default to Medium unless you have a specific reason to go longer.

The Master Checklist

Before you consider any VSL complete, run this final pass. If any item fails, revise before filming.

- Foundation: audience, Big Idea (passes Big Domino Test), lead type, curiosity object, mechanism name, villain, stack, proof, format, and length are all locked in writing.
- Hook: no greeting in first 30 seconds; specific unexplained noun in first 60 seconds; first sentence earns the second.
- Big Claim: specific number + timeframe + catalyst, stated twice in first five minutes.
- Curiosity-Gap: named but not resolved until the Reveal.
- Credibility: micro-credibility first; stack distributed; media validation where real; humility anchor included (scene-level specific); no invented credentials.
- Origin: all four beats present (before, disillusionment, decision, mission); insider identity explicitly rejected.

- Villain: named, motive stated, specific evidence; only one villain; never blames the viewer.
- Problem: one or two urgency vectors, not three; resolves to hope, not despair.
- Mechanism: proprietary branded name; 3–5 named components; visual metaphor; teaches strategy not tactics; one past example walkthrough.
- Proof: three tiers stacked; specific, verifiable, never fabricated; honest-losses disclaimer for finance.
- Reveal: category reveals, actionable withholds; “take a look at this” physical/visual moment; withhold names where actionable lives.
- Offer Stack: hero first; 2–3 bonuses max; subscription named after; 5 operational benefits for the subscription.
- Price: four-anchor sequence in order (stack total, normal, discount, per-day); 70–85% discount; publisher-advocate frame included.
- Scarcity: exactly one type, specific, with stated reason.
- Guarantee: iron-clad, 30–90 days, any reason, keep-the-bonuses framing explicit.
- CTAs: 3 minimum across the close, specific button/link, specific next step.
- Sign-off: presenter name + publisher name, invokes mission, warm not pushy.
- P.S.: included (optional for Short, required for Medium+).
- Rule of One check: every section serves the same one Big Idea.

- No invented proof anywhere in the script.

If every box checks, you've got a complete, professional, high-converting Agora-style video sales letter. Go film it.



A G O R A - S T Y L E V S L S
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