



Was 2015 one of the worst years *ever*, for the quality of marketing communications?

I think it was. And, it would appear, quite a few people agree with me.

I had a pretty good year. I hope you did too.

But, in my humble opinion, the communications industry did not. The last 12 months has seen another mediocre year, in terms of quality of work.

Standards continue to slip.

What has happened to the art of communication? Why don't marketers understand it anymore?

The stuff I see and hear, the campaigns I receive, both at home and at work, are in the main, totally second rate. They could be so much better.

And this is happening, at a time when it is harder than ever before, to break through defences. Recipients of marketing communications are now firmly in charge. And, what's more, they know the power they have.

Brands aren't in charge anymore.

Getting a response or a sale has never been harder in the history of our business. Loyalty, in real terms, is virtually non-existent.

Promiscuity rules.

You would have thought, given this scenario, that campaigns would be superbly written and inspirationally created, to address this massive challenge.

But, you would be wrong. Because they are not. In fact, the reverse is the case.

Dross is now wall-to-wall.

Let me share a current story with you, to underline my point.

A couple of days before the break, I had a Christmas lunch with 8 chums, all of whom have spent most of their working lives in direct marketing. I have known most of them for well over 20 years - and they are significant people.

They played a key part in the growth of DM in this country and overseas. They are all very smart and extremely knowledgeable about what works in DM - and what does not.

A few of them are retired now.

The day before our lunch, I received a mailing pack at home, from a wine company I had previously bought wine from. The pack was so appalling, it begged belief.

So, I took it with me and, after lunch, I shared it with these good people. People who have spent a lot of their working lives creating packs like this one.

Successful packs.

Packs that launched brands.

Packs that made an awful lot of money for the companies involved.

When they saw what I shared with them, I can tell you, there was total disbelief.

That's the only way to describe their reaction. I am not exaggerating this, one bit.

They simply couldn't believe that people could create such tripe - and waste their valuable budget in such a way.

Here are just a few snapshots of the pack:



The outer envelope. Full bleed but could have been so much better. The most important element is the "Save £153!" and it's almost unnoticeable on the bottom right corner. The roundel has been plopped on - and has no energy or belief. The very important "inside" statement under the head on the bottom left, would be missed by most.



The reverse is landscape, when the front is portrait, which makes it feel very odd - and when you first look at it, you think someone has put the wrong message on the back. It does not seem to belong with the front at all.

Dear Mr Owen,

Let's face it, after the delights of the festive season you can left a little low on good wine - which is not only a sad state of affairs for you but can also be so embarrassing if unexpected guests arrive and you've no wine to offer them.

So now is the perfect time to take advantage of this amazing offer and stock up your cellar. Plus, with this 'Winter Warmer' Selection you can make a huge saving of up to £5.10 a bottle – **that's up to 50.55% off!**

Wines and prices to warm the cockles of your heart

I have included in the choice of 20 superb wines eight wonderful big winter reds. These are perfect to sip as you relax in front of a roaring fire or as the ideal complement to hearty winter fare of stews, roasts and game dishes. – not forgetting the remains of the festive Stilton. And don't forget, every wine is only **£4.99 a bottle** – sensational value, especially for wine of this provenance and quality.

Our wines are highly rated by wine expert, Luca Maroni

Luca Maroni is one of Italy's - and the world's - foremost wine experts and he rates Giordano wines extremely highly. Just turn the page and find out what he thinks of four of the wines that he has tasted that I have included in this 'Winter Warmer' Selection.



If you order before 9th December, we'll deliver before Christmas!

You can order by calling our orderline on **0844 939 6336** or visiting our website at **winterwarmer.giordanowines.co.uk**. If you prefer, you can order by completing and returning the attached order form, either using the enclosed postage-paid envelope or faxing it on 0844 939 6366. And now, you can also order by scanning the QR code into your smartphone.

I look forward to receiving your order.

Yours sincerely,

Ferdinando Giordano

*Free with every order!
This beautiful silver necklace
with Swarovski pendant
See over for details...*



CALL: 0844 939 6336

LINES OPEN MON-FRI 8AM-8PM, SAT 8AM-12NOON

VISIT: winterwarmer.giordanowines.co.uk

Or you can order by completing and returning the attached order form, either using the enclosed postage-paid envelope or faxing it on 0844 939 6366.

The most important element of a DM pack after the targeting, is the letter. And, guess what, there is a word missing in the first two lines. The copy that's left, is poor and rambles. The indented paragraphs make the whole thing look strange.

Dear Mr Owen,

Let's face it, after the delights of the festive season you can left a little low on good wine - which is not only a sad state of affairs for you but can also be so embarrassing if unexpected guests arrive and you've no wine to offer them.

And where is the punctuation? If it wasn't for the dash, there would be no punctuation in 44 words. Absolutely criminal.

A knowledgeable DM copywriter could write a better pack than that, while riding their bike over cobblestones, with one hand behind their back, eating a Cornish Pastie and with a blindfold on.

Very easily...

It simply is beyond my understanding that people can create and sign off work as bad as this. It has to be down to naiveté. It can be the only reason. They simply don't know what they are doing is wrong.

And, make no mistake, this is not an isolated example. Packs like this are the norm now. Not the exception.

As are TV ads that make no sense. Car ads are by far the worst. Millions are wasted every week.

Totally useless. People can remember the ad. But not the brand. So the whole object of the investment has been wasted.

Don't these dumbos know, that the most important job of any ad, is to centre all the attention on the merchandise and none on the technique of presenting it.

Press ads also have little appeal these days - and most look like they've been knocked up by the night watchman. That's why clients can't make it work.

And emails and social media? Well, how long have you got? Email as a prospecting tool is finished.

Kaput.

Dead in the water.

And can I tell you the worst phrase in the world, right now? It's a phrase that sends shudders up my spine every time I see it in my inbox.

" XXXX has updated his/her status".

Yes, my friends, Facebook.

You have to open it, because, after all, this person is a friend and has connected to you. They may have something interesting to tell you.

But we all know that's rarely the truth, don't we?

You open the thing up - and what do you see? Your 'friend' looking gormlessly into the camera, with a new puppy on his/her lap.

Or a picture of a cottage they are staying at over the weekend. Or, their new baby, lying on a bed, slobbering at the mouth, looking as evil as Damien.

Why do they share these banal messages? Why do they think we are interested in such things?

Because most of us aren't.

Is it a surprise, given all these mind-numbingly bad attempts at communication, that the world is switching off?

No it isn't. In my humble opinion, it's the main reason.

So, given all the above - and in my usual personal crusade to try and make our industry - and our lives - a little better, here are a few New Year resolutions I have selected, that I would suggest marketers give serious consideration to.

I know – and so do you – that they won't. But, I won't stop trying. You can take that to the bank...

STUDY YOUR CRAFT

Do not ignore the lessons of the past. Study the greats. There is so much to be learned from them.

The basic 'rules' of communication are proven. They will never change.

They have been handed down to us, by some of the most outstanding individuals this industry has ever produced. Sadly, this knowledge is being used and kept alive by only a handful of people now.

These techniques will ALWAYS work, whatever medium is used. I have mentioned this before, but it doesn't hurt to say it again.

"Times change, but people don't".

Don't think that basic human nature is altered by media or changing times. It hasn't changed since men started walking upright. And it won't change now.

The reason people respond to promotional approaches is pretty much the same as decades ago. And it will be the same decades from now.

Remember this. There is nothing new in our business.

Just new channels to market.

GET A COPY OF SCIENTIFIC ADVERTISING - AND READ IT

This is easily the greatest book our industry has ever published. Every serious marketer should have a copy on their shelf.

But they haven't. Which says so much...

Written in 1924 by Claude Hopkins, every word of it, is as relevant today as it was then. I give it away FREE at my Masterclasses, Workshops and Seminars all over the world.

All people have to do, is email me and I will send it to them.

Over the last 10 years, less than 10% of any of my audiences have requested it. Marketers today, have no desire to study and get better. That's why the quality of work is abysmal.

David Ogilvy said of this book *"Nobody should be allowed to have anything to do with advertising, until he has read this book 7 times. It changed the course of my life.*

Every time I see a bad advertisement, I say to myself – "the man who wrote this copy has never read Claude Hopkins. If you read this book of his, you will never write another bad advertisement – and you will never approve one, either".

And that's from the greatest individual that has ever drawn breath in our industry. David was - and still is - peerless.

REDUCE THE NUMBER OF MEETINGS

Meetings are a contemporary curse in marketing.

Marketers today, overdose on meetings. They are almost all a waste of time. They have meetings about meetings.

Then another meeting to discuss the meeting they had about the other meeting.

Nothing ever gets done. Productivity goes out the window. Briefs that should have been sent out, go out 3 weeks late. Emails remain unanswered for weeks.

"Sorry, I have been busy", is the usual stock reply.

It makes me laugh when I hear that phrase. Most of the people who use it, don't start work until most of us professionals have already done half a days' work.

When I'm not travelling, I'll be at my desk at 7am. And, despite all the work I have to do, I'll answer every serious email I get.

And a lot of my older industry chums do exactly the same.

How do we do it? Simple.

We restrict our meetings to an absolute minimum.

DON'T FALL FOR THE LATEST SILVER BULLET

Marketers are suckers for the latest fad. They always have been, when you think about it.

They are always looking for something new, when the secret to success is under their own noses all of the time.

Drayton once said – and he was spot on – that marketers always think some new thing - CRM, SEO, PPC, SMS, Social Media - and a million other things - will substitute for the need to think.

They won't. Thinking can be very beneficial.

It's quite good to try it now and again.

You will surprised at how effective it can be.

STOP SIGNING OFF BY COMMITTEE

This is a major problem now.

It's always been there, but, in my estimation, it is worse now than it has ever been.

It seems that no one can make a decision anymore. Or, perhaps more pertinently, they don't want to. So they share creative work and copy with a bunch of other people, to give themselves a safety net.

But, here's the rub. Those people aren't qualified to comment on such things. So why are they being asked for their opinion?

What happens as a result of this nonsense, is great work becomes average work. I have seen it so many times in the last few years.

A committee is an alleyway where great creative work is lured – and then slowly strangled to death.

Committees are a group of people who individually can do nothing, but as a group, decide that nothing can be done.

They can criticise great work, but they cannot create it.

As the irrepressible George Lois once said: "*Living a life having your worked judged by the Philistines of the world is scary.*"

They'll call you nuts. They'll call you a flake. Screw 'em".

Rock on, George...

APPLY COMMON SENSE TO THE CURSE OF BRAND GUIDELINES

This is immensely frustrating and just another thing that affects the overall performance of campaigns.

It is a key reason for so much pedestrian work. Work that ticks all the boxes, but rarely works.

I fully understand the need to be visually consistent.

But, in a lot of cases, when that visual consistency is applied - it reduces the impact and delivery of the promotional message.

The best examples of this, are typefaces. There are numerous examples of companies using typefaces that are not suited for letter copy.

Don't the brand advisors they use, know this?

I have seen first hand, how marketers get so up their own backside about this issue. Trust me, it is truly something to behold.

For example, they will centre on a word and say to you "this is not on brand". Or, "we don't talk like that" And, they will insist on using a weaker word.

What happens? The campaign will underperform. Is that what they want?

START TESTING - AND NEVER STOP

Very few clients test anything anymore.

It is, sadly, a lost art. To not test, is a cardinal sin - and certainly one of the most common mistakes around today.

And the reason is simple. Why guess when you can know?

As we all know, the opinions of our customers and prospects are much more important than our own. So let them decide what they like best.

Marketers have very little idea of what will work. That's why underpinning campaign activity with a test methodology, is absolutely essential.

"Don't just gain a response, gain knowledge" Drayton Bird

RECOGNISE THAT YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE YOUR LIFEBLOOD

As was stated decades ago, by someone much smarter than me, the purpose of business is to create and keep a customer.

Surely this is recognised by everyone employed in a marketing role these days? Sadly, no.

Marketers continue to spend more time and money on getting a new customer, than on the one they already have.

That's never made sense to me - and never will. It's total madness.

I saw some survey results a couple of days before Christmas, that really showed how bad this has become. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of businesses across UK, France & Germany, admitted that they never use the customer data they collect.

When the 72% of firms were asked why they do not fully process the data they have, the top answer was that data processing was too time consuming (48%), while 46% said they lacked the internal skills to do so, and 30% admitted that they did not have the proper data processing tools required. Nearly a fifth (19%) said that it was too expensive to process data.

Can you believe it? Whatever your business, your best source of profit is the customer you've got, not the one you want.

How can you run a business and forget your customers?

As the marvellous Murray Raphel told us years ago, *"It is far, far more profitable to service an existing customer, than it is to find a new one"*.

That commandment should be pinned in every marketer's wall, together with this one from Theodore Levitt of Harvard Business School:

"The sale merely consummates the courtship, at which point the marriage begins. "

ACCEPT THAT THE MESSAGE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE MESSENGER.

"It's not just what you say that stirs people. It's the way that you say it."

Bill Bernbach was so right when he said that. To communicate correctly, your words and images must catch people's eyes, penetrate their minds, warm their hearts and cause them to act.

But, how many times in a year, do you see work that does this? It seems to me, that most marketers today, are more interested by the many and various routes to market, than what is included in the messages they create.

They feel this is more important. But they are wrong. Marketers must recognise that the *message* is light years more important than the *messenger*.

No matter what media - or choice of media - you use, your messages have to connect, engage, persuade and reassure. If they don't, you will lose your shirt and your job.

What you say - and how you say it, is THE biggest challenge in marketing today.

REALISE THAT IT'S THE WORDS THAT DO THE SELLING - NOT THE PRETTY PICTURES

"I can't save this copy!" A legendary quote from a famous art director.

What he was saying was, if the copy isn't on the money to start with, no amount of time on art direction, photography and illustrations, and any other graphic whizbangs you might include, will save the campaign.

That's because, it's the copy that's the most important element of any campaign, as it's the copy that does the selling.

A picture might paint a thousand words, but I have yet to see a successful campaign that does not depend on superb copy to make it work.

So, there you are. 2015 - a poor year for marketing in my view - is now behind us, thank goodness. We can look forward to 2016.

Will marketers be better at what they do this year, or will the industry stumble further down into the darkness? I have no idea. But surely something has to change?

Obscene amounts of budget are being wasted every day. The average tenure of a Marketing Director in the UK, is now only 11 months.

The two facts above, are very closely linked, of course.

Let's face facts here. Your customers are now in total control. And, if you are responsible for creating campaigns, you have to respect their power.

This means employing smart and knowledgeable people who will create and write campaigns that cut through - and rise above the general noise level. Campaigns that connect and offer value.

Campaigns that drive your promotional nail into their brains - and interrupt their daily routine. Of course, it must then lead them to making a positive act - click the link, pick up the phone, clip the coupon, etc...

If your message is pedestrian, lacking in energy or belief - like most attempts I saw in 2015 - it will disappear. And so may you...

The solution is in your hands.

Keep the faith...



ABOUT YOUR AUTHOR

Andy Owen is MD of **Andy Owen Copy & Creative Ltd**, one of the world's most respected and experienced International direct marketing consultancies, specialising in all aspects of creative, copy and strategy for direct and digital marketing.

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