



**What you don't know, is hurting you and your company much more than you realise.**

**So, here are a few vital communication tips to help you deliver your current and future marketing messages a little better.**

**They are a FREE gift from me, as a final goodbye from Copycat...**

Over 20 years ago, I wrote my first *Copycat* article.

It was for the dreaded Chartered Institute of Marketing. It wasn't long before I said goodbye to that load of tossers - and started to publish it on my own.

And, I have to say, it has been very good to me.

In its way, it has been a brand ambassador and an excellent vehicle for me, to spread the word about the power of copy and how to write well.

This was how it started, all those years ago...

*'Copywriting for direct marketing is a specialist discipline.*

*A lot of people think they can do it. Only a handful can.*

*This is demonstrated graphically and annoyingly every morning when we open our mail, both at home and at work.*

*I believe the standard of current DM copywriting is abysmal. It has never been worse. But, ironically enough, the rewards have never been greater.*

*In contemporary direct marketing, it's all about words. They do the selling job. Not the pictures, the words. Seems to me that this is a secret that very few people recognise, let alone understand'.*

Well, over two decades later, nothing has changed at all, has it?

In fact, standards have dropped even further - and, there is something more concerning to those few of us around now, that really love this business - no one *cares*.

The art of effective communication is dead. That's official. I was at its funeral.

RIP effective communication. I'll see you soon and we'll have a few drinks together in the agency pub in the sky.

Perhaps we can invite Bill Jayme, David Ogilvy and Claude Hopkins. Maybe Bill Bernbach, John Caples and Vic Schwab. Ray Jutkins and Eugene Schwartz should be there, too. And, last but not least, my chums Roger Millington, George Smith and Herschell Gordon Lewis.

What a party that is going to be...

But there would be a great sadness in the air. Because those greats taught us how to communicate. But now, clearly, marketers have no interest in the wisdom they left - and as a result, do not communicate effectively in any media.

The greats would ask me, 'what happened?'

Sadly, I wouldn't have an answer for them. I'm as puzzled as they are. Because what those great people left for us, is priceless. What's more, it's as relevant today as it has always been.

So, why today's marketers ignore this incredible wisdom and don't study and test more, is just beyond my understanding. They would get so much better, if they did.

This industry - my industry - is now a pale imitation of what it was. I don't recognise it anymore, or the people in it.

It's now a mess . Most of the greats are either dead, or sitting in a country pub, enjoying the wonders of retirement.

They got totally disillusioned with the business they once loved and helped to build. They couldn't wait to get out.

I can appreciate how they felt...

I remember the peerless Roger Millington saying to me during lunch around a year before he died...*"Andy, this business is fucked. Go and do something else..."*

So, here we go. The last Copycat you will ever be sent.

Unless of course, you tell me otherwise. But more of that, later...

GDPR demands it, you see. *(Well, not exactly, as this is a B2B email, so I could send it out to you, as it can be classed as being of 'legitimate interest'. In fact, given the current state of copy in all media, I would say it was of 'essential interest'!)*

But, I can't be arsed, to be honest. Because, I know, after May 25th, if I send it out as normal, I'm going to get annoying snowflakes writing to me, to tell me I am breaking the GDPR rules.

And as I wouldn't be, I know I would get very irritated by them, give them short shrift and tell them to go forth and multiply.

I can do that, I'm delighted to say. It's one of the hundreds of wonderful benefits of being an old ligger.

But, it would take time and it would change my mood.

As I seem to be in great demand for some inexplicable reason, I don't have a lot of time to spare these days - and because being in a good mood is important to me, I'm not going to bother.

So, the thousands of you that have subscribed to Copycat over the years and have had enjoyment and stimulation - filling my postbag with comments, observations - and, in the main - thanks - have now either got to opt in to Copycat again, or get inspiration from elsewhere.

They call it progress. Ho hum...

Anyway, let's get this article going. Because, we shouldn't be bothering ourselves with the future, because we have major problems to address, right here in the present. And it's the same old, same old...

Delivering our products and services to our targets, *effectively*, connecting, engaging, generating interest, response and purchase.

Yes, **a sale**. That's what it's all about, mes amis...

But to do that, you have to learn how to communicate better.

**If you can't communicate the major benefits of your products and services to your customers and prospects in an effective way, they will not buy them. And you will lose your job.**

But, as I said over two decades ago, it's a specialist skill. An art.

And not many people have it these days. Most don't even recognise it. The rest don't care.

Surely we should be discussing this vital area a lot more than we are? Bloody hell, people have even stopped talking properly to each other now.

We started to email instead of picking up the phone. That was bad enough. Now we use What's App or SMS. And in those messages, we don't worry about grammar or punctuation. So, no one can spell anymore. And punctuation - what's that?

Our industry is in trouble. Big trouble. ROI is under pressure like never before. But it's no surprise.

The customer is in control - and the customer knows it very well. Talk badly to them, or ineffectively, as most companies do these days - and your message will fail.

So, your copy has to work harder than ever before.

The recipients of your communication have not been waiting to hear from you. Quite the opposite, in fact.

They are not the slightest bit interested in you, your brand or your products. That is their mindset, when your letter drops on their mat, your email arrives in their inbox, or your ad is in their face. You are getting in the way of their day.

Accept it my friends, because it is the truth.

It's a communication mountain you have to climb.

And copy is key...

You must start creating and structuring your selling messages an awful lot better than you do now. And that, means understanding fundamental communication techniques.

How the whole ball of wax really works. Things like:

- **How to create an ad that 'stops' readers.**
- **How to write an email that cuts through the morass.**
- **How to write copy that sells**
- **How to connect and engage.**
- **How to interest, persuade and reassure.**
- **And, how to generate a response...**

All these require huge amounts of skill, knowledge and technique. Do you and your team have them?

Obviously, I can't cover all of these subjects today, so, as this article is called '*Copycat*' - let's take a few minutes to concentrate on one of them.

### **How to write copy that *sells* - how to harness the enormous power of WORDS within your communication campaigns...**

You are going to have to do this, especially when you start to use direct mail again, when GDPR decimates your email databases. And your emails will also have to work much harder, because of less targets.

So, to help you, here are some absolutely essential and proven copy commandments. I have literally hundreds - but I've selected 10 goodies, picked at random, to talk about here:

**1. You should always fire your biggest gun first - the headline - and it MUST contain a benefit and a relevance to the reader. If it doesn't, then 9 out of 10 readers will stop reading your letter, email, ad or web page right there.**

How many times does this have to be said before the penny drops?

Every day, millions of pounds is wasted on ads that forget this vital commandment. Your offer must be in the headline. If it isn't, why should anyone read on?

The late, great, John Caples said:

*"What good is all the painstaking work on copy, if the headline isn't right? If the headline doesn't 'stop' people, the copy might just as well be written in Greek..."*

**2. Don't write long rambling paragraphs. Especially the first one. Short and snappy is where it's at. Always has been. Always will be.**

Even when the headline of your letter or ad is a stopper, if your opening paragraph is too long and daunting, 99% of your readers will leave right there.

You have to get the reader into the communication *quickly*. A big block of copy in the first paragraph is a total turn-off. (And in any paragraph, by the way...)

**3. To write effective sales copy, you need to write like you talk. Let your words flow easily and with a natural rhythm. Great communications, when read aloud, sound just like a friend talking to you.**

That's exactly why this copy approach works. Because its warmth and connectivity at reader level, disarms the reader and makes the selling approach more effective.

Here's what the greatest man this industry has ever - and will ever - produce - David Ogilvy - said on the subject.

*"I don't know the rules of grammar. If you're trying to persuade people to do something or buy something, it seems to me that you should use their language. The language they use every day. The language in which they think..."*

**4. Marketing and advertising is about SELLING. Don't ever forget that.**

But so, so many do. These days, pedestrian copy rules.

As I have said many times in this column, don't try and be subtle or clever - or try to entertain. That's not the objective. The objective is to SELL.

As Drayton once said: *"Your communication is not written as an artistic endeavour. It is written to build your business..."*

**5. The 4 bases of success in contemporary copywriting are: (a) Connectivity (b) Clarity (c) Benefit (d) Verisimilitude**

(a) Latest figures suggest that you have 2.8 seconds to convince your reader. That's how long people take to decide whether or not to read your copy. (It's pretty much the same with ads too, perhaps slightly less. If you don't believe me, just watch someone reading the morning paper...)

It is even less for an email. (Now, if that fact doesn't focus your mind when you're preparing your next draft, you are in the wrong business).

(b) You have to be clear. If your copy is muddy and confusing, the reader will not read on and they'll leave the communication. They will not return.

(c) People want to know the benefits of your product or service, not the features. Because that's what they buy.

(d) The appearance of truth. Does it look the part? Sound the part? And feel the part? If it doesn't, people will not believe what you are saying.

Once a reader spots an inconsistency, or has reason to doubt something, they're out of the communication in a heartbeat. And they will not return.

**6. Five totally useless words you should never use in your sales copy: (a) Quality (b) Value (c) Service (d) Caring (e) Integrity**

These are all neutral words that have absolutely no place in selling copy.

When we read these words, our eyes glaze over. They make no impression on us whatsoever. Everyone offers quality and value. All offer great service.

Everyone cares. Integrity is a given. Those of us in the real world, know this is total bollocks. Very few companies offer anything of the sort.

Quite the opposite, in fact. Everyone of those 5 words can be replaced with something more meaningful.

Think about it...

**7. If there is no offer - there will be no SALE. More important than ever, now.**

Give them something. If you don't, they'll go to someone who does.

It doesn't have to be 50% OFF. It could be added value – like a gift or FREE delivery or a million other things. But there has to be something of value.

Ignore this at your peril.

**8. Don't have dinosaur views about long copy. It's not about long or short. It's about interesting or uninteresting.**

Get your head out from up your wotsit and start testing. Then you will know.

If you take 2 pages to write something that should be on one page – you will lose the reader because you'll be rambling. If you need 2 pages to sell something and you cram it on one, your layout will be unattractive and you'll lose them as well.

Retailers know, that the longer they can keep you in the store, the more you are likely to buy. It's the same with professional copywriters. We know that the longer our copy can hold and interest the reader, the more chance we have of getting a result.

**9. Don't forget the vital importance of effective punctuation. Commas, dashes, colons, underlines, parentheses and others are all essential weapons for the knowledgeable writer.**

This is absolutely essential. Good use of punctuation allows the writer to control the pace of the selling delivery. The pros have known this for decades.

What I see these days, is beyond a joke. It has got much worse over the years. Every day, I see three line (and more) sentences without any punctuation at all. And don't get me going on grammar...

**10. The most important word in the copywriter's armoury is YOU. The second one is FREE. This will never change until the world stops turning.**

Do you know some people are still afraid of FREE?

I still have conversations about it. "Could damage our brand" "Not our image". And other crap like that.

These are the same cretins who want to spend 75% of the message delivery talking about who they are, how long they've been in business and how many of this and that they have - and other useless stuff.

When they should instead be telling the reader, the benefits that he or she will enjoy as a result of all these things.

A *massive* difference.

OK playmates, I'm nearly done.

Some final advice before I go...

Don't run your marketing by the seat of your pants. Work out your copy strategy before you start. Base it on three words - benefit, benefit, benefit...and always look at it from the recipient's point of view, not from your company's.

To get attention with your selling copy, you must make the offer and benefit(s) so powerful, so unusual, so relevant - or so dynamically dominating - that the reader is captured at once and will want to read on, without being aware of being influenced to do so.

But, don't stop after telling people about the benefits of your product or service. Also tell them what they'll miss if they don't buy it.

The fear of loss is always more powerful than the promise of gain.

In summary, here are a few tips that will do you no harm in your search for extra performance from your copy. Print this out and put it over your desk. It is timeless advice...

- 1. Think before you write**
- 2. Offer benefit, benefit, benefit**
- 3. Have a powerful offer in your headline**
- 4. Have a strong opening paragraph**
- 5. Write short sentences**
- 6. Keep the copy flowing**
- 7. Make it easy for people to respond**

Oh yes, I nearly forgot. I must share this with you before I finally leave...

I had an intriguing conversation a few years ago with someone who actually responded to a hugely successful direct mail pack that we created for Time Out London.

I asked him to share with us, the sequence from the time the direct mail pack arrived through his door...

*"Well, the message on the outer envelope got my attention. Then, the headline of the letter offered me a stunning benefit and was relevant to me. So, It continued my interest. That interest carried me into the copy.*

*The first paragraph continued to hold me and promised me even more. The second paragraph started to convince me....*

*Then something very strange happened. The following minute or so seemed to move very quickly - and the next thing I knew, I was on the telephone ordering the product..."*

*That's how to do it.*

And it shows you what can - and will - happen when a good professionally written communication with a strong and relevant offer and an easy call to action, is put in front of a targeted individual.

Is your current copy good enough to do that? If it isn't, call me. I will make it so...

OK. So, how do you get Copycat in the future? Simple. Email me and tell me you would like to continue to receive it.

You can either just respond to this email, with the subject line '**Copycat, Yes, please**' or send me a separate email when you feel like it.

Or, of course, if you feel in a good communicative mood, you could drop me a line and tell me how you are and how life is treating you.

I'd love to hear from you.

Keep the faith



## **ABOUT YOUR AUTHOR**

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

Andy has been writing copy for 31 years. He writes traditional and digital marketing campaigns, including direct mail, sales letters, emails, SMS's, PPC ads, websites, landing pages, brochures, radio scripts and much, much more.

He works with top clients in three continents and was inducted into the Direct Marketing Hall of Fame in February 2015.

Visit [www.andyowencopyandcreative.com](http://www.andyowencopyandcreative.com)

Andy runs in-house copywriting training for companies of all types and also presents direct marketing Masterclasses, Workshops and Seminars all over the world. (Including Direct Mail.)

If you would like further information on these, or indeed any aspect of copywriting and creative for direct marketing, please contact Andy personally at [andyowen@aol.com](mailto:andyowen@aol.com)

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