



**When you are writing copy for response, be clear, be disciplined - but above all - write *simply*...**

I have three *extraordinary* men helping me open up Copycat this month...

And they all have some invaluable advice and guidance for you, on how to write *effective* copy.

**David Ogilvy**, the most influential adman of them all, said this:

*"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..."*

**Bill Bernbach**, the father of creative advertising, said this:

*"Make your copy straightforward to read, understand and use. Use easy words, those that are used for every day."*

**Winston Churchill**, the greatest Englishman that has ever lived, said this:

*"The 5 rules of effective writing. Begin strongly; have one theme; use simple language; leave a picture in the reader's mind; end dramatically."*

I'll add my own 'ten-penneth' to the advice of those three legends:

*"Great sales copy, when read aloud, should sound just like a friend talking to you."*

Four great bits of advice to kick off with.

So, let's get cracking on this piece. I'm impatient this morning.

Frustrated.

Disillusioned.

Well, I have spent valuable time wading through the cesspit of digital crap that has polluted my inbox.

Something, unfortunately, that I have to do every morning. As you do.

Let's cut to the chase early...

- *You can have the most amazing product.*
- *You can have a service that is unequalled, anywhere.*
- *And your offer is stunning.*

But all that doesn't mean a thing, if you can't connect to - and engage with - the reader of your sales copy.

To quote Ogilvy again:

*"You can't save souls in an empty church."*

**It doesn't matter where you are, who you are talking to and what brought you together - if you don't use the right words to connect and engage with that person, you will not convince that person to be interested in you. Or, of course, buy from you...**

Why is this so difficult to understand? It's common sense.

So why are today's brainless marketers still ignoring this golden rule - and sending out promotions with shamefully ineffective copy?

Every day, a tidal wave of mindless dross appears in our inboxes, letterboxes, social media accounts - and pollutes the media we view.

And it doesn't stop there. Companies spend thousands, driving people to their expensively-created websites - and then see that investment go up in smoke in minutes - seconds, sometimes - because the webpages are written so poorly.

But, appalling as all that is, there is a new trend developing that is making it even worse. The dorks and robots that write copy these days, want to show off by using clever or big words.

*"Aren't I clever to use that big word. People will be very impressed with me", I hear them say...*

No, you're not – and no they won't, you dope.

As we all know, people place business with people they like.

If you use a word in a communication with me that I don't know, am a bit unsure of, or have to look up, I'm going to dislike you, not buy from you.

### **Simplicity is the key...**

Knowledgeable copywriters use common, everyday words. They write the way we speak. Effective copy always sounds conversational.

And, there is a reason for this. When the writing is breezy, uncomplicated, and conversational, it creeps under the radar.

The reader becomes connected and starts reading - and is being led by the copywriter - without even knowing it.

The result? Interest is generated and a response or a sale has an above average chance of being the next action.

Don't try and be clever, show off - or use big words. No one has either the time or interest to work out what you are saying.

I think there is little doubt that this new trend has been accelerated by AI.

We know more and more of today's lazy marketers are using ChatGPT or something similar. The copy that these robots produce, is generally flat and lifeless and completely devoid of emotion.

What's more, their copy will always contain an above average collection of 'big' words.

### **Robots *can't* write effective sales copy. End of...**

Another thing, is allowing 'intellectuals' to write or review copy.

If you have any so-called intellectuals in your company, give them some spreadsheets to play with - or lock them away in a room somewhere with legislation issues, or other worthless stuff, such as 'brand purpose'.

But for heaven's sake, keep them as far away from your communications programme as possible.

Effective sales copy has to be dripping with emotion. Intellectuals cannot comprehend emotion, let alone write or understand copy that contains it.

More of the simple things in a minute or two. Here is something else you need to consider.

As well as writing simply, **you need to be clear**. Don't over-complicate what you are trying to say. If you do, I guarantee your copy will fail.

Remember Herschell Gordon Lewis's clarity commandment all those years ago? If you don't, write it down now and pin it over your desk. Always look at it before you start writing.

Here it is:

**"When you choose words and phrases for force-communication, clarity is paramount. Don't let any other component of the communications mix interfere with it."**

That's gold dust advice from a late, great wordsmith. So please don't ignore it. You must be clear and ensure your message is understood.

And this clarity commandment by the way, also relates to the use of creativity. Never let the creative get in the way of the copy.

Copy is king. Nothing has more power in the selling arena than words.

*Nothing...*

As I have said hundreds of times in *Copycat*, words do the selling, not pretty pictures. If your creative advisors tell you different, fire them.

They are not worth a toss, as they are costing you a lot of money.

Please, please, don't 'play' with copy. Don't take it for granted, as 99% of marketers seem to do these days.

Here's what I mean. It's a *true* story.

And it's only 72 hours old...

It highlights once again, the incredible naiveté and unprofessionalism that exists in the marketing arena these days.

A few days ago, I ran a tightly targeted, new business email campaign promoting my copy expertise. It's part of regular promotional activity I do, using a variety of media.

A certain marketer, who will remain nameless, sent a 'remove' request within the first couple of minutes of my email landing.

As I do with any such request, I eventually went to this person's website, to get a flavour of how he approaches selling the benefits of his company.

I am obviously interested in his incumbent copy, as this helps me to try and understand why he dismissed my approach so quickly.

Being a simple boy, I am assuming from his actions, that he doesn't need my expertise, as he already has an effective copywriter.

When I look at his website, I expect to see this clearly.

Well, he does.

And I didn't.

The first thing to hit me was the big headline on the Home Page. In there, was 'award winning'. Without the hyphen. Under that, was a 30-word copy block, with no punctuation at all.

Yes, you heard that right. 30 words, going on and on - and on...

And not a comma, full stop, or hyphen anywhere to be seen.

I emailed him, of course. You wouldn't expect me to pass up something as good as that now, would you? I offered to pop up to see him over a cup of coffee.

He was in Manchester. A long, long way from Cornwall. But I would have got on a plane and visited him. That's who I am.

Predictably, I have heard nothing.

And I don't expect to. Showing a mirror to Quasimodo rarely pays dividends.

If it wasn't so sad, it would be funny. But that's what's happening in our industry and has been for decades. A massive lowering of standards and an appalling lack of knowledge about what works and what doesn't.

And, just another brainless marketer who simply doesn't care.

Anyway, after that slight detour, let's get back to simple copy. Otherwise known as *readable* copy. The type that connects, engages, influences - and creates sales.

*"Any darn fool can make something complex; it takes a genius to make something simple."* Pete Seeger

A credo for every serious copywriter.

Here are two more classic pieces of advice that I recommend to you.

After you've written your copy and ruthlessly edited it many times, try these two moves.

**1. Read your copy out loud. Does it sound like someone talking?**

If it doesn't, you need to revisit it, to make it so.

**2. Show your copy to the dumbest person you know. Watch their reaction. Did they understand your message?**

If they did, your copy is on the right track.

Remember this. Dumb people's money is just the same as smart people's money. And, of course, there are a lot more dumb people out there, than smart people...

...as the marketer story I have just shared with you, shows very clearly.

Copywriting for response MUST be simple and it must be CLEAR. You need to carefully consider every single word you write.

When you have written your first draft – ask yourself these five very important questions:

- **Am I saying what I want to be saying?**
- **Can I make myself clearer?**
- **Can I connect better with the reader?**
- **Am I writing this as well as I can?**
- **Are the words I am using, relevant for the audience?**

Let's face it, we all carefully consider the words we use when we want to get something in life.

It might be when you're chatting to that person you really fancy.

It might be when you are in front of your Boss, when you are discussing your annual review or a salary increase.

Or, of course, it might be when you are trying to get your builder to reduce his quote for that work you are planning on your property.

So, when you are writing copy for your next acquisition campaign, the choice of words you use, are just as crucial. You need to give them just as much thought and attention.

Why do today's marketers forget this? Why do they treat copy as something nasty on the soles of their shoes?

It's the \$64,000 question. I'd love to hear your views on this, I really would.

**Remember, your sales copy is a personal message from you to someone you don't know, who doesn't want to hear from you, about a product he/she doesn't really want.**

Be under no illusion about that, because it's the truth. No one is waiting to hear from you. Quite the opposite in fact. You are interrupting their day.

Which means, you are starting your sales pitch on dodgy ground to start with. As a result, you have to work much harder than you are right now.

When you accept this, it will give you a stronger and more realistic focus on the mighty challenge you face.

OK, let's recap a minute. After these first few pages, hopefully, you have been reminded, that when you prepare copy for a marketing campaign, the most effective copy you can write, will be simple, transparent writing.

Not literary writing, with big words no one understands and intellectual claptrap that turns people off.

But many people out there today, still don't realise this.

In a great book, written in 1976, called '*On Writing Well*', William Zinsser said: "*Executives and managers at every level, are prisoners of the notion that a simple style reflects a simple mind.*"

*Actually, a simple style is the result of hard work and hard thinking; a muddled style reflects a muddled thinker or a person too dumb or too lazy to organise his thoughts".*

The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence down to its cleanest components.

Edit, edit, edit. And then when you have finished, edit it again.

As Zinsser said, writing simple, effective copy might look easy, but it isn't.

I can assure you, that it takes a great deal of skill and knowledge to put together a communication that *works*.

One of my American chums, calls it '*simple, dramatic, move-gut copy*'

And that's what it is, of course. Complicate it and your campaign will fail.

Joseph Priestley nailed it with this quote:

*"The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate."*

Every single word in selling copy is vitally important. To all experienced and knowledgeable copywriters, every word is a weapon.

Many times, in test activity, the change of **just one word** can dramatically increase the response levels of a letter or ad.

One of the most famous examples, was for the headline of an ad for an automobile repair kit.

The original headline was "*How to Repair Cars.*" When the headline was changed to "*How to Fix Cars*" - the ad pulled **22% more sales**.

That's a lot of fish and chips. 22% is a BIG number...

**So, remember, whatever you are writing** – a DM letter, an email, an ad, a webpage, a social media post, a sales leaflet, or anything else for that matter, that is trying to generate a response or sale - **use plain simple, everyday words.**

**And be as clear as you can** delivering your offer, benefits and your point of difference.

Effective copywriting for sales, is *invisible*.

It takes the reader from where they are, to where you want them to be – without them even realising it.

Just in case you don't agree with what I have just shared with you, let me finish with this classic quote from one of the greatest writers ever to walk the earth – Ernest Hemingway.

**“I use the oldest words in the English language.**

**People think I'm an ignorant bastard who doesn't know the ten-dollar words.**

**I know the ten-dollar words. And they don't work in copy...”**

Amen to that.

Keep the faith...

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andy". The signature is stylized and cursive.

### **ABOUT YOUR AUTHOR**

Andy is now recognised as one of the most influential direct marketers of his generation. He has worked in direct marketing for over 40 years and his renowned speciality is copywriting and creative for direct and digital campaigns.

He was inducted into the [DMA Hall of Fame](#) in February 2015, one of only two copywriters in Europe with that honour.

He writes traditional and digital marketing campaigns, including direct mail, sales letters, emails, SMS's, PPC and FB ads, media ads, websites, landing pages, brochures, radio scripts and much more.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of copywriting and creative for direct marketing, please contact Andy personally at [andyowen@aol.com](mailto:andyowen@aol.com)

All Andy's [previous Copycat articles](#) are available to download and enjoy.



### **What clients have said about Andy...**

**"Andy, you are an expert in direct marketing copy - a true artisan who understands how to write copy that engages and makes a real customer impact."** Russell Morris, Board Marketing and Analytics Director Amazon Prime Video

**"I can honestly say I am amazed. You took a promotional approach that was proven and that had been running very successfully for over 8 years and transformed it. Your letter produced our best-ever single performance in 75 years of trading. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it for myself."** Scott Mackay, CEO, Richard Mackay & Sons, Edinburgh

**"The talent to craft effective persuasive communication is rare and highly valued. Andy Owen is one of those exceptional communicators - and the proof of his skill is demonstrated time and again in measurable results."** Glenmore Trenear-Harvey, Writer & Broadcaster

**"If you want to ensure your copy grabs and holds attention then elicits a positive response, Andy Owen's your man. His work is consistently of the highest calibre and has made a demonstrable difference to the success of my direct marketing campaigns."** Huw Williams, Marketing Director, Leger Holidays, UK

**"Andy is a professional wordsmith of the very highest order."** Ged Rowbottom, Managing Director, Solarlec, Burnley, UK

**"The art of contemporary copywriting, has now got its own Grand Master. Once Andy has written a sales letter for you, you will never consider anyone else."** Mohamed Safieddine, Director of Marketing, Effemex, Saudi Arabia

**"We have taken regular advantage of Andy Owen's superb copywriting skills during the past year and have been delighted with the results."** Ian Fairservice, Group Editor and Managing Partner, Motivate Publishing, Dubai

**"Copywriting for response is clearly an art form - and Andy is one of the industry's greatest exponents."** Jamie Wren, Circulation and Marketing Director, Prospect Publishing Ltd, London, UK.

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

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