



**If you want to be more successful, market to the  
*differences of people, not their similarities.***

**But you'll need to discover what those differences are,  
before you start writing a single word...**

From the beginning of recorded history to 1900, if we factored all of the known knowledge, it would be 1.

That's roughly 6,000 years.

From 1900-1950, this knowledge doubled. Between 1950-1975, it doubled every 5 years. That is 64 times what it was in 1900.

Between '75 and '95, it doubled every 2 years. Between '95 and 2000, it doubled every year.

In 2020 it was doubling every 35 days. Now it doubles every week.

In a couple of years, or probably earlier, it will double every DAY.

We are literally *drowning* in information. But information is useless unless it is turned into knowledge.

Because, as I have said many times, *'the more you know, the more you sell'*.

Francis Bacon, the Lord Chancellor under James 1<sup>st</sup> was a lawyer, statesman, philosopher and master of the English tongue, remembered in literary terms for his sharp worldly wisdom and his letter writing.

He said "*Knowledge itself is power.*"

But it seems to me, knowledge is in short supply these days.

Especially with copywriters. Very few writers today are well-read.

They have little experience.

*Of people.*

*Of life.*

*Of history.*

*Of attitudes.*

These are all vital things that help a writer to prepare copy that connects and sells. But, so many writers today, don't have these qualities.

Take ad agencies. It's rare these days to find any of the troops in an agency, that are over 35 years of age. Ageism rules and has done for decades.

I've never understood why, when an agency wins an account that sells products and services to a more mature audience, they give the copy challenge to young copywriters.

They're still wet behind the ears most of them. They have little or no life experience in real terms, so how can these young copywriters create effective copy for communications aimed at a mature audience?

They don't understand them for a start. Don't talk their language. Have no idea of what motivates them. What influences them to buy.

The same happens in company marketing departments. Young copywriters given the brief of writing to an audience they simply have no knowledge of.

And, before you shout at me, let me just say, that no amount of research or focus group feedback can give them this knowledge.

To write effective copy, you have to have an understanding of the person you are writing to. You have to know them. Added to that, you need to have an understanding of what makes the world go around.

A copywriter who can combine target knowledge and life experience has more chance of delivering results, than someone who lacks those key qualities.

Writing copy that sells, is hard. The challenge is great, as the recipient is in charge. But the more you know, the better chance you have of success.

Let's face it, there are so many different types of people out there.

Doctors think and respond differently than plumbers. Musicians from architects. Teenagers from grandparents - and teachers from contractors.

Owners of small businesses and leaders of big corporations, are chalk and cheese. As are women and men - as we all know...

Everyone is *different*.

But we have known for generations, if you have the knowledge and the skill, there can be a real opportunity if you focus on the *differences* of people, not their *similarities*.

That's why sending the same message out to everyone, is total lunacy, but so many companies are still doing it every day.

Successful copywriters know very well, that to connect, create interest, desire and action from people, they have to know as much as they can about the individuals they are writing to.

Who they are, what they are interested in, what turns them on - and what turns them off.

And much, much more.

In other words, what their *differences* are.

Once you identify that, then you can create a relevant, benefit-laden communication, that will stand an above-average chance of not only being read, but also generating a positive response.

On the other hand, if you don't really understand the individuals you are writing to - and you create a more 'general' message - you are unlikely to connect.

And if you don't connect, you won't sell anything.

By the way, this agency nonsense hasn't just started - it's been going on for decades. David spotted it nearly 50 years ago:

*"Advertising is a business of words, but advertising agencies are infested with men and women who cannot write. They cannot write advertisements, and they cannot write plans. They are helpless as deaf mutes on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera."* David Ogilvy

Nothing has changed, clearly.

Here's some relevant advice from another legend:

*"I think central to good writing of advertising, or anything else, is a person who has developed an understanding of people, an insight into them, a sympathy towards them."* George Gribbin

Spot on. As was most of the advice that George shared with us.

As a copywriter myself, I see poor copy with alarming regularity. As a potential mature target, I see it every single day.

Companies trying to sell to me, through traditional and digital channels.

The vast majority of the communications are tripe. Because the writers don't understand me. They don't know me.

Why? Because they haven't taken the time to find out.

The result is, they don't connect with me. Another potential sales opportunity, lost. They need to remember this:

*"The customer or prospect doesn't give a damn about you, your company or your product. All that matters is, 'What's in it for me?'"* Bob Hacker

If you don't know the individual you are writing to, you can't answer that key question.

And, let's remember one thing. The 'empty nesters' or 'silver surfers' – or whatever we are called these days - mature individuals over 55 - are the most lucrative audience around.

We are not struggling with a mortgage, or living with Mom and Dad in their spare room. We aren't trying to pull every penny together to try and put a deposit on a house.

We haven't got a young child and another on the way.

We don't answer questions with 'So'.

A good percentage of us, have got some dosh slopping around.

And we like to spend it.

A fact which seems to have escaped the notice of today's marketers.

*"It turns out that people over 42 (i.e., Gen X, Boomers, and Golden Oldies) have 93.5% of the wealth in the US. Gen Z and Millennials, the only groups the idiotic marketing industry pays any attention to, have a combined 6.5% share of wealth. And what do our geniuses in the marketing industry do? They devote a whopping 5 to 10% of their marketing dollars to people over 50."* Bob Hoffman

We're a lucrative group of individuals. We'll spend.

That is, if we are offered something that's relevant, dripping with benefits and delivered to us in the correct way.

But I can tell you, that rarely happens. And this is not just my view.

I have discussed this at length with many, many people. A lot of my chums, colleagues, friends, clients, neighbours and other peers, who all say exactly the same.

In general, the stuff we get is dross. Total crap.

It doesn't touch us in any way. So, we keep our hands in our pockets.

It's the same story for many other vertical market groups.

And I believe it is because today's copywriters - in the main - aren't working hard enough and certainly don't know enough.

If you employ people to write for response, they HAVE to be smart.

Street-wise.

Savvy.

Knowledgeable.

Well-read.

They should devour knowledge. Read *anything* and *everything*.

They should talk less and listen more.

Today's copywriters are clearly not well-read. They have little or no experience or knowledge outside of their own small circle of friends, colleagues and lifestyle.

Let me tell you a great personal story on this subject.

Many years ago, I knew a fantastic guy called Aubrey Watson.

Aubrey was the CEO of a leading Sales Promotion Agency based in Golden Square, called Watson, Lane and Keene. They had a superb client list, including British Airways. And it was a direct mail campaign for BA that brought '*Aubrey the Strawberry*' and myself together for the first time.

Aubrey was an inspirational character, a gentle giant of a man, who used to travel into London every day from Gloucestershire, (I think), on the train.

One day, I had an early meeting with him and met him in his agency's reception, as he came in from the station.

He had an armload of magazines and newspapers. I was intrigued, as the variety of the magazines was astonishing.

There were men's mags, women's mags, specialist mags, children's mags – you name it, it was there.

As we enjoyed our first coffee, I asked him why he had purchased all these different magazines. His answer was an eye-opener to me at the time.

And his answer still stays with me to this very day.

*"I run a very successful agency, Andy" he said. "Our clients are extremely varied and cover a wide range of markets. I feel that I cannot advise them correctly and produce effective strategic and creative solutions, unless I understand both their marketplaces and their prospective customers within it.*

*Reading magazines that service each market, gives me an insight and a feel for what's going on in that market. On nearly every occasion, I learn much more from this, than I ever can from the market research"*

If I recall correctly, he used to spend around £100 per week on all this stuff. But the success he and his agency enjoyed, repaid this investment in spades.

I never forgot what Aubrey said. And I learned from it.

It's an inspiring story. But I wonder how many agency bosses or marketers would do it today?

Not many, I would wager.

Good copywriting skills come from people with well-furnished minds.

They're inquisitive. They explore and investigate. They make it their business to find out more.

They are avid readers. Of *everything*...

Unfortunately, as we all know, this kind of professionalism is rare these days.

It hasn't just started, either. This quote is forty years old.

*"Young creative people start out hungry. They're off the street; they know how people think. And their work is great. Then they get successful. They make more and more money, spend their time in restaurants they never dreamed of, fly back and forth between New York and Los Angeles. Pretty soon, the real world isn't people. It's just a bunch of lights off the right side of the plane. You have to stay in touch if you're going to write advertising that works."* Jerry Della Femina

'Staying in touch' – bloody hell, most of them these days, have never been in touch in the first place.

Why? Because they don't study.

I have shared my frustration with you in many previous Copycats over the years, regarding studying the art of copywriting.

Today's writers don't feel it's necessary.

And this was emphasised again to me personally, only a month or two ago.

I ran a copy workshop for a large collectables company, just before the Christmas break.

They sell their excellent products through direct mail, email and print ads.

The room was full of young people - average age probably 20-25.

All copywriters and creative people.

They were a very nice bunch, very attentive - and the questions they raised throughout, were intelligent and relevant.

I shared over 200 slides with them. Examples of great work. Stunningly bad work. And I explained to them, why they were good and why they were bad.

I shared my secrets and techniques, plus a few stories - and I showed them how to write effective copy.

A few made notes during the 4-hour session. Most did not.

As I always do, I offered them the chance to get a FREE copy of '*Scientific Advertising*', by Claude Hopkins - the best book that's ever been written on the subject of effective communication.

It was written in 1920, yet every word in it, is as relevant now as it was 100 years ago. It is a bible.

All they had to do, was to email me after the show and I'd send it to them.

Guess what? Not one delegate asked for it.

Not a single one.

And it was FREE.

This is a book, of which, the greatest man this industry has ever produced - David Ogilvy - said this:

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

I know - and you do, too - why they didn't bother.

Because it was OLD.

Yesterday is not important to these people

They believe that nothing produced before the digital age, could possibly be useful or interesting in any way.

*"That was then", they believe. "This is now."*

*"Those people were old fogies." "Living in a different time."*

*"I cannot learn anything from them."*

*"Read old books?" "Study copywriting techniques?"*

*"Do me a favour. I've got better things to do..."*

They are wrong. So wrong in fact, it's a crime.

Times change, but people don't. Those rich treasures that are available to them - but they choose to ignore - would undoubtedly make them better writers.

Listen to what the greatest Englishman ever, had to say on this subject:

*"The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see." Winston Churchill*

Why is it that other key areas, respect and learn from what's gone before, but the marketing and advertising business does not?

Music for one. The arts for another. Sport as well. They have all been inspired, shaped and hugely influenced by what has gone before.

But not our industry.

I simply don't understand it.

And I'm not the only one...

Here's a view from one of today's leading marketing minds...

*"If you listen to many of the most influential current marketing leaders, it seems that books and studying in marketing are out, completely out. Training is not essential for marketing success. It's appropriate around now for those who don't have any formal training in marketing to start getting defensive about why not being trained is entirely acceptable. While they expect their accountants, dentists, undertakers and engineers to be fully trained, the marketing philistines make a small exception when it comes to marketing, which is 'creative' and 'common sense'. It's neither of these two things." Mark Ritson*



Copywriting, as an art, is no different from any other specialism. Those who are the best at it, tend to be those that spend great amounts of their time studying it.

As Plato said: *"Ignorance is the root cause of all difficulties."*

And ignorance, underpinned by laziness, is, I'm sure, the cause of so many underperforming communication campaigns - and indeed, company failures these days.

Don't gamble with your copy. It's too damn important.

Choose someone with relevant copywriting experience, of course - but also someone who has been around the block a few times.

Someone who has seen life.

Someone who has enjoyed great successes and disappointing failures.

Someone who has 'tasted blood' on the altar of direct response.

Someone who knows people and understands what makes the world go around.

Someone who recognises that *'Knowledge is Power'*.

A person like that, will give you a much greater chance of success.

I'll leave the last words on this topic, to two of the industry's most influential figures - Leo Burnett and Bill Bernbach.

*"Curiosity about life in all of its aspects, I think, is still the secret of great creative people."* Leo Burnett

*"Nothing is so powerful as an insight into human nature. What compulsions drive a man; what instincts dominate his action. If you know these things about a person, you can touch him at the core of his being."*  
Bill Bernbach

Keep the faith



**P.S. By the way, if you would like a FREE copy of Scientific Advertising, just ask me. I would be delighted to send it to you.**

## **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 selling copy for over 38 years.

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.

He works with clients in three continents and was inducted into the **Direct Marketing Hall of Fame** in February 2015, one of only two copywriters in Europe with that honour.

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

Andy launched an innovative new copywriting service late in 2019, called **Copy Chief** - which guarantees professionally written copy every time - for a fraction of the normal rate card cost.

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

Don't forget to visit Andy's **personal website** where you will find many interesting tales, amazing yarns and wonderful stories - completely devoid of any corporate claptrap.