



**Sir John Hegarty, Rory Sutherland, David Ogilvy,
Bill Bernbach, George Lois, David Abbott, John E
Kennedy, Bill Jayme, Claude Hopkins, John Caples,
Victor Schwab, Herschell Gordon-Lewis and more...**

A stunning guest list, to wave me off?

I am close to giving up.

I have been for a little while now.

But, I have to tell you it doesn't sit well with me. This depressing cloak that is slowly wrapping itself around me, is causing me issues I don't like.

I am a positive animal. Ask anyone.

More positive than most you will meet. I always have been.

Glass always full kind of guy. I am passionate too. About a lot of things. Communication is one of them.

Creative and copy. The art of persuasion.

Learning about a product or service, immersing myself in it - then creating work that influences people to go out and buy it, is something I have always loved to do.

Helping businesses figure out what they sell and then sell it for them very effectively.

I have been doing this - very successfully - for over 35 years.

'Salesmanship in print'. That's what it's all about.

What it has always been about.

Those three simple words were shared with Albert Lasker by John E. Kennedy on a May evening - one hundred and sixteen years ago.

His words were spot on in 1905. They are still spot on in 2021.

"Nothing happens in business until something gets sold." Thomas Watson Jr - Chairman of IBM, said that.

Surely everyone knows this, don't they? The secret of success in *any* business - is not just coming up with good ideas, but knowing how to sell them to people.

But, playmates, it seems no one really wants that anymore...

The skill, knowledge and expertise of proven, experienced creatives no longer matter - and are no longer required. Many years ago, Rory Sutherland said:

"This is a peculiar time. Never before has creativity been more valuable - yet felt less valued. "

I used to share that quote with audiences in my Masterclasses around the world. I always asked for a show of hands about it.

"Who agrees with this", I used to say.

70% of hands went up. Seven out of ten agreed with it.

If I did that today, I'd be lucky to get 10%.

Things have changed. And not for the better.

There is a totally dismissive attitude today in the communications business, regarding experience. It started in ad agencies over two decades ago.

Genocide.

Knowledgeable and experienced creative people were shown the door. And this policy has accelerated significantly in the last ten years.

Recent data shows that 32% of the UK workforce is aged 50 or older. In ad agencies, it is only 5%. The ad agency of today, has no substance and is a pale imitation of its predecessors.

I read somewhere recently, that the average age of creative people in ad agencies is 24.

I suspect it is the same in company marketing departments.

The vast majority of these people have never written an ad for paid media, never created a traditional direct mail campaign and - more important - have no knowledge of what works and what doesn't, in the communication process.

They are uneducated children in the art of communication.

They don't know much to start with. That generation is hopeless.

They don't study, they don't test - and they haven't read, or understood, a single bit of the history of this business.

How can these dorks - who know fuck-all about anything, perhaps a bit of digital here and there - write effective sales messages?

Answer is, they can't. And, God knows, we all have to suffer the disastrous results of this.

It's wrong. Very wrong. It also makes absolutely no sense.

Sir John Hegarty, one of the greatest admen ever, said this about the ad industry in a recent interview:

"We have a lack of understanding of our history. We're unique as a creative industry, in that we have very little regard for what's gone before.

If you talk to a fashion designer and you say 'Coco Chanel', they would instantly understand who you were talking about and her impact on the fashion industry.

Or if I was talking to an architect, they'd understand who Frank Lloyd Wright was.

In our industry, you can literally say to a young creative today, 'John Webster', and they wouldn't know who you're talking about. It's a great shame because I think they're losing the value of this experience that these people put into their work and the creativity they put into it".

I know of creative people who work at Ogilvy & Mather, that haven't read a word that David Ogilvy has written. I have met some of them.

Yes, we are talking about the greatest man this business has ever produced. What's more, they are working for a company with his name over the door.

You couldn't make it up. No one would believe you.

One creative director in Dubai even argued with me, that it was pointless to read David's stuff, as it had no relevance and benefit to creative today.

That's just one example of the nonsense that's happening out there, right now. And it only gets worse from here.

Take copy for instance. It doesn't matter at all to marketers or their agencies. They'll tell you that no one reads anything anymore and has an attention span no longer than a pissed-up gnat.

So why bother with it?

This is a low point in our industry's history. As low as it's ever been.

Very little care and attention to detail is paid to communications.

Pretty much everything I see, receive, or are made aware of these days, is tripe. Yes, *everything*. I can't remember when I last saw something that was even bordering on good.

Let me share something with you here.

A week in my life...

It's Friday today. So far this week, I have received 486 emails - 399 of which were cold prospecting approaches.

I have opened 32 of them, influenced by a mixture of the sender's name and the subject line.

I closed 27 of them within 30 seconds or less. Of the other 5, 2 held me a little bit longer, before those, too, got deleted.

I have received 21 direct mail packs - 11 of which were mail order catalogues. Only 2 of them had covering letters.

The other 10 packs were traditional C5 packs, but all atrocious.

Dreadfully poor creative, abysmal copy and, in fact, 5 of them, had no covering letter at all. Just a brochure.

14 out of 21 without a covering letter. I despair.

Direct mail is a personal medium. Me to you. Him to her.

In direct mail, the letter 'sells', the brochure 'tells'. That's a proven fact. A commandment.

Send a brochure out without a letter and the effectiveness of the pack is significantly reduced.

We proved that, decades ago. So, why ignore this key fact?

I received 7 door drops. The least said about those, the better. Door drop creative has always been the pits, so I was not surprised at all. It's par for the course.

They died in my hands.

And don't get me started on TV and radio ads. We'd be here all day.

I am in the target group that is clearly the most attractive. We have the most disposable income. We buy things. We *like* to buy things.

Approach us in the right way, connect to us, influence us, make us an offer on something relevant, attractive and with lots of benefits - and you stand a good chance of us buying it.

But how can a twenty-something copywriter with virtually no relevant skills, create and construct a sales message that will connect to me, influence me and get me to buy.

They can't. They don't know how.

My own week's summary above, shows that quite clearly.

It's embarrassing. But the industry thinks it's OK.

That's why I'm close to giving up.

By the way, a lot of the direct mail offenders that I hear from, I have written to, more than once. A personal, hand oversigned letter to the Marketing Director.

Offering my help.

Because, if they put crap direct mail out, then their emails and social media will be crap as well. Stands to reason.

What did I get? Unsurprising silence. No interest.

No one cares anymore, you see.

They are happy for their new young graduate with little or no understanding or credentials, to write the copy, rather than an ageing old hippie who has been doing it at the highest level for 35 years.

It's not just me, by the way. Quite a few of my peers have had the same experience. Most of them have retired to write more books, play more golf, make more love.

They have clearly more brains than me.

My old chum Roger Millington, who was a brilliant direct marketer, told me over 12 years ago, *"Andy, this business is fucked. Go and do something else"*.

Perhaps I should have listened...

The stupidity of marketing professionals seems to be increasing even faster than global temperatures.

I simply can't understand why marketers and creatives these days don't study. It's all there for them, if they would take the trouble to just look.

Ogilvy, Bernbach, Lois, Abbott and many other top creatives have given us SO much.

And, all of it, when studied, can make creatives better at what they do today.

It's the same with copywriters.

Jayme, Hopkins, Schwab, Gordon-Lewis and Caples, to name just five, left us with an amazing amount of valuable advice and guidance.

Their skills and advice are timeless - and hugely relevant to today's challenges. But those skills and that advice are not felt relevant by most in the industry today.

So, that advice and guidance will stay on the shelves, gathering dust. You can take that to the bank.

So, let me ask you a personal question here - and I want you to be honest with me. What DO you know?

More importantly, what don't you know?

When it comes to marketing, advertising and communication, do you and your people, know the key elements of what works and what doesn't?

And why?

Do you?

Because, if you are involved in our business these days whether front line or peripheral, what you don't know, is almost certainly going to hurt you more than you realise.

And hurt your company, too.

My own personal weekly overview earlier in this article, proves that beyond any doubt.

You might be reading this and thinking that I'm rather cynical and I'm looking on the gloomy side of things. You would be wrong.

As I said earlier, I'm a positive guy. But the wall-to-wall tripe and the continuing decline of a once great industry I loved, has got me down.

I saw it - and was a part of it - when it was great. It was wonderful, stimulating and loads of fun. Some of the greatest work ever, came out of those times.

So, when someone criticizes me and says I'm being negative, I remind them of a relevant quote from George Bernard Shaw:

"The power of accurate observation is often called cynicism by those who haven't got it."

The modern world of marketing is beyond my understanding.

The most important parts of marketing and communications are getting noticed - so your message can be heard - and then taking advantage of that window, by delivering an effective message that cuts through and *sells*.

You see less and less of this, as every day dawns. Simply because the industry does not have the skills to do it.

And, what hurts most, is they have no desire to learn.

What is going on now is buckshot bullshit. Let's send a hundred messages a day to everyone at every opportunity, in the hope that something sticks.

That isn't a communication strategy. It's desperation.

Sir John Hegarty shares that view:

"Over the last 25 years, they've been told that great writing doesn't matter; if you want to win an award, you can win an award by creating some stunt; creating a long-term viable campaign isn't really something clients look to anymore, so they don't bother doing it."

"So, in a way, the market has driven them. This artificial market, I'd almost call it, has driven them to this place. The rise of digital has said that it's not about creativity, it's about an algorithm that gets to your audience and that's how you gain success".

He's right. It IS an 'artificial market', complete with artificial people.

But 'algorithms more important than creative'? I challenge that.

You still have to connect to your audience. You still have to influence and persuade. You still have to *sell*.

A lorry load of algorithms can't do that.

But a knowledgeable creative can.

There is one chink of light, though. Apple and Google are soon to introduce new rules, which will stop, or greatly reduce, the appalling and fraudulent consumer tracking that is getting worse by the day.

This will result in algorithms becoming much less effective.

Bloody hell. Maybe marketers will have to start thinking about being creative for the first time in their lives. Maybe some of those dusty books will come off the shelves.

I know. I'm being ridiculous. But, that's how this current shit-show affects you - especially if you're passionate about the business.

It hurts like hell.

I really don't know how we have got in this state. I suspect that it has its roots in the arrival of the Internet and email - with marketers and agencies being almost instantly seduced by it.

That love affair has continued.

Let me finish with this. It might shock you. There again, it probably won't...

85% of all advertising today, is invisible, because it is so badly done.

14% of all advertising is very poor — either ugly, stupid, patronising, demeaning. Actually, that's better than being invisible, because at least it might get your attention.

The remaining 1% is terrific advertising.

All of us working in this industry, should be bloody ashamed of that.

Imagine if 1% of vaccines worked. Or 1% of aeroplanes got to their destination.

Or 1% of relationships worked.

We'd be in some trouble, wouldn't we?

But, it's perfectly acceptable for today's so-called marketing and advertising industry.

They are probably even proud of it.

That's why I am close to giving up.

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 selling copy for over 35 years. He writes traditional and digital marketing campaigns, including direct mail, sales letters, emails, SMS's, PPC 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 individuals in Europe with that honour.

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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.

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All Andy's **previous Copycat articles** are available to download.

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