

**The more you know about your target market
and the individuals you are targeting
- the more you will sell...**

Do you spend enough time understanding your target market and the prospective customers within it, before you start writing a campaign?

If you don't, you are certainly going to waste valuable budget - and miss a great opportunity.

Many years ago, I knew a fantastic guy called Aubrey Watson. Aubrey was the MD 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 in to 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. 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 there. 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.

An inspiring story. But, I wonder how many agency bosses or marketers would do it today? Not many, I would wager.

What has this got to do with copywriting, you may ask?

A hell of a lot. And here's why...

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 listen instead of talking. They are avid readers.

Unfortunately, this kind of professionalism is rare these days.

Many high profile individuals in our business, whose responsibility includes recommending communication strategies and campaigns to clients and prospects, can be incredibly blinkered and narrow-minded.

They know everything about their business, but very little about anything else.

Jerry Della Femina, who in 1970 wrote an excellent book on advertising, called 'From Those Wonderful Folks Who Gave You Pearl Harbor', had an interesting view on this.

"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 was spot on. I passionately believe that central to good writing - especially copy that needs to sell - is an understanding of people, an insight into them, a sympathy towards them.

This understanding allows the writer to effectively connect to the reader.

Herschell Gordon Lewis referred to it as writing within the 'experiential background of the reader'. Introduce as many facts as you can, which are likely to come within that experience.

When you do that, you will connect immediately.

The reader's reaction is likely to be: "*Yes I know that, so it's likely that the other facts are true.*"

In the vast majority of the copy I see these days, this is not happening.

I believe this to be one of the fundamental flaws of copywriting in current times. The vast majority of copywriters today are not studying their products or their targets anywhere near enough.

The result, is copy that is way off-beam and does not connect to the audience they are talking to. And a potential customer is lost.

Saga is a current case in point. This company have been very successful over the years in the 50+ market. But, they are really struggling in the UK right now - and apparently haemorrhaging customers.

It's not hard to see why. I get mailings and emails from them, that are, in a word, awful. The copy is pedestrian and limp - and does not connect or engage in any way. It doesn't sell at all and I get a strong feeling that in most cases, a younger hand has written it.

That can't be right, surely? If you're selling golf clubs, the copywriter needs to understand golf and golfers. If you're selling the latest Stones album, the copywriter needs to understand the band and their fans.

If you are writing to the 50+ market, with its many subsets, you have to understand them. What turns them on - and what turns them off. The language they use - and how they like to be spoken to in the right way.

The best writers for the 50+ market, have to be 50+ writers themselves. They know the market, because they are the market.

One other key point needs to be made, when we're talking about the 'silver surfers' or whatever nonsense they call us now. The older we are, the more we like things to be *correct*, especially in copy terms.

We *love* to read stuff. As long as it's copy that's well written, connects to us straight away, is relevant and interesting - and offers us benefit and value.

Saga's copy is none of that. It also regularly contains poor punctuation and bad grammar. And *that*, let me tell you, gets very short shrift from all of us.

It's instant death. So, Saga and others, you have been warned.

As I mentioned earlier, the narrow-minded are everywhere. I had a run-in with one recently.

The conversation I had, left me once again frustrated and disillusioned with the idiots that now populate this once-great industry.

This person was someone whose marketing job title suggested he had an understanding of marketing and communication issues. The title lied...

This cocky and arrogant young man with all of eighteen months front-line experience (yes, a graduate, now there's a surprise) violently disagreed with me about the importance of a letter in a direct mail pack.

"Your comment about 'letter sells, brochure tells' is flawed, in my view", he said. "Load of balls, actually".

Oh lovely, I thought. Here we go again. Another arrogant little shit who thinks he knows everything about everything, despite his total lack of knowledge and experience in this business.

"I never read letters anyway. Don't know anyone who does. I just don't have time. If the brochure is well produced, you don't need a letter at all..."

I just shook my head. Not with disbelief, because nothing surprises me in this crazy business anymore. It was because it was just yet another very clear confirmation that this business is going down the toilet. Fast...

No amount of discussion relating to testing and historical data to support my position would budge him. *"This is not the gospel according to Andy Owen, this is fact", I said. "Been proven millions of times in campaign activity.*

If you don't believe me, test it. Then you would understand..."

No dice. Little shit did not budge.

"That's another thing about guys like you", he said. "Always talking about the past. I'm not interested about the past. That's dead and buried. Let's talk about now..."

At this point I should have given him a slap.

I wanted to.

Badly.

But I resisted the temptation and laughed instead. Not like me at all.

Anyway, I won't bore you with any more of this silly boy's theories, because he's beyond help. And, at his very young age, that's quite a feat. But, I left him to ponder on this.

"Those that disregard the mistakes of the past, are doomed to repeat them."

He'll be cleaning windows in Wimbledon soon. About right...

As I seem to have have stumbled into this particular subject of direct mail, let me add a few more things about the first lady of direct marketing. How anyone can disregard the enormous power of the letter in direct mail, is absolutely beyond me. But they do, as you can see.

A knowledgeable writer's ability to influence the reader to do what he/she wants the reader to do - is, without any doubt at all, a key reason for the continuing success of direct mail.

And yes, it's STILL a success story. Direct mail is doing *phenomenal* business for those smart enough to invest in the correct people to write and create it. It will deliver more business £ for £, \$ for \$, than pretty much anything out there - if done correctly.

In direct mail, the letter is second only in importance terms after the targeting. It is four times more important than the creative. And yes, this is fact too, because we have proved it hundreds of times in campaign activity.

(How we did it, was called 'testing'. Anyone out there that wants to know what that word means, is welcome to call me and I'll explain it...)

Drayton referred once to the best letters as '*organised speech*', which is exactly how they should appear. Because, this disarms the reader and creates warmth, which is, of course, the whole object of the exercise.

But this is the skill of the writer, who has probably taken weeks and weeks studying and learning the product and the market - and then writing and rewriting the text to make the end product sound exactly like it does.

It is vital to amass the information you need before you start writing. Live and breathe the product or service you are selling - and the audience you are selling it to.

Bill Jayme - my hero - and probably the best copywriter that has ever lived, admitted that he spent 90% of his time preparing and 10% writing.

Most of the best writers work this way.

David Ogilvy, when his agency won the Rolls Royce account in the 50's, spent a couple of weeks at the Rolls' factory, learning about the car. He immersed himself in every aspect of the business.

One day, he was walking through the service area and two mechanics were working on a customer's car. He overheard one of the mechanics telling his mate, how they had to do something about the dashboard clock.

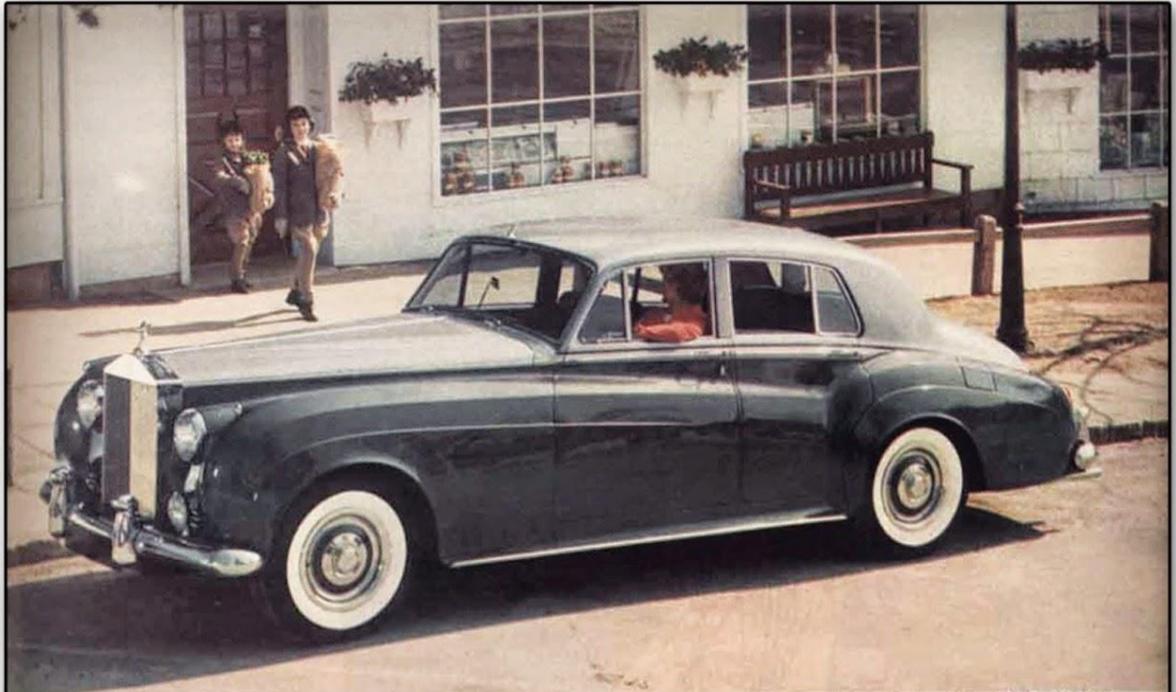
David stopped, went over and asked them about it.

"Ah, Mr Ogilvy, I was just telling Tom, that the clock is, in my view, ticking too loud. We need to do something about it. This is a Rolls Royce, after all."

The ad below - probably the most iconic print ad ever created - was the direct result of that conversation. What a headline that is.

It would never have seen the light of day, if David hadn't spent all that time at the factory.

Can you imagine any agency boss these days, doing such a thing?



The Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud—\$13,995

“At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock”

What makes Rolls-Royce the best car in the world? “There is really no magic about it—it is merely patient attention to detail,” says an eminent Rolls-Royce engineer.

1. “At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise comes from the electric clock,” reports the Technical Editor of *THE MOTOR*. Three mufflers tune out sound frequencies—acoustically.
2. Every Rolls-Royce engine is run for seven hours at full throttle before installation, and each car is test-driven for hundreds of miles over varying road surfaces.
3. The Rolls-Royce is designed as an *owner-driven* car. It is eighteen inches shorter than the largest domestic cars.
4. The car has power steering, power brakes and automatic gear-shift. It is very easy to drive and to park. No chauffeur required.
5. The finished car spends a week in the final test-shop, being fine-tuned. Here it is subjected to 98 separate ordeals. For example, the engineers use a *stethoscope* to listen for axle-whine.
6. The Rolls-Royce is guaranteed for *three*

years. With a new network of dealers and parts-depots from Coast to Coast, service is no problem.

7. The Rolls-Royce radiator has never changed, except that when Sir Henry Royce died in 1933 the monogram RR was changed from red to black.

8. The coachwork is given five coats of primer paint, and hand rubbed between each coat, before *nine* coats of finishing paint go on.

9. By moving a switch on the steering column, you can adjust the shock-absorbers to suit road conditions.

10. A picnic table, veneered in French walnut, slides out from under the dash. Two more swing out behind the front seats.

11. You can get such optional extras as an Espresso coffee-making machine, a dictating machine, a bed, hot and cold water for washing, an electric razor or a telephone.

12. There are three separate systems of power brakes, two hydraulic and one mechanical. Damage to one system will not affect the others. The Rolls-Royce is a very *safe* car—and also a very *lively* car. It cruises serenely at eighty-five. Top speed is in excess of 100 m.p.h.

13. The Bentley is made by Rolls-Royce. Except for the radiators, they are identical motor cars, manufactured by the same engineers in the same works. People who feel diffident about driving a Rolls-Royce can buy a Bentley.

PRICE. The Rolls-Royce illustrated in this advertisement—f.o.b. principal ports of entry—costs **\$13,995.**

If you would like the rewarding experience of driving a Rolls-Royce or Bentley, write or telephone to one of the dealers listed on the opposite page.

Rolls-Royce Inc., 10 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y., Circle 5-1144.

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.

But, an awful lot of money is wasted, because people confuse *what* they are selling, with *why* people should buy it. The professionals know the truth:

What you write has to connect and engage the reader.

It has to be relevant. It has to offer benefit.

And it has to be interesting.

David Ogilvy said it perfectly all those years ago.

"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".

So right. The reader should feel that the writer *understands*. That creates an immediate rapport. *"He's one of us..."*

A connection will be made. Meaning the first hurdle has been cleared.

And, once a good copywriter is in this position in the early stages of the communication process, he/she is in control. Not the reader.

The selling opportunity now has a real chance.

And a professional writer will not let the reader off the hook. Proven techniques will be used to keep the reader reading - and influence that reader to respond positively to the sales message.

A good writer will go to enormous lengths to achieve this situation. Using the correct words in the right way is essential, of course.

But, knowledge of the product, the marketplace and an understanding of the mind of the reader, are also *massively* important.

I was extremely lucky to learn that, very early...

Take a bow, Aubrey, my friend. I owe 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 over 32 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, much more.

He works with top 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.

Visit **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.

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**

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

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