



Why be dumb, when you can be smart? Here's 19 proven ways to improve your marketing from Day One...

I have 19 very special gold nuggets for you this month.

To me, they are **commandments**, because they represent discoveries and learning that I have gathered in over 33 years at the marketing coalface.

Every one is real, true and **proven**.

Commandments can focus the mind - and kick us into the real world and out of our own little misguided bubble.

If accepted and acted upon, you will benefit because these things work. Don't ignore them.

But, you will not be surprised to hear, that, in the main, people are ignoring them. That's one of the reasons that marketing communications today, are so desperately poor and ineffective.

The advertising and marketing industry as it once was, was flushed down the toilet years ago. In its place now, are charlatans and amateurs that I don't recognise anymore. They are a complete waste of time and space.

Here's what I mean. Bob Hoffman shared this gem recently recently, in his excellent [blog](#). Read it and weep.

Remember, someone is being paid a salary to create this tripe and someone else is also paid a salary to approve it...

Bob shared...

"I bought some Thomas' English Muffins the other day.

On the front in big letters it said, "Wake up to what's possible." And I thought, what does this mean? Is there some way not to wake up to what's possible? Is it conceivable to wake up to what's impossible?



If so, I think I'm missing something, because everything I've ever woken up to, has turned out to be possible. As a matter of practicality, and as a principle of philosophy and logic, I am pretty certain that it's not possible to wake up to what's impossible.

Otherwise it wouldn't be impossible, would it?

*The critical observation about this, that only a trained blogweasel can recognize, is that "wake up to what's possible" sounds **exactly like marketing.***

It is both perfectly idiotic and perfectly normal marketing. We've become so used to massively inane horseshit in marketing, that idiocy like this doesn't even perturb us.

In fact, we don't even notice it, or how uselessly stupid it is.

"massively inane horseshit in marketing".

Ain't that the truth, Bob.

But, you're not alone. We all have to suffer it, every hour of every day.

Over here in the UK, it appears to me to be worse than it has ever been - and it's *everywhere*.

Every media channel is polluted with crap, crap and more crap.

You just need to watch the latest *Go Compare* ads, with that fat waste of space opera singer that once helped build the brand. Now, with these new ads, he's fast destroying it.

They are banal, badly written and shabbily produced.

TV car ads bamboozle the mind. You watch them and then scratch your head. Bank ads try to suggest they are caring. Everyone knows they're not.

Financial and telecommunications direct mail is appalling. Central Government communications, especially those received lately from Matt Hancock and Boris, have been simply embarrassing.

Nearly every door drop I see, is instantly forgettable - and most of the daily torrent of emails are excruciatingly poor.

I could go on and on...

They all suffer from the same disease. It's known as IBWC.

Incredibly badly written crap.

Remember, someone is being paid a salary to create this tripe and someone else is also paid a salary to approve it...

I don't despair anymore. There's no point. It's no good despairing over something that is in a hopeless state - and will never get better.

The trend has been set for years - and it's a racing certainty that it will only get worse.

No one cares about copy anymore. It isn't important to marketers at all.

It's a necessary evil. Something smelly on the bottom of their shoes.

When bad copy gets written - by whichever muppet gets the job this month - it always gets approved. The reason is simple.

The approver has no idea of what good copy is - and how good copy works. They have never studied the art. They simply don't know.

So, it always looks good to them - and gets approved. If it wasn't so serious, it would be funny.

It's a classic case of the partially-sighted leading the blind.

And marketers wonder why response levels to campaigns continue to decline. It's right in front of your eyes, bozos.

When you use the wrong words to talk to us, we'll continue to ignore you.

You have been driving us all mad with your ineffective wallpaper for years. You simply don't connect or interest us anymore. And, until you do, the 'interest' switch remains in the off position.

So, for those of you out there that have a genuine desire to improve and get better, the remainder of this Copycat, is for you.

I have pulled together some of the proven commandments I mentioned earlier, in an effort to focus a few minds.

Misguided? Probably. But, I'm going to try anyhow...

Good commandments can really stick in the mind. That's because they're short and to the point. They hit hard, make people think and immediately can get considered and applied to personal situations and challenges.

Here is an interesting list of just a few. I have many more...

How many of these 19 do you know? How many of these are you embracing and applying?

Remember, they are all *real*.

True.

And **proven**.

Just to avoid confusion, that word means - they **work**.

Try them, introduce them - and you will see for yourself.

1. When you talk bullshit, people won't like you and won't buy from you

'It's a paradigm shift'. 'Right from the get-go' 'Let's circle back to that'. 'We think outside the box'. 'This is where the rubber meets the road'. 'Let's square the circle'. 'We have to tear down the silos internally'. 'Let's attack the low-hanging fruit'. 'We need to push the envelope'.

Think of your customers and prospects and how they will view you from a distance, after they read your copy with bullshit words and phrases like that.

People place business with people they like. People who use those phrases are *impossible* to like.

(By the way, how can *'From the get-go'*, be better than *'From the start'*?)

The world has gone mad.

2. If you spend more time, money and attention on getting new customers, rather than on the ones you already have - you will go broke.

"The purpose of business is to create and keep a customer." Professor Theodore Levitt said that.

Surely everyone knows this?

No. They don't.

Most marketers out there are still spending **over 7 times more to get a new customer, than on the one they already have.**

It's lunacy. Please explain to me why it is still happening.

Your best source of profit is the customer you have got, not the one you are trying hard to recruit.

3. Learn from the past masters and test everything

The giants of yesteryear understood selling and communication techniques much better than the marketers of today.

You might not like to hear that, but it's true.

That's because they had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and a passion for studying the business, to find out what worked and what didn't.

You must measure and test ruthlessly. Most marketers do little or no testing. It's crazy. The direct marketing industry was built on testing. It was the rock on which we built our church.

Every campaign we did in the good old days was underpinned by testing and it gave us more and more knowledge. And most of that knowledge is still available and, what's more, it's still highly relevant today.

These masters have left their findings for you to use. It's all gold dust.

Read it, understand it and apply it - and your response levels will rise.

"Strategy is all very well, but it pays to give thought from time to time to the results." Winston Churchill

4. Listen to your customers. Then you can give them what they want - not what you think they want.

Most companies have no interest in anything other than your wallet.

Buy something from them - and they'll either ignore you, or email the bloody life out of you.

Both are disastrously wrong.

Never mind what you read from certain people. Sending me an email a day, is a massive mistake and will eventually end up with me being a non-customer.

Ignore me - and the same thing will happen.

5. You and your brand are not in control anymore. Accept it.

Respect your customers, because they are in charge.

No one is interested in you, or your brand. Even less in your mission statement. They couldn't give a monkey's chuff about any of that.

All that matters to them is, "What's in it for me?"

Create a point of difference. Give them benefit, relevance, value - and don't forget the offer.

If you give them all of that - delivered in the right way - you will stand a fighting chance of selling something to them.

6. Copy is king. Fight it and you will die. Embrace it - and you stand a chance.

Marketing today is a smelly swamp infested by amateurs.

It's not just what you say that moves people to act and buy. It's the way that you say it.

Copy is king.

Good copy will sell. Bad copy will not.

Don't write it yourself to save a few pennies. You almost certainly aren't good enough. It won't save you pennies - it will cost you pounds.

"That which is written without effort is generally read without interest."
Dr Johnson

7. If there is no offer - there will be no sale.

If you want to dramatically improve your responses, improve your offer.

Don't penny pinch. It never works. Offer something of real value.

Tell them exactly what they will gain or save, by availing themselves of your offer. And don't forget to tell them what they will miss, by not buying it.

Always use monetary benefits, as this consistently works better than percentages.

"The right offer should be so attractive that only a lunatic would say 'No'."
- Claude Hopkins

8. Effective communication techniques are essential.

Creating a promotional message is one thing. Getting people to read it, is quite another.

Selling anything is tough. Consumer and business drawbridges have been pulled up and secured. We have ourselves to blame for that.

This is what the recipient of your communication is thinking...

- 1. I don't believe you*
- 2. I don't need it*
- 3. I don't have enough time*
- 4. I don't have enough money*
- 5. It won't work for me*

Every one of those objections is a roadblock to a sale. You must address them ALL. Then, use all the arrows in your quiver to get your effective sales message across. Here are some key ones...

Start fast. Don't write long blocks of copy, as they are too daunting to read. No single paragraph should ever have more than 5 lines of copy. To a reader, long blocks of copy, is like trudging through a muddy field. Most won't bother. So why do it?

Use short sentences. Snappy. Energetic. Appealing.

Be careful with reversed-out type, because it kills readership and kills response. Yet, you see it all over the place. Because today's charlatans don't know any better.

Same with fonts. The correct font is vital.

In print, Serif type enjoys better comprehension than San Serif by at least 67%. That's a seriously big number.

You need it working for you, not against you.

Online, San Serifs work best.

9. Words that work in copy. And why they work.

First-ever	Startling	Hurry
Free	Proven	Magical
Bargain	Offer	Now
Save	Unique	Exclusive
Exciting	Classic	Miracle
New	Introducing	You
Stunning	Guaranteed	Amazing
Powerful	Superb	Remarkable
Announcing	Breakthrough	Now

Words like that, and words that mean the same things, tend to work very well. Because they relate to **3 vital elements**:

1. The single most important thing that makes copy work is **benefits**
2. The next most important thing is **news**. (*The best copy contains news of benefits*)
3. Most of them are **emotional** words, which are essential in selling copy.

Communications that tend to work best - are the ones that reward the recipient - by providing benefits, news or information, solving a problem or appealing to the emotions.

10. There are three kinds of writers. Two are useless.

1. *Those who write without thinking*
2. *Those who think while they write*
3. *Those who think BEFORE they write*

The first two are everywhere. Amateurs. You should run a mile from them, as they will cost you a lot of money.

The third one is the one you want. But they are rare.

And very hard to find.

But a handful of them are still alive...

Great copy comes from people who pay enormous attention to detail

Great copy comes from people who think beyond the words

Great copy comes from committed writers

Great copy comes from people with broad minds, not narrow ones

Great campaigns come from people who STUDY

11. Do you know how selling copy really works?

Do you? Really?

To write effective copy, you need to write like you talk.

Let your words flow easily and with a natural rhythm...

Great letters, when read aloud, sound just like a friend talking to you - and that is their power, as it disarms the reader.

It puts the writer in control, without the reader realising it.

Use the words you would use, if you had your best prospect next to you in a bar, not stiff, pedestrian and useless words that you write in the office.

Use punctuation effectively, to emphasise words at key times. Just as you would, if you were selling face-to-face.

Commas should be used to influence the reader to pause at an important moment. A dash should be used, to deliver something extra, after a selling point has been made. There are many more similar tips.

And use 'link' words and phrases to keep the copy flowing and the reader reading - *What's more, For example, Actually, Moreover, And, But, However, Better still...*

12. Long copy and short copy.

There's been so much nonsense written about this, over the years.

Let me put the record straight, once and for all.

Your copy should be as short or as long as it needs to be. If you need two pages to create an effective selling message, don't try and cram it on to one.

Because it won't work.

On the other hand, if you take two pages to try and sell something that only needs one page, you will lose the reader because you'll be waffling, so that won't work either.

A letter is one of two things - interesting or uninteresting.

But remember this: the longer your copy can hold the interest of the reader, the likelier you will be to influence the reader to act positively

In the main, length is strength. The more you tell, the more you sell.

13. Not having a real product advantage will hurt you

If you can't demonstrate something better or different about your product or service, then you have nothing to sell.

You are wasting your time. Go and do something else.

You must emphasise your point(s) of difference in everything you do.

But remember, no matter how skilful you may be - or how much of a con artist you are - you can't invent a product advantage that doesn't exist.

If you try, it will just be a gimmick and people will see right through you.

So, find that genuine USP - and drive a coach and horses through it.

14. Stop being a marketing wimp. Be bold. Go for it

Compromise has no place in advertising. If you sit on the fence, you'll get splinters up your arse.

Whatever you do, go the whole hog.

Stand out.

Get noticed.

Make a strong proposition and deliver it. And, make it one that the competition cannot - or does not - offer.

Don't be like the rest of the losers, who try and hide in a forest, by dressing like a tree.

Pathetic.

15. If you spend your week having meetings, followed by more meetings about those meetings - your business will suffer.

Stands to reason, doesn't it?

Meetings are nearly all a waste of time. Most can be avoided.

Do stuff. Don't talk about it, day in and day out.

Get into the trenches, get your hands dirty and do some real work.

16. Do you employ sign off by committee?

If you do, stop it now. It is a sign of weakness.

You are in charge. You're the big cheese. So, make a bloody decision. That's what you are paid to do. Don't ask for opinions from people around you, that aren't qualified to give them.

Over the years, I've seen - and had personal experience - of some astonishing things. I've had Financial Directors comment on my copy. I've had MD's take campaigns home to ask the wife's opinion.

And many, many more such absurdities. That's because people can't make decisions. They are frightened to death to commit.

You couldn't make it up.

Committees can criticise work. But they cannot create it.

"A committee is a cul-de-sac, down which good ideas are lured and then quietly strangled". Sir Barnett Cocks.

17. Learn how the creative process really works and your communications will be more effective

Advertising is 'competitive persuasion', as the peerless Steve Harrison told us. Steve was spot on.

Your work should be abruptive, but relevant and benefit-laden.

As George Lois told us, *"To be a master communicator, words and images must catch people's eyes, penetrate their minds, warm their hearts and cause them to act"*.

Do your promotions do that? Do they?

If they don't, engage someone who knows how it's done.

18. Prepare, prepare, prepare...

As with everything you do in life, being prepared for the challenge ahead, always gives you an advantage.

Very few people prepare for anything. They just bounce straight into it head first - and hope that it all works out.

It rarely does.

I wrote these 9 questions down as a slide in a copywriting presentation nearly 25 years ago. Since then, the slide has been part of every seminar and Masterclass on copy that I have ever done.

I have presented in 29 countries. A number of them, many times.

It is easily the most requested slide people ask for. I would estimate that over the years, I have sent it to over 1,000 delegates, post show.

Before you write a word of anything, make sure you have the answers to ALL these questions.

You can't write effective copy without having answered those questions, before you start writing.

1. *Who are we writing to?*
2. *What are we selling?*
3. *What is the main feature or USP?*
4. *What is different or better about it?*
5. *Why should the recipient be interested in it?*
6. *Have we made a strong offer?*
7. *Have we delivered the message clearly?*
8. *What do we want the recipient to do?*
9. *Have we made it easy for them to respond?*

19. Study, study, study

Don't believe things are different now. They are not.

Human nature has not changed since men started walking upright - and is not altered by media or changing times.

The reasons people bought goods and services decades ago, is exactly the same as the reasons they buy today.

And those reasons have been well documented.

You should know what they are. Do you?

It's very simple, actually.

People only buy for two reasons - **good feelings** and **solution to problems**.

Recognise it - and work it into your campaigns.

Then read some more, study some more and learn from people who know more than you.

It's the only way you will get better.

So, that's it, playmates. 19 classic commandments - given to you with my compliments. Gold nuggets every one.

Use them or ignore them. It's up to you.

There's one more thing I want to share with you, before I go.

WORDS, not numbers, are the true currency of business these days. The words we use, every day, can have a life-altering impact. The right words bring you success and everything you want in life.

The wrong ones bring you poor results and failure.

If you're honest, you will know that's true from personal experience.

So, act on it. And stop treading water. Take your copy *seriously*.

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 33 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 copywriters in Europe with that honour.

Visit 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

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.