



13 proven copy secrets that will get people reading - and keep reading - your promotional messages...

PART ONE of TWO. Second part next month...

Many years ago, Carlyle compared Mankind to a flock of sheep.

He said: *"Stretch a rope across a country path, about a foot and a half from the ground. Then drive a flock of sheep over it. When the leader has jumped that elevated rope, lower it to the ground.*

You will see that every sheep in the flock that follows, will jump a foot and a half in the air over that same spot.

They follow the bellwether blindly and unreasoningly, without regard to changed conditions. They don't jump for the same reason that the bellwether jumped, but just because they saw another sheep jump a given height, at a given spot".

Carlyle's comparison fits the current Marketing industry like a glove...

Not many bellwethers around in this business these days. A handful at best. And, in the main, they aren't acknowledged.

So, their wise words normally fall on deaf ears.

The reason is simple. The flock of sheep that make up the marketing industry today, don't listen. They are a very different bunch to the marketers of yesterday.

Those people went out of their way to listen and take advice from people who knew more than they did. And they grew as a result - and became better at what they did.

This current bunch, in the main, don't listen, because they think they know it all.

Well, it is my opinion, that most of this current lot know less about marketing, than any generation of marketers since the first brief was ever written.

And that's a bloody long time...

Marketers of old used to study the business. Most of this lot don't study *anything*. They just follow the latest trends blindly – and dismiss proven techniques and effective ideas. They're like a load of lemmings...

And it bothers me, I have to say. Because I know it is a trend that will continue.

This industry is a pale imitation of what it was. It's going downhill at an ever-increasing speed. The halcyon days are gone and will never return.

Anyway, rant over. You, of course, are not part of that group described above, because you read *Copycat*. This places you a cut above...

So, as you like to listen and learn, here's something you might find interesting. Here are 13 absolutely 'gold-plated' copy secrets to get – and keep – your customers and prospects reading your messages.

Obviously, there are many more than 13. I have just cherry-picked these important ones for you. As well as this baker's dozen of good tips, I'm going to show you at the end of this article, examples of copy blunders that certain marketing buffoons have made, to help you steer clear of similar misfortunes.

So, it's a double-header, really. Let's get started...

1. Prepare, prepare, prepare

Until you understand who you are writing to, and why, you cannot write effectively. Here are nine questions you should ask, before you start writing one word.

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?

Don't start writing until you have the answers to ALL of the above. If you choose to ignore these, your copy will underperform. I guarantee it.

2. Write today and edit tomorrow

Don't rush your copy. Take your time. It's important.

Write your first draft. Write as much as you can, then leave it until the next day. Then re-read it (out loud if you can) and unless you are a genius, you will find it still needs a load of work.

Edit ruthlessly. Don't use three words where one will do. Your copy needs to be tight, persuasive and compelling.

You have to hold the reader's attention.

Your reader is not waiting to hear from you. Quite the opposite, in fact. He/she has no time to work through your copy, because he/she has other pressures - the mortgage is due and funds are tight, or a partner has a bite mark on the neck that he/she didn't put there.

So, revise, revise, revise. And, when you think you're done, revise again.

3. Get the tone right to suit the prospect

"The tone of a good communication is as direct and personal as the writer's skill can make it. Even though it may go to millions of people, it never orates to a crowd, but rather murmurs into a single ear."

It is a message from one writer to one letter reader." Harry Walsh

I always try and picture the recipient in my mind. Get a pen-picture of him/her. Then I can write to that person.

We must remember, as copywriters, that we are now talking to individuals - not marketplaces. They are only interested in themselves - not you, or your company...

Doctors think and respond differently than Chairmen of Corporations. Charity donors think and respond differently to Electricians. Recognise this and address it in the tone of your copy.

As human animals, we are more alike than unalike. But we respond to communications each in a different way. This is because of our personalities, interests and because we are "different".

Successful letter writers find out as much about who they are writing to, as the product or service they are trying to sell.

Get closer to them – and you will sell more. Simple as that.

4. Have a benefit-laden headline - and start strongly

Start strong. Use a powerful headline.

"A headline should single out your prospect like a bell boy paging a man in a crowded hotel lobby." Claude Hopkins, Scientific Advertising 1924

A strong headline and opening paragraph are absolutely vital.

You need to capture the reader and then entice them into your copy quickly and easily. Headlines and sub-heads in print ads get attention. It's the same for letters, emails, inserts, door drops, webpages, et al.

The headline at the top of your letter is the most read part of a letter. It is, therefore, the most important element.

Writing great headlines is a critical skill. The better your headline, the better your odds of beating the averages and getting what you've written, read and acted on, by a larger percentage of people.

Next time you write a headline, stress the *benefits* of your product, not the product or its features. No one is in the slightest bit interested in you, your company or your products.

They are only interested in benefits and value.

But remember, you must support your headline claims. If your headline is a stopper, your body copy has to work with it and continue to deliver the promise.

Short snappy sentences and opening paragraphs are also key. Lines of copy no more than 40 - 60 characters long are easiest to read.

Long paragraphs are death. No one will bother to read them.

One other thing. A copy point size of 11 or 12 is normally ideal. 10 at a push. But never less than 10.

A lot of people wear glasses. This is because their sight is not good. If they are presented with copy under 10 point, they won't even bother reading.

Yes, a strong headline is essential. If yours doesn't grab or interest the reader, your letter is toast. The reader has gone. Never to return.

All your hard work, gone in an instant.

5. Make an offer. Because if there is no offer, there will be no sale.

"In direct marketing you should be as generous as you can afford on offers. It almost always pays." Graeme McCorkell

In these competitive times, an offer is essential. No campaign should ever be created without one.

Why would you, anyway?

An offer is a reason for someone to consider doing business with you.

Your prospects and customers want offers from you. If you don't give them one, they will go to someone who does. People aren't loyal anymore. They're promiscuous.

They'll leave you in a heartbeat for the company across the road, if they're offering a better deal. Believe it...

An offer is a reason for your "suspect" to become a "prospect", or a "prospect" to become a "customer".

An offer tells the reader that if they "do this now", then good things will happen. If they "respond in 30 days", they will get an extra gift or benefit.

An offer will influence them to say, "Yes, I would like to know more about this product". In effect, they are raising their hand and showing an interest in your company. They are willing to communicate with you.

Don't even think about writing a letter or email without an offer. An offer will always increase your response.

6. Use short sentences and short paragraphs.

Short sentences are easier to read and understand.

The easiest sentence to read is one word. Anything up to eight is dynamite.

The average length of sentence for easy reading is 16 words. Any sentence longer than 30 words tends to look daunting – and most people won't bother.

Short paragraphs make the communication inviting to read. This is important. People don't read copy with great attention.

Ray Jutkins once said, "*Advertising communications are driftwood on the surface of life.*" A typical Ray quote. He was right.

People aren't waiting to hear from you. When they open your letter or email, or land on your webpage, they are already looking for a reason to get out of there.

Don't give them one...

Try to make sure that the first paragraph is short and snappy - preferably only one sentence long. This is particularly important if the piece itself is very long.

That first short sentence grabs the reader and eases them into the copy. A good writer will ensure they don't escape after that.

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF HOW NOT TO DO IT...

In the main, the majority of marketers don't have the faintest idea how copy works. Here's what I mean...

Cleverness and gimmicks don't work...



Royal Mail can always be relied upon for a good old cock-up. They've done many in the past - and this is just one of them. Staggeringly bad.

I show this sometimes at Masterclasses. People can't believe it.

Unattractive layout and daunting opening paragraphs are a deterrent to readership...

ES/L/01-01

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March 2009

Dear Mr Owen

Specialised affordable healthcare for over 55s.

If private healthcare is becoming more important to you, let me introduce you to EspritHealth from Standard Life. Designed exclusively for over 55s, this plan offers you the reassurance that you won't have to wait for operations or be left out of pocket by restrictions on specialists' fees. When we promise 'full cover', that's exactly what we mean – we pick up all eligible medical treatment costs, with no hidden limits, no shortfalls and no nasty surprise bills.

Our EspritHealth plans are available where the eldest person to be covered is aged over 55 and under 80 at the cover start date. Once you've taken out cover, there is no restriction on age thereafter.

Up to 65% no-claims discount when switching.

If you already have health insurance and switch to Standard Life, as a reward for your claim-free years with your current insurer, and depending on your age, EspritHealth can offer up to 65% no-claims discount from day one. Plus, when switching we can often let you keep the same personal underwriting terms that you have with your current insurer; so you don't have to worry about losing out on cover for past conditions. Even if you are new to healthcare we'll automatically give you a generous no-claims discount of up to 40%, which can rise to 65% over time following a good claims history.

Well, would you even bother reading this? Absolutely horrific and doomed to failure. The rest of the letter is like this, too...

Copy that makes little sense, will generate even less response...

Photo © Getty Images / iStockphoto.com

Would you rather be holding on line because your insurer doesn't understand your healthcare provider policy or because they do?



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This is simply laughable. It's an apology of an ad I saw in La La Land (Dubai) a few weeks ago.

The headline has to be seen to be believed. Who writes this garbage?

I call it 'down the drain' advertising. Waste of time and money.

So, there you have it.

Some tips on how to make your copy better. And some examples of how you could waste your money, if you're not very careful.

The recipients of your promotional messages will not be attracted and influenced to respond or buy, unless they are convinced by your selling proposition.

This means your copy. Pretty pictures don't sell product. Copy does.

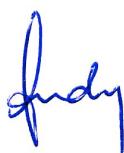
Once a person is tempted into your copy – and kept there, by proven techniques and a well-written and structured delivery, you stand a great chance that they might start to believe what you're saying.

Work at your copy – and you will be rewarded. Remember these wise words...

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

Part two of this article next month...

Keep the faith

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "andy".

About the Author

Andy Owen is MD of Andy Owen & Associates, a leading International direct marketing consultancy, specialising in all aspects of creative, copy and strategy for direct marketing.

The company's corporate website is www.andyowen.co.uk

The specialist copy division website is www.copywritingthatsells.com

Andy is personally involved in every creative and copy element that is produced by Andy Owen & Associates.

As well as his International speaking engagements, Andy runs in-house copywriting and direct marketing Masterclasses, Workshops and Seminars for companies and organisations all over the world.

Check his latest gigs on the website:

<http://www.andyowen.co.uk/speaker-presenter.html>

If you feel your company could benefit from any of these, or if you would like further information on any aspect of copywriting and creative for direct marketing, please contact Andy personally at **andyowen@aol.com**

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