



The immense power of the words 'YOU' & 'FREE'

Plus, Ed McLean and the classic 'Newsweek' letter

Words that work best in copy, are words that have relevance and benefit. Words that make people pay attention. And words that stimulate action and purchase.

Words just like these:

First-ever	Startling	Hurry
Free	Proven	Magical
Bargain	Offer	Wonderful
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 the best.

Why they work is simple; they relate to 3 very important things:

1. They relate to the single most important thing that makes copy work - and that is BENEFITS.

2. They relate to the next most important thing, which is NEWS. (The best copy tends to contain news of benefits).

3. They are also, in the main, EMOTIONAL words. Emotional words always work best in selling copy.

Out of those word examples above, 2 words stand out. Yes, even in that stellar list, these two are head and shoulders above the rest.

The first one to mention is FREE. This is the second most powerful word in selling copy.

Don't be afraid of it. It *works*. And it will continue to work until the world stops turning.

For everyone. No one is above it. But, I still meet a few brainless berks who think they are.

I recall this conversation at a conference in London not too long ago.

"We don't use the word FREE. We feel it's a tacky word and not relevant to our brand positioning.

If we gave things away FREE it would damage our brand. It's not what our customers expect of us. We're happy to leave it for more downmarket companies".

What a load of old tosh. They should be boiled in oil, as a great man once said...

What these blinkered idiots don't realise, is that a FREE offer doesn't have to have a high *monetary* value, just a high *perceived* value.

Things that work, include "Free stool with every chair purchased this weekend" Free consultation," "Free branded whisky glass with each bottle of Johnnie Walker," "Free report," "Free shipping," and "Buy one main course, get the other one free."

Everyone loves getting something for nothing. *Everyone.*

I remember seeing this for myself one day, many years ago, when I was in the Birmingham International Station concourse waiting for an early morning train to London.

The newsstand was incredibly busy. There was a queue of about 30 people all in line waiting to be served. This was most unusual.

Normally, they moved people on very quickly in this place, for obvious reasons.

I noticed that the queue pretty much consisted of well-groomed business people and it was clear there were a fair few Barristers and Lawyers amongst them. (You can tell by their distinctive trousers and the mass of files they always carry.)

I was intrigued and joined the queue to pay for my newspaper.

As I got closer to the counter, I noticed all these people were handing over a small coupon and coming away from the counter with The Times and The Financial Times.

It transpired that one of the papers was running a promotion.

Cut out yesterday's coupon in the Times and you could exchange it the next day, for a FREE copy of the FT. Or vice versa, I can't remember...

Anyway, these people were queuing up to take advantage. In those days, if my memory serves me correctly, these papers were selling at 50p or something silly like that.

So, here we had Captains Of Industry, top Barristers and Lawyers, queuing up to save 50p on a FREE couponed offer.

Amazing to see. But it just confirms that FREE is universally attractive, no matter what the age or profile, or whether it's a consumer of BTB promotion.

The second word to talk about, is YOU.

'You' is the most powerful word in the copywriter's lexicon. By a million miles...

It's much more powerful than the word "money" - and light years more powerful than the proven word "offer."

Prospects want to feel as if you're talking to them personally - and by using the word "you", a knowledgeable writer can achieve this.

When you are preparing your letter or email draft, remember that your recipient does not want to read about you or your company, what you do, how long you've done it and what your company stands for. They only want to know what benefits and value you can offer to them.

Have a look at your current sales letter or email. If you are talking about you and the company and all the rest of the useless information that goes with it, rewrite it and change the focus to the reader.

I will *guarantee* you it will work a whole lot better.

Nothing new in this, by the way. It has been the case, ever since people starting selling.

And it will continue to be so.

An incredible 48 years ago, Ed McLean proved this in an astonishing way in his legendary subscription letter for Newsweek magazine.

He used "you" or "yours" **58 times**.

Here is Page One of the classic letter:

(If you would like to see Pages 2 & 3, please email me and I will send them to you.)

Newsweek

NEWSWEEK • 117 EAST THIRD STREET • DAYTON 2, OHIO

Dear Reader:

If the list upon which I found **your** name is any indication, this is not the first -- nor will it be the last -- subscription letter **you** receive. Quite frankly, **your** education and income set **you** apart from the general population and make **you** a highly-rated prospect for everything from magazines to mutual funds.

You've undoubtedly 'heard everything' by now in the way of promises and premiums. I won't try to top any of them.

Nor will I insult **your** intelligence.

If **you** subscribe to Newsweek, **you** won't get rich quick. **You** won't bowl over friends and business associates with clever remarks and sage comments after **your** first copy of Newsweek arrives. (**Your** conversation will benefit from a better understanding of the events and forces of our era, but that's all. Wit and wisdom are gifts no magazine can bestow.) And should **you** attain further professional or business success during the term of **your** subscription, **you'll** have **your** own native ability and good luck to thank for it -- not Newsweek.

What, then, can Newsweek do for **you**?

The answer depends upon what type of person **you** happen to be. If **you** are not curious about what's going on outside **your** own immediate daily range of concern...if **you** are quickly bored when the topic of conversation shifts from **your** house, **your** car, **your** ambitions...if **you** couldn't care less about what's happening in Washington or Wall Street, in London or Moscow...then forget Newsweek. It can't do a thing for **you**.

If, on the other hand, **you** are the kind of individual who would like to keep up with national and

For 15 long years, no other Newsweek advertising letter was more successful in gaining new subscriptions than Ed McLean's letter, above.

They tested *everything* against it. Nothing came close.

In those 15 years, Newsweek mailed 107 million packs containing McLean's subscription letter. It is a gem - and I continually have requests for it from all over the world, as I regularly include it in Masterclasses and Workshops.

Ironically, this letter was eventually replaced with a new letter offering a FREE calculator.

What was different about this letter, was that it acknowledged a touchy subject at the time. People became aware that individual information was being tracked on mailing lists – this was before data protection, of course - and this was becoming a bit of a concern.

McLean addressed this issue head-on, which was a very brave thing to do - but the risk paid off, as bravery in marketing often does.

McLean was an interesting character. He spent his early years in New Orleans, selling pots and pans door-to-door and also writing ads. Then he came to New York during the blizzard of 1947 (at age 20) to try to forge a career as a novelist and cartoonist.

He did the usual odd jobs in restaurants and bars that struggling writers and artists have always done to pay the bills - and he also sold baby photos door-to-door in Brooklyn.

“I was young, and had a handsome face, pre-moustache,” McLean said in a 1995 interview. *“And I’d get leads from people. If a woman had a baby, there would have to be a grandmother.”*

There are many similarities here between McLean and Ogilvy, especially relating to their door-to-door selling successes. They both learned a lot about human behaviour and this proved invaluable in their successful later years in advertising and marketing.

But one day a dog bit Ed’s ankle on Eastern Parkway. Two weeks later another dog bit the same ankle. *“That was it for me,”* McLean laughed.

His skill as a writer was being noticed. He started writing for the Radio Advertising Bureau and Sky Publishing (a publisher of true detective magazines). And in 1959, McLean wangled himself an interview at Newsweek.

He actually stretched the truth in an interview, when he told the interviewer that he had been a reporter in New Orleans, as he thought the man interviewing him was an editor.

But that man was Red Dembner. And he was looking for a direct mail copywriter. He found McLean interesting and set him a few sample tasks.

McLean wrote four pieces over the weekend, took them in on Monday - and got the job.

Under the guidance of Dembner, McLean became a master of the long copy direct mail letter. That time was the golden era of circulation marketing. Time Magazine were mailing millions of packs and Newsweek were enjoying great success, too.

Soon after he was hired, Ed wrote his classic subscription letter.

Ed went on to write more than 9,000 mailings, direct response print ads, radio spots and inserts, and his ad copy sold more than a billion dollars of products and services over a career that spanned four decades.

Along the way, he wrote several books, founded the Direct Marketing Writers Guild and went on a worldwide seminar tour to teach what he had learned and developed to younger marketers.

He died in August 2005, at age of 77, after a long illness.

So, there you are. Power words work. But, you have to know the best ones – and, of course, how and when to use them.

The truly great words highlighted earlier – and loads more like them, are essential tools for any copywriter writing to sell product. They can and regularly do, turn an average campaign into a record-breaker.

And there are none more powerful in selling copy, than 'FREE' and 'YOU'.

I'll leave the last words to the late, great Ed McLean. These two commandments of copywriting should be pinned up on every writer's wall.

"It's not what you say, but what is believed..."

"It's not what you mean, but what is understood..."

In future Copycats, I am planning to continue the theme of **Power Words**, into **Power Phrases** and **Power Headlines**.

Something for you to look forward to - and a few more FREE essential arrows for your copywriting quiver. You really would be daft to miss them.

They will be FREE. With my compliments. Gratis. On the house. No charge. Yours to keep and use for ever. So, keep an eye on your inbox.

(Just proving a point 😊 ...)

Keep the faith



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 has its own site at www.copywritingthatsells.com Andy is personally involved in every creative and copy element that is produced by Andy Owen & Associates.

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