



The Five Deadly Sins of Copy Creativity

Many years ago Drayton referred to the '*deadly sins of creativity*'. He called them "universal failings". He identified five main ones.

Obviously, they related to all forms of direct marketing communications. But, when I was revisiting the works of the great man again last week, I found they relate to copy rather interestingly.

What's also quite noticeable is that the failings identified then, are still happening now.

Seems that very few people learn in this business. *Nothing's changed there then...*

Here are the original five, with added commentary from me, plus, at the end, two new ones I have added.

1. Reluctance To Get To The Point

This seems to be happening even more now than it used to. It is vital to get that all-important benefit into the mind of the reader immediately.

Fire your biggest gun first, remember...?

Latest tests I have seen, suggest that you have 3-4 seconds to grab the reader and draw that reader into your letter. Whether it's 3, 5 or 10, it really doesn't matter. The point is made.

Some copywriters seem almost reluctant to get to the point. There's yet another desperately poor BT letter highlighted later, which demonstrates this very well.

2. Being Shy About The Offer

As I have shared with you before, I believe strongly that *"if there is no offer, there will be no sale"*. The offer should be in lights. It should, obviously, be relevant and it should be restated and impossible to ignore.

As Ray Jutkins said recently, *"Don't even think about a letter without an offer. An offer will always improve your message and will always increase your response"*.

Incidentally, when you 'guarantee' that offer, your responses will go up. Showing complete confidence in what you are selling will give that sceptical reader that extra push, just at the right time.

Try it and see...

I have included later, a couple of laughable letters that contain no offer at all, they just talk about themselves. They are from predictable sources - a printer and an envelope supplier. Not a clue...

3. Forgetting That There Must Be Something For The Reader Wherever That Reader Looks

This is especially important when you are creating a mailing pack with a number of elements.

Whatever element the reader is looking at, the benefits of doing business with you should be bold, visible and appealing.

And benefit means benefit. Features do not sell without a relevant benefit. A benefit connects the product feature to the reader's need.

If the reader has no need, there will be no sale. Simple as that.

4. Making It Hard To Respond

An area that a lot of companies only pay scant attention to - and they pay the price - is the call to action.

I've lost count of the mailings I've received and the ads I've seen that do a reasonable selling job, then lose your interest because it is so difficult to find out what you have to do next.

No one bothers to find out, by the way. You lose that potential customer right there. *"People are lazy and they are procrastinators"*, said Bob Silverman.

I understand that American Express enjoyed a massive 30% uplift in response a few years ago by making the application form easier to complete. Those are serious numbers...

5. Failing To Do A Complete Selling Job

It is imperative that you cover every sensible and logical reason why the reader should respond to your selling proposition.

People want to know 'what's in it for me?' Be sure to tell them quickly, clearly and appealingly.

What's more, of course, you have to overcome all the predictable objections they may have of not doing so.

If you do this you will do well. If you do not, your communication will underperform.

Okay, there we have five *deadly sins of creativity* brought up to date and positioned specifically towards copywriting. Here's another two that in my view, deserve to be added.

6. Not Utilising The Power Of The P.S.

In a direct mail letter, the power of the P.S. is proven.

We know, through detailed research and testing that nearly 4 out of 5 people look at the P.S before they start reading the letter. Only the headline gets more attention.

Close to 80% of your readers are going to look at the P.S. What an opportunity... don't miss it...

The P.S allows the writer to restate the benefits and the offer, loud, clear and with energy.

7. Not Paying Enough Attention To Detail

Those of you that have been with me for some time will know of my feelings in this area. Standards have slipped. I am in no doubt about that. People just don't seem to care anymore.

You may recall that horrendous example I shared with you from KLM a few months ago. It was unbelievable.

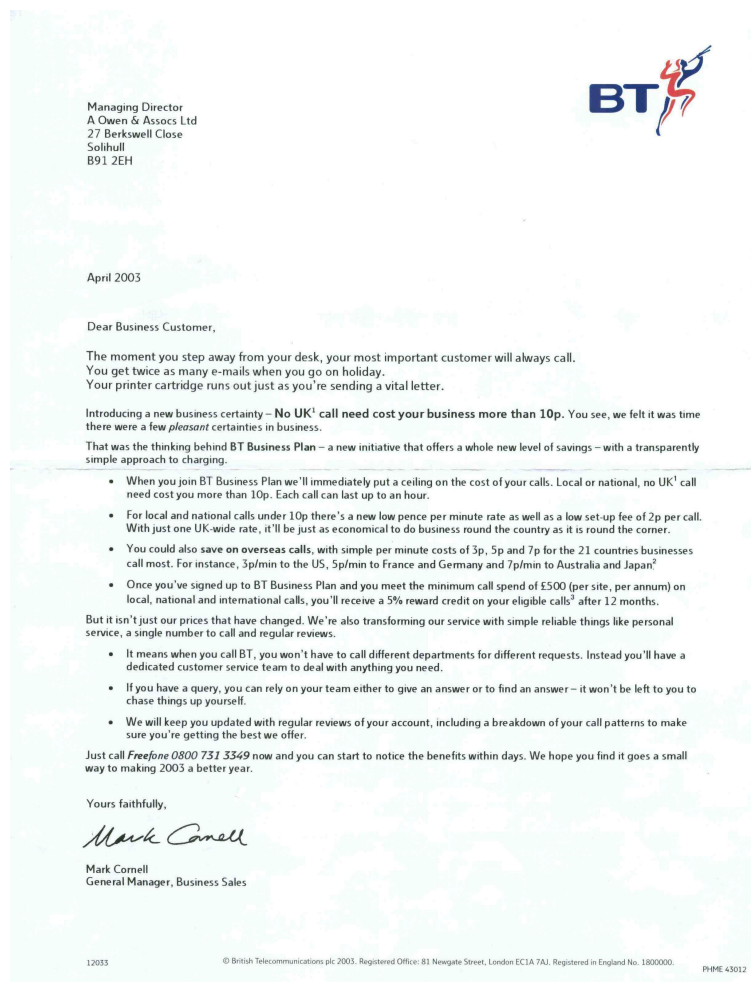
I see examples of typos, bad layouts and other lazy errors almost every day. There are two examples below relating to off the page ads, that you just won't believe...one is the stuff of legends...

So, there we are. There were seven deadly sins. Now we have balanced the scale by establishing seven deadly sins of copy creativity as well...

Now to the examples I promised you earlier...

British Telecom

An awful letter. (But, I can't remember when I last saw a good one from BT). Useless opening which would have lost 99% of the readers right there, horrible font, poor layout. In short, a total disaster.



Spearhead Training

There you go. A maths lesson. Who cares what those numbers equal? The letter should have only one objective: to sell. This doesn't.

The writer probably heard once that actual numbers work well in selling copy. They do. When used correctly.

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Dear Valued Client,

What Does 9+9+8 Equal?

The answer is the Spearhead mini portfolio featuring a selection of 26 of our most highly acclaimed Management, Sales and Business Skills public courses.

All are proven to make **a real difference** to the performance of attending delegates, because (unlike some other training organisations) we are not involved in recruiting, so **our entire focus is on providing your people with quality training.**

And this is just a small sample of what we offer. Whether you are after e-learning, coaching, field training, performance profiling, self development books or want a programme designed and delivered exclusively to your people, we can do it. After all, as one of the leading suppliers of business training we have been delighting our clients through improving their business performance since our formation in 1981.

If you would like to book a course, discuss how we can help you with your training needs, or would like us to send you our full brochure, simply call one of our Course Administrators on 01295 250010, they will be pleased to help you. Alternatively, please use the faxback form on the back page of the mini portfolio.

After all, from your initial enquiry through to our post-course support service, **our aim is to make your experience of using Spearhead as your training provider a totally satisfying one.** So go on, give us a try - you won't be disappointed, I promise!

Best regards and successful business,

David Stone
Managing Director

BOOK NOW, SAVE 10% WITH OUR EARLYBIRD DISCOUNT AND AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT! SMALL GROUP SIZES MEANS COURSES FILL EARLY.

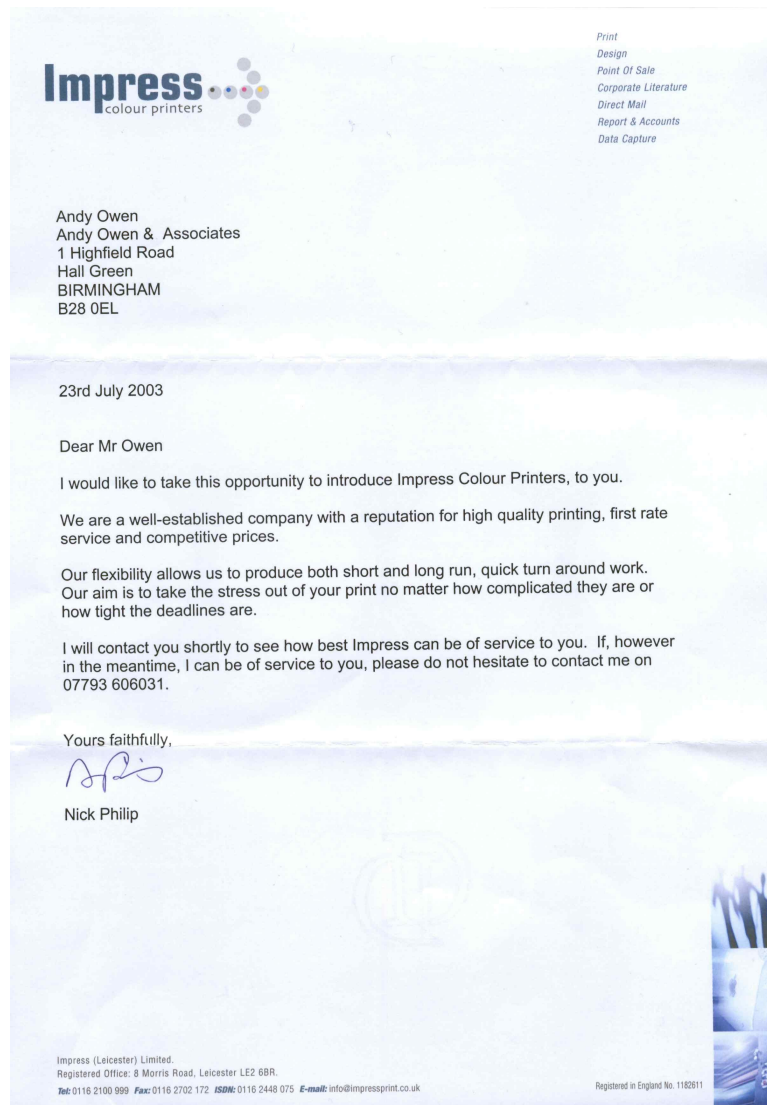
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Impress

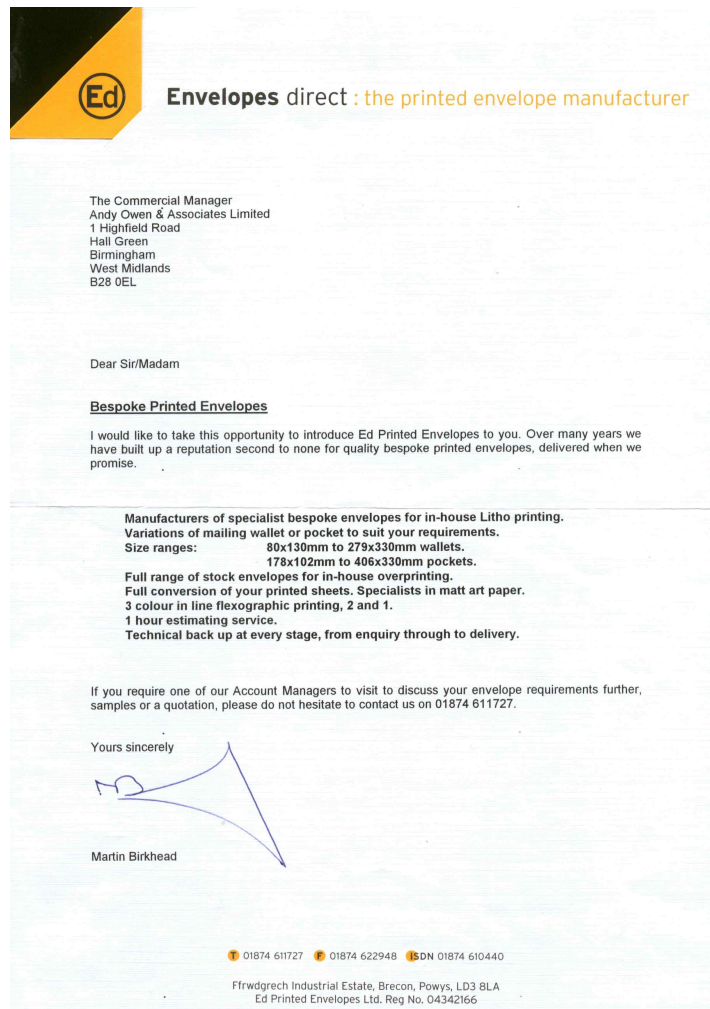
The worst opening line to a sales letter ever. Because, the answer is always "No, you may not". A lazy, lazy opening that continues talking about them...and them...and them... Printers do this all the time.

Features-led rubbish, which is a waste of paper - and everyone's time...



Envelopes Direct

Almost the same opening as the printer's example. Just as poor and would get the same response. Nowhere in this letter do they tell me what they can do for me. Why don't they learn?



Tony Sharp Design

Oh dear, oh dear. A high profile furniture retailer with an expensive half page ad. But unfortunately they can't spell. The result will be severe damage to their brand and their credibility.

designed for living

bedrooms

a new years revaluation

a new and exciting bedroom range for the new year

tony sharp design

from concept to completion

172 Streetsbrook Road, Solihull (next to texaco garage) 0121 733 7844

Al Huzaifa Furniture

I'm saving the best for last. The headline just beggars belief. I have to tell you that when I turned the page over and saw it, I laughed so much it hurt. You wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't shown it to you here in all its glory... would you?



Keep the faith...

See you next month.

If anyone would like complete copies of any letters reviewed here, please contact Andy direct at andyowen@aol.com or copydeskUK@aol.com

About the Author

Andy Owen is Managing Director of Andy Owen & Associates, a leading International Strategic Marketing Consultancy specialising in all aspects of contemporary direct marketing. The company has offices in UK, Middle East & North Africa, with Associate Offices in Europe & The USA.

The company's corporate website is www.andyowen.co.uk The specialist copy division has its own site at www.copywritingthatsells.com

As well as his International speaking engagements, Andy runs in-house copywriting and direct marketing sessions and workshops for companies and organisations all over the world. If you feel your company could benefit from one of these, please contact Andy for details.

If you would like further information on any aspect of copywriting for direct marketing, please contact Andy direct at andyowen@aol.com or copydeskUK@aol.com

Don't forget to check out Andy's superb new DVD on Copywriting called *"How To Write Copy That Really Sells."* To find out more and see excerpts from the DVD, visit <http://www.andyowen.co.uk/buy-online.html>