



Effective Marketing Communications

Sorry, closed. Come back another time. Preferably never.

These are signs that are now going up on every consumer letterbox and business desk not only here in the UK, but all around the world.

If you haven't seen them yet, you will...

Never before have we marketers been faced with a challenge as significant as this. No one really wants to know any more. No one really wants to hear from us...

Our messages are getting in the way of their daily lives and they want us to know that...

Twenty years ago, the inspirational Herschell Gordon Lewis was telling us that we were facing a sceptical audience. He was absolutely right, we were.

Well, if they were sceptical then, they are pure disbelievers now...

That portcullis has been pulled firmly down. And getting the recipient of your communication to raise it - even slightly - is now a massive task.

Please believe this. Because it is true. What's more, it is going to get even harder in the future.

For years I have been saying to anyone kind enough to listen, that to succeed in this difficult world of contemporary communication we all have to work much, much harder.

Pedestrian copy doesn't cut it anymore. In the 60's and 70's you could get away with it an awful amount of the time. The world was changing and response rates were going through the roof. People actually wanted to hear from you.

Not now. But, I am convinced there is a way to get that portcullis raised. And it isn't about dressing up like Sir Lancelot and riding over the hill on a white charger...

It's about writing copy that *connects*. I believe that the copywriter's role is now taking on a greater significance than ever before. Words *reassure*. Words *persuade* and words *influence*.

And words *sell*.

No matter what your creative director tells you, pretty pictures cannot do what words can do. No way. Especially in the world of disbelievers...

In the last few months, the feedback from you wonderful people that read this article has been tremendous. And encouraging.

The correspondence I am receiving about the importance of copy is growing month by month. The overriding feedback is that you agree with me. We do have to make our words more effective and our communications more dynamic...in every way...

But, the word hasn't spread to everyone...

Recently, during a conference in Dubai, I was discussing one particular slide with the large audience, highlighting the proven importance of the 5 elements of a Direct Mail pack.

I have shared these with you before, but, for the benefit of telling this story, I will show them again.

They are:

The Targeting 50%, The Letter 23%, The Offer 13%, The Timing 9% and finally, The Creative at 5%.

As these percentages show, the copy is over 4 times more important than the creative in a direct mail pack. So, I asked the audience this question:

"Does everyone now accept this?" There were a few mumbles. I saw a few heads nodding. So I assumed that the answer was yes...

Armed with this confidence (and this minor breakthrough), I then followed up with "OK, so now you've accepted this, will you all be budgeting and paying more for your copy than for your creative?"

"NO" came an immediate and rather aggressive reply from the second row. Must be a creative, I thought...

"Why?" ... I asked the lady with the wild eyes...

...I got a smile, followed by "*because I won't, that's all*".

Just when I thought I was winning as well...

Please see me afterwards....

I have to tell you that I find it astonishing that people can ignore facts like the DM pack importance values above. This is not the Gospel according to AO, these are proven facts. It's intelligence gained in the trenches of campaign warfare, lasting more than seven decades, by innovative direct marketers who grew their knowledge and their businesses by testing, testing and testing again...

...(whatever happened to testing anyway...?)

This is even more difficult to understand, when you witness the increase of more and more banal press advertisements, useless inserts and quite unfathomable television ads...

Over 15 years ago, Ed McCabe, one of America's most respected creative individuals said "*Advertising is a genuinely troubled industry with a questionable future. Ad agencies have evolved backwards. What's common today is to hear someone ask: 'What do they mean by that?' Or: 'What is that commercial about?' I think the industry has almost totally abdicated the notion of making a connection with the consumer*"

Yes, that was 15 years ago. God knows what he would be saying now. He'd have a fit if he saw some of the TV ads I have seen in the last couple of months...

And, it's not just TV of course. A lot of radio ads are becoming so laughable now, trying to get so much in, in so little time, the presenter sounds as if he's got a rocket behind him. Posters I gave up on years ago.

And press ads...well...if you want a laugh, go down to the Gulf and see some of the stuff down there that ends up in the papers. How most of it gets signed off is beyond my understanding.

...no wonder the portcullis has been lowered...

But, whilst the ad industry is going backwards, the direct marketing industry is growing in leaps and bounds...more and more budget is being transferred into direct mail.

...but the starring role of the copywriter is still not fully understood...

Listen to this...

According to a recent report from The Royal Mail, small businesses in the UK are losing more than £3bn a year as a result of poor communications.

The research revealed that over half of the 3 million businesses had terminated a contract because of inappropriate communications.

Most SME's got communications wrong at the initial point of contact. And 81% of companies preferred that first point of contact to be...guess what...?

...Direct Mail...

Royal Mail Managing Director For Mail Markets, Gillian Wilmot, came up with a gem... "*Getting it wrong can prove extremely costly*"

(Well, she should know. Most of the direct mail I receive is pretty poorly written). So, what does all this say?

Over 8 out of 10 small businesses in the UK want you to make contact with them initially through direct mail. But, most attempts are so bad, that they don't work.

...no wonder the portcullis has been lowered...

And, it's costing the sector - that's you and me by the way, over £3bn a year.

At home of course, our letterboxes have been raped by the financial services industry over the last 15 years and every time we receive a free newspaper every Friday night, 354 inserts drop out...

...no wonder the portcullis has been lowered...

I passionately believe, the only way to get it opened again, is to start understanding what makes people buy.

And that's using the correct words...*correctly*...

"Words, not numbers or pictures, are the true currency of business these days. The words we use every day can have a dramatic effect.

"The right words can bring you success and everything you want in life. The wrong words can bring you poor results and failure"

We all know this.

But only a knowledgeable few are doing anything about it...*I wonder if 'Wild Eyes' might be a convert one day...?*

I live in hope...

See you next month, with a great selection of brand new copy examples...

Keep the faith...

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'A' and 'y'.

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.

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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>