



## Copy Layout & Approach

**Andy, this month, continues his popular 'Copycat' series covering important issues such as the 'power struggle' between the writer and the reader, and one of the most misunderstood areas of letter writing - layout...**

A few years ago, my good friend Jerry Reitman, a former executive vice president at Leo Burnett, gave a speech to a group of several hundred retailers at a marketing convention in Baltimore.

He made a truly dramatic statement at that show, which really shook a few people up. He said, *"Mass marketing was a myth. Not only does it not exist today, but probably never did"*.

Jerry produced this evidence to prove this theory, *"Customers have different names, ages, addresses, dialects, education, incomes, ethnic backgrounds, experiences, aspirations, circumstances, family structure, motivations, behaviour patterns, personalities, character traits, physical features, emotional makeups and personal priorities"*.

*"Consumers are individuals as unique as snowflakes"*.

He was absolutely spot on. People have always been, and will always be, individuals. Every one of us is unique, different, separate and apart from anyone else.

And, if we want our marketing efforts to be effective these days, we now have to market on the differences of people, not their similarities.

But, it has to be recognised that a major shift has taken place in the last three years. The customer is now in control. Absolutely and without question. What's more, that customer knows it.

What is more, a lot of marketing people out there, don't know what to do about it. I find it highly amusing that now customers are getting promiscuous, marketers want to go steady. Continual talk about customer dialogue, relationship marketing and the dreaded CRM seems to be everywhere, yet only a true handful understand what it all *really* means.

In my view, one of the most important things a marketer should do these days, before they do anything else, is they must first learn to listen. A customer conversation is totally different conceptually from a mass marketing dialogue.

To be successful in marketing these days, companies must recognise that whether an audience is a dozen or millions, people do not respond as a *target consumer* or as *profiled sample*, but as me, and you, and her and him.

*...and that's where the vital area of copywriting comes in...*

A successful contemporary copywriter will have an above-average understanding of people, an insight into them, a sympathy towards them. Because, without that, these days, a writer cannot function effectively.

This understanding allows the writer to connect to the reader. Because the writer knows that focusing on the interests of the reader are absolutely crucial to the success of the campaign activity that is being prepared.

Herschell Gordon Lewis refers to it as writing within the '*experiential background of the reader*'. Introduce as many facts as you can which are likely to come within that experience. When you do that, you will connect immediately. The reader's reaction is likely to be: "Yes I *know* that, so it's likely that the other facts are true."

As Professor Poffenberger states, "Belief is a fabric of *personal* experiences."

In the vast majority of the copy I see these days, this is not happening. I believe this to be one of the fundamental flaws of contemporary copywriting in current times. A lot of copywriters are not studying their targets enough. The result is copy that is way off beam and does not connect.

Jerry Della Femina, who wrote a wonderful book on advertising many years ago, had an interesting view on this.

*"Young creative people start out hungry. They're off the street; they know how people think. And their work is great. Then they get successful. They make more and more money, spend their time in restaurants they never dreamed of, fly back and forth between New York and Los*

*Angeles. Pretty soon, the real world isn't people. It's just a bunch of lights off the right side of the plane. You have to stay in touch if you're going to write advertising that works".*

Connecting is vital. The longer you hold your reader, the better chance you have of getting them to do what you want them to do. Shrewd retailers have known this principle for years. The longer customers stay in their store, the more likely they are to make a purchase.

Only a percentage of the recipients are going to read what you've written. *(There are lots of proven techniques for uplifting the percentages. I have shared many of them with you in this column since last summer).*

But the ones who do start reading are the ones you *want*. They're interested. They're looking in your shop window.

Make sure your layout is as attractive and influential as possible. This is so vital in the communication process but, by and large, it is very much misunderstood these days.

Remember this. The people you are writing to are only looking for an excuse not to read your communication. Bad layout will give them one.

If your letter needs to go on two pages, don't cram it on to one. You are saving pennies, but costing your company thousands of pounds. *(This is getting so common nowadays...)*

Here are three examples of how to waste money very easily:

### **British Telecom**

I can't remember the last time I read even a half decent direct mail letter from British Telecom. They just don't seem to know how to do it.

Here's their latest disastrous attempt that I received recently. I despair...

Managing Director  
A Owen & Assocs Ltd  
27 Berkswell Close  
Solihull  
B91 2EH



April 2003

Dear Business Customer,

The moment you step away from your desk, your most important customer will always call.  
You get twice as many e-mails when you go on holiday.  
Your printer cartridge runs out just as you're sending a vital letter.

Introducing a new business certainty – **No UK<sup>1</sup> call need cost your business more than 10p.** You see, we felt it was time there were a few *pleasant* certainties in business.

That was the thinking behind **BT Business Plan** – a new initiative that offers a whole new level of savings – with a transparently simple approach to charging.

- When you join BT Business Plan we'll immediately put a ceiling on the cost of your calls. Local or national, no UK<sup>1</sup> call need cost you more than 10p. Each call can last up to an hour.
- For local and national calls under 10p there's a new low pence per minute rate as well as a low set-up fee of 2p per call. With just one UK-wide rate, it'll be just as economical to do business round the country as it is round the corner.
- You could also **save on overseas calls**, with simple per minute costs of 3p, 5p and 7p for the 21 countries businesses call most. For instance, 3p/min to the US, 5p/min to France and Germany and 7p/min to Australia and Japan<sup>2</sup>
- Once you've signed up to BT Business Plan and you meet the minimum call spend of £500 (per site, per annum) on local, national and international calls, you'll receive a 5% reward credit on your eligible calls<sup>3</sup> after 12 months.

But it isn't just our prices that have changed. We're also transforming our service with simple reliable things like personal service, a single number to call and regular reviews.

- It means when you call BT, you won't have to call different departments for different requests. Instead you'll have a dedicated customer service team to deal with anything you need.
- If you have a query, you can rely on your team either to give an answer or to find an answer – it won't be left to you to chase things up yourself.
- We will keep you updated with regular reviews of your account, including a breakdown of your call patterns to make sure you're getting the best we offer.

Just call **Freephone 0800 731 3349** now and you can start to notice the benefits within days. We hope you find it goes a small way to making 2003 a better year.

Yours faithfully,

Mark Cornell  
General Manager, Business Sales

The opening statements are so poor they are hard to believe. Which is probably why they didn't bother to underline or embolden them. I suspect they were embarrassed.

Most of the readers would have left right there.

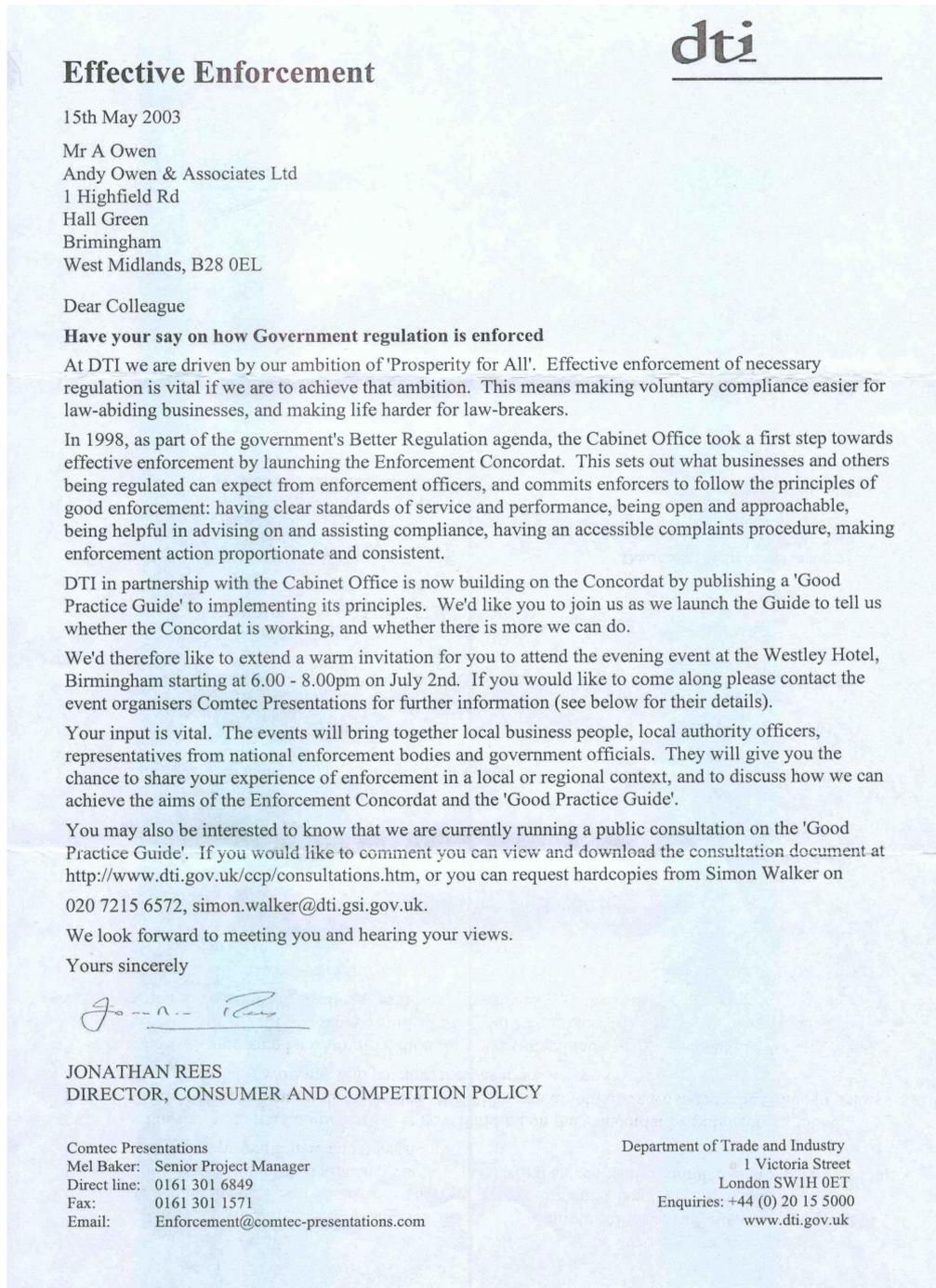
I only carried on, because I recognised another 'how not to do it' example to share with you all. The layout is awful. It will fill the reader with dread.

There are two type sizes in the letter. The copy is crammed on to one page when it screamed to be put on two, which has resulted in appalling message delivery and lack of readability.

And, on top of all that, the letter has no *belief, no heartbeat.*

## Department Of Trade & Industry

Communications from Government Departments are always good for a laugh. Here's one that came in last week that didn't disappoint.



**Effective Enforcement** 

15th May 2003

Mr A Owen  
Andy Owen & Associates Ltd  
1 Highfield Rd  
Hall Green  
Birmingham  
West Midlands, B28 0EL

Dear Colleague

**Have your say on how Government regulation is enforced**

At DTI we are driven by our ambition of 'Prosperity for All'. Effective enforcement of necessary regulation is vital if we are to achieve that ambition. This means making voluntary compliance easier for law-abiding businesses, and making life harder for law-breakers.

In 1998, as part of the government's Better Regulation agenda, the Cabinet Office took a first step towards effective enforcement by launching the Enforcement Concordat. This sets out what businesses and others being regulated can expect from enforcement officers, and commits enforcers to follow the principles of good enforcement: having clear standards of service and performance, being open and approachable, being helpful in advising on and assisting compliance, having an accessible complaints procedure, making enforcement action proportionate and consistent.

DTI in partnership with the Cabinet Office is now building on the Concordat by publishing a 'Good Practice Guide' to implementing its principles. We'd like you to join us as we launch the Guide to tell us whether the Concordat is working, and whether there is more we can do.

We'd therefore like to extend a warm invitation for you to attend the evening event at the Westley Hotel, Birmingham starting at 6.00 - 8.00pm on July 2nd. If you would like to come along please contact the event organisers Comtec Presentations for further information (see below for their details).

Your input is vital. The events will bring together local business people, local authority officers, representatives from national enforcement bodies and government officials. They will give you the chance to share your experience of enforcement in a local or regional context, and to discuss how we can achieve the aims of the Enforcement Concordat and the 'Good Practice Guide'.

You may also be interested to know that we are currently running a public consultation on the 'Good Practice Guide'. If you would like to comment you can view and download the consultation document at <http://www.dti.gov.uk/ccp/consultations.htm>, or you can request hardcopies from Simon Walker on 020 7215 6572, [simon.walker@dti.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:simon.walker@dti.gsi.gov.uk).

We look forward to meeting you and hearing your views.

Yours sincerely



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Oh what difference some subheads would make ! And a sprinkling of benefits instead of all the features. It even opens up with a statement about the DTI.

Don't they realise I am not interested in the DTI. At all. All I am interested in is what the DTI can do for *me*.

The layout is horrible and just insists on being thrown away. As with the BT example, it should have gone on to 2 pages. The paper stock was ow as they could get, the print quality so poor and the response form enclosed is simply laughable.

## Mobile Enterprise

Penny pinchers never prosper.

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MR ANDY OWEN  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
ANDY OWEN & ASSOCIATES LTD  
1 HIGHFIELD ROAD  
HALL GREEN  
BIRMINGHAM  
WEST MIDLANDS  
B28 0EL

Dear Mr Owen,

**Mobilise your Field service - Visit Mobile Enterprise 2003**

The field service industry has always led the mobile data market. Now there's a new generation of mobile technologies that are completely transforming the way service is delivered.

New mobile networks, new devices, new applications – they can only give you competitive advantage if you know about them and understand the implications.

**Mobile Enterprise 2003 is here to help every field service business get to grips with the new explosion of wireless and mobile technologies. The exhibition, keynote speakers, seminars, case studies and networking opportunities are all FREE, so I do hope you'll take advantage of this exciting programme:**

**New field service challenges and opportunities**

- "How to successfully extend business applications to a 'bought-in' mobile field force" by the Mobile Market Strategist from Siemens Communications
- "Field force automation - learning from a successful small/medium business implementation." by the IT Director of Cork International
- "Empowering the Corporate Nomad" by Inmarsat
- Case Study: British Gas Transco Workforce management using wireless technology by the CIO of British Gas Transco
- Wireless Applications for Utilities and beyond by a Partner of IBM Business Consulting

**The view from the top**  
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**The new solutions on show:** top vendors of mobile field service solutions including [mobile applications, devices, field service apps, SMS and MMS, mobile marketing, WLANs, Bluetooth](#)... don't just read about it, see it all in action.

**The Wireless Enterprise Theatre** shows you how wireless solutions are liberating organisations like [British Gas Transco and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox](#) ; plus in-depth sessions from [Vodafone, Symbian, IBM, Siemens, and Giga](#)

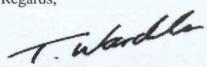
**The SMS and Mobile Applications Theatre** drop you inside the pioneers of mobile marketing including [Chrysalis, The Ordnance Survey, Levi's, Sainsbury's, Britvic, the Metropolitan Police, Tesco and more.](#)

**An advance look at all the technologies you could be servicing next year!** From smartphones to wireless networks, PDAs and handhelds.

**PLUS – see the latest solutions from these top vendors:** Vodafone, Orange, IBM, O2, Intel, Symbian, Siemens, Brother, Xcellenet, WIN, Opera Telecom, Kommunicate, Deloitte & Touche, PA Consulting and many more...

The entire event, including all seminars, is FREE but you'll want to pre-book your seminar sessions to avoid disappointment. There are no other FREE programmes of this depth and breadth, so sessions will fill up. Visit [www.mobileenterpriseevent.com](http://www.mobileenterpriseevent.com) now to pre-book.

Regards,

  
Tom Ward-Lee, Group Show Director

**P.S. Your entry badge also gets you free access to Internet World 2003 (the UK's premier business technology event) and Smarter Business (full of IT solutions just for SMEs) right next door! Visit [www.internetworld.co.uk](http://www.internetworld.co.uk) or [www.smarterbusinessexpo.com](http://www.smarterbusinessexpo.com) for full details.**

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Penton

As you will notice from the upper right of this abomination, these comedians used the letter as an outer envelope as well. It came folded in half in a polybag.

I kid you not. God knows how this got past the sponsors. The FT are usually quite careful about anything that might damage their brand.

Caps in the address block are a bad mistake. Surely everyone knows this now?

Copy tries hard but is poorly written. Layout is so bad, it makes the BT letter layout look like an award-winner.

The indenting is strange to say the least, the boxed bullets are amusing and the writer appeared to be confused about what words and statements he/she should emphasise.

So, a simple decision was made. Lets emphasise everything, to be on the safe side.

I have to tell you that rubbish like the letters above make me wonder about this business. Who are the people that are writing these letters? Who are the people that are signing them off?

Don't they have any idea of how contemporary communication works?

We all know that budgets are tight right now. Well, they can't be that bad if people are throwing money away like this...

Keep the faith. See you next month.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy', with a small dot at the end.

If anyone would like complete copies of any letters reviewed here, please contact Andy direct at [andyowen@aol.com](mailto:andyowen@aol.com) or [copydeskUK@aol.com](mailto: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](http://www.andyowen.co.uk) The specialist copy division has its own site at [www.copywritingthatsells.com](http://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](mailto:andyowen@aol.com) or [copydeskUK@aol.com](mailto: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>