



Hi everyone...

This month, I'm *steaming*...

I wanted to write this a couple of weeks ago, but I've had International shows to prepare for, which had to take priority. But now I've found a window, so here we are...

What the HELL is happening in our business?

I have to tell you, I am getting *seriously* concerned about what's going on now. We should all be afraid. *Very* afraid...

The lunatics are certainly running the asylum. I don't think there's any doubt any more. Plus, no one seems to care...

A couple of weeks ago, we held our major industry show in the UK - The International Direct Marketing Fair at Earls Court. Having been involved with this event from the start at Derry Street all those years ago, I can tell you that a lot of things have happened with this show over the subsequent years.

Some for the better. Most of them, unfortunately, for the worse...

For example, 10 years ago, when there was a 'heartbeat' in our industry (it now has a pacemaker fitted) the show was run by a great guy who understood both the culture and the business - Malcom Whitmarsh.

The result was an event that no one wanted to miss. The IDMF was a show that was incredibly powerful and beneficial and interesting to all.

Positivity reigned. Top people were everywhere, the best were fêted, those that wanted to, could learn a lot and the atmosphere was tremendous.

Alcohol flowed like water, deals were being done everywhere, people kissed and fondled with enthusiasm and regularity. Life was in a *major* key.

Now, the show is a pale imitation.

This year's show was boring. There was no atmosphere at all. Negativity reigned. Only a handful of top people were there and those that spoke didn't get the audiences they should. I heard that Steve Harrison (one of the most talented creative minds in our business) attracted an audience of just 30 people).

It would be funny if it wasn't so tragic. It reminds me of something Samuel Johnson wrote, way back in the 18th century...

*"Mankind have a great aversion to intellectual labour; but even supposing knowledge to be easily attainable, more people would be content to be ignorant than would take even a little trouble to acquire it..."*

In the IDMF 2008 edition, water now flows like the alcohol used to. The only questions the bar staff had to answer were "still or sparkling?".

The spaces at the bar were huge. No deals were being done that I could see and kissing and fondling was not on the menu at all.

Neither was smiling. No one seemed to be enjoying a single minute of it.

What a load of boring bastards...

I always arrange to meet old friends there and we normally all arrive separately. We all have a look around, shake a few hands, then collectively disappear somewhere nice for an all-afternoon lunch where we reminisce, like old farts do.

This year, we pretty much did the same, although the walk around took minutes, as there was nothing really to see. And I include the Internet part in that. The handshakes were less than previous years, as it appeared that most of the sensible people seemed to be somewhere else.

Let's be honest here. There wouldn't be an IDMF, if it wasn't for Internet World. That show has joined and takes up half - maybe more - of the floor space.

To old DM liggers like me, it's very sad. The show just isn't our show anymore. It's gone. And, I'm afraid, it doesn't look like it will ever come back.

But, it's little surprise. We are devaluing everything. Seminars are now FREE. The organisers and sponsors are ecstatic that their theatres are full.

They're only full because they're FREE, you tubes! Charge a nominal £20 for entry and you wouldn't spot a soul. It's all skin deep.

But, bad as all this is, there are greater problems underneath it all.

During the 3 days, there were a total of 180 FREE seminars. Yes, over 60 a day. Much too many, in my view. But, as we all know, there are politics at play here.

I analysed the topics and subject matter of the seminars on offer, over the duration of the event. Astonishingly, this is part of what I found...

There were:

**(a) 25 on CRM...**

Yes, incredibly, CRM came out tops. The subject has already wasted hundreds of millions of pounds already. But, during the 3 days there were 25 FREE seminars on how to waste some more...

**(b) 21 on Postal Related Issues...**

I bet there were a few snores to be heard here. 21 seminars on a subject like this. Bloody hell.

**(c) 21 on digital printing...**

I passed by one of these when it was being presented. Simply a sales pitch. I have heard subsequently, that this applied to most of them. Well, we're not surprised are we?

**(d) 20 on research...**

Okay, so let me understand this. 20 seminars on research, but not one on testing. Can you believe it? The rock on which we built our DM church was testing. No wonder no one does it anymore. They simply don't know how.

(e) **13 by the CIM...**

I have to be careful what I say here. All I will say is this. What are the CIM doing at a DM Show? They don't know the first thing about DM...

(f) **5 on how to win awards**

How to win awards! I ask you. If you want to know how far we have fallen, this is it.

If people wanted to know how to win awards, why didn't they go and see Steve Harrison's presentation? He's won so many, he probably doesn't know where to put them all...

If the above analysis seems like total bollocks to you, that's because it *is*. But, as I said earlier, it gets worse. And here's why...

Do you want to know how many seminars or presentations there were on the two most important elements of our business – creative and copy?

**A big fat ZERO.**

Unbelievably, there wasn't a single one.

This means that if anyone came to this big annual UK event on contemporary direct marketing and wanted some advice on how to create an effective mail pack, door drop piece or insert, they wouldn't get it

If they wanted to know how to create a winning ad, or write an email that cuts through the crap that's currently filling our inboxes every day, they would go home unfulfilled.

And, if they wanted to learn why the correct use of words in today's communication challenges is now probably more important than anything out there, they would be disappointed.

I think we all ought to pack up and go home.

It wouldn't be so bad, if the standard of creative and copy was good out there.

As we all know, it isn't. Quite the opposite, in fact.

In the main, it's awful and getting worse.

Have a look at this statistic that I read a little while ago...

*"85% of all advertising and marketing is invisible, because it is so badly done.14% of all advertising and marketing is extremely poor – either unattractive, stupid, patronising, demeaning. (Ironically, that's better than being invisible, because at least it might get your attention.)The remaining 1% is terrific work..."*

Let me tell you this. Everyone in our business should be thoroughly ashamed of that statistic. It indicates that for the most part, we really don't know what we are doing...

Mind you, many of us who study this business have known this for years...

Rory Sutherland, the Chairman of The Creative Forum said recently, *"This is a peculiar time. Never before has creativity been more valuable – yet felt less valued "*

How right he is. And look at the result. At a time when getting a response has never been tougher, we are now producing work of the lowest quality in decades...

But, it's not surprising really, when people who should know better, think that CRM, postal issues and research are more important than creative and copy...

See you next month...

Don't forget, all my previous articles are available for enjoyment and FREE download at: [www.andyowen.co.uk/articles.html](http://www.andyowen.co.uk/articles.html)

Keep the faith *(although it's getting increasingly more difficult...)*



### **About the Author**

**Andy Owen is Managing Director of Andy Owen & Associates, a leading International direct marketing agency, specialising in all aspects of contemporary direct marketing.**

**The company has offices in UK, Middle East, Romania & Russia.**

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, creative 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.

To see Andy 'live' please visit [www.andyowen.co.uk/speaker-presenter.html](http://www.andyowen.co.uk/speaker-presenter.html) for future events and gigs.

If you would like further information on any aspect of direct or strategic marketing, or copywriting for direct response, please contact Andy direct at [andyowen@aol.com](mailto:andyowen@aol.com)

Andy's DVD on Copywriting called "*How To Write Copy That Really Sells.*" is now available to purchase online.

To find out more and see excerpts from the DVD, visit <http://www.andyowen.co.uk/buy-online.html>