



“The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate...”

Joseph Priestley

I was reading one of our industry magazines the other day and saw this...

“In the next decade, we are going to witness more changes to our industry than in the previous 50...how we market, advertise and promote our products and services is being redefined in front of our eyes. It’s becoming a new world...”

Is it? Is it REALLY?

Yes...there are going to be many more channels to market for all of us to consider.

Yes...we know that our targets - whether they be consumer or business - don’t want to hear from us anymore. They are simply not interested in us, our brand, our culture or anything else for that matter.

Yes...we accept that they are ‘*increasingly empowered*’ as someone put it to me recently. And, they know it...

Yes...it’s going to get tougher for all concerned (I’ve been saying this in *Copycat* for the last 2 years...)

So, yes...there are going to be significant challenges facing us all, and those challenges are obvious.

But, it’s important to remind ourselves of one very important fact. When it comes to the basics of how and why people buy, you can take this to the bank...

“Times change, but people *don’t*...”

So, headlines like the one mentioned above can sometimes allow us to be sidetracked and distracted to matters of the future when there's a much more important fundamental issue that we have to address first.

What happens in the next 50 years or the 50 following - whether we are all using channels that haven't even been thought of yet - is all totally irrelevant, right now, as I see it...

Because, we shouldn't be bothering ourselves with the future, when we have major problems to address, right here in the present.

There's something much more important - and it requires our attention NOW!

How we communicate...

One thing will remain constant in our business, whatever channel we use. We have to learn how to communicate better.

Because, let's face it, whether you consider yourself to be in marketing, advertising, direct marketing, promotions or anything else for that matter, you're really in the 'communication' business...

When you think about it, what you do - is you try to 'communicate' the major benefits of your products and services to your customers and prospects.

Whether direct, as a client, or in the case of agencies and advisors, on behalf of your clients.

Individuals that possess the skill and talent to 'communicate' relevant and benefit-laden offers to the right target at the right time, will always do well.

Now and in 50, 100, 200 years time...irrespective of anything else....

But, guess what? One thing you have to do well to be successful in the communication business - is to be able to *communicate*.

And, as readers of this column will have heard me say numerous times, not many people in this business *really* know how to do that...

You have to know how to *connect* before you can *sell*. And the best and proven way to do that, is to connect through *relevance*.

But, it's a specialist skill. An art.

And not many people have it. It seems to me that not many care, either.

Surely we should be discussing this vital area a lot more than we are?

Bloody hell, we've even stopped talking properly to each other now.

We email instead of picking up the phone. We don't worry about grammar or punctuation. No one can spell anymore.

We send text messages with a language that is horrific. And where that culture takes us, is anyone's guess....

One thing I will predict. It's going to put us in even more trouble than we're in already. No doubt in my mind about that.

We have a massive challenge on now, with this economic downturn. The smart and savvy, of course, will start working existing customers a lot harder.

It's a proven way to beat off the chill when the North wind 'doth blow.

And, it's going to blow a gale. *Trust me...*

But, whatever the strategy, to get the best out of campaigns, we have to start communicating an awful lot better. And that, my friends, means understanding basic communication techniques.

How the whole ball of wax really *works*...

Things like:

- *How to create an ad that pulls.*
- *How to write an email that cuts through the morass.*
- *How to write copy that sells*
- *How to connect.*
- *How to interest.*
- *How to persuade and reassure.*
- *And, how to generate a response...*

All these and many others like them, require skill, knowledge and technique.

*By the way, I cover all these elements and a lot, lot more in my full day **Masterclasses**-and I'm presenting quite a few from now until the end of the year.*

Have a look here - http://www.andyowen.co.uk/andys-events_08.html to see if there's one near you soon...

*****STOP PRESS*** Dublin, September 18th 2008 - BOOKING NOW...**
<http://www.andyowen.co.uk/dublin>

Promo over. Back to the subject matter.

Obviously, we can't cover all of these subjects today, so, as this article is called 'Copycat' - let's take a few minutes to concentrate on one of them.

How to write copy that *sells*...or...how to harness the enormous power of **WORDS** within communication campaigns...

To do that, in my humble opinion, we need to get back to basics and consider some copy *commandments*.

I have literally *hundreds* - but I've selected 10 goodies, picked at random, to talk about here:

1. Don't write long rambling paragraphs. Especially the first one. Short and snappy is where it's at. Always has been. Always will be.

Even when the headline of your letter is a stopper, if your opening paragraph is too long and daunting, 99% of your readers will leave right there.

As Joe Sugarman quite rightly said, the object of the first line of copy is to get them to read the second line...and so on. You have to get the reader into the letter quickly. A big block of copy in the first paragraph is a total turn-off.

2. Marketing and advertising is about SELLING. Don't ever forget that.

But so many do. As I have said many times in this column, don't try and be subtle or clever - or try to entertain. That's not the objective. The objective is to SELL.

As Drayton once said to me " *Your letter is not written as an artistic endeavour. It is written to build your business...*"

**3. The 4 bases of success in contemporary copywriting are:
(a) Connectivity (b) Clarity (c) Benefit (d) Verisimilitude**

(a) You have to connect and quickly. Latest information suggests that readers take only 2.8 seconds to decide whether they are going to continue to read your letter, after reading their name and address, the headline and the P.S. (In that order...)

(b) You have to be clear. If your copy is muddy and confusing, the reader will leave.

(c) People want to know the benefits of your product or service, not the features. Because that's what they buy...

(d) The appearance of truth. Does it look the part? Sound the part?

And *feel* the part?

Once a reader spots an inconsistency, or has reason to doubt something, they're out of the letter in a heartbeat.

4. To write effective sales copy, you need to write like you talk. Let your words flow easily and with a natural rhythm. Great letters, when read aloud, sound just like a friend talking to you.

That's exactly why this copy approach works. Because its warmth and connectivity at reader level, disarms the reader and makes the selling approach more effective.

Here's what the great man had to say about it:

"I don't know the rules of grammar. If you're trying to persuade people to do something or buy something, it seems to me that you should use their language. The language they use every day. The language in which they think..." David Ogilvy

**5. Five totally useless words you should never use in your sales copy:
(a) Quality (b) Value (c) Service (d) Caring (e) Integrity**

These are all neutral words that have absolutely no place in selling copy.

When we read these words, our eyes glaze over. They make no impression on us whatsoever.

Everyone offers quality and value. All offer great service.

Everyone cares. Integrity is a given.

Those of us in the real world, know this is total bollocks.

Very few companies offer anything of the sort. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Everyone of those 5 words can be replaced with something more meaningful.

Think about it...

6. You should always fire your biggest gun first - the headline - and it must contain a benefit and a relevance to the reader. If it doesn't, then 9 out of 10 readers will stop reading your letter or ad right there.

How many times does this have to be said before the penny drops?

Every day, millions of pounds is wasted on ads that forget this vital commandment. Your offer must be in the headline. If it isn't, why should anyone read on?

The late great John Caples said:

"What good is all the painstaking work on copy, if the headline isn't right? If the headline doesn't 'stop' people, the copy might just as well be written in Greek..."

7. If there is no offer - there will be no SALE. More important than ever, now.

Give them something. If you don't, they'll go to someone who does.

It doesn't have to be 50% OFF. It could be added value - like a gift or free delivery or a million other things. But there has to be something of value.

Ignore this at your peril.

8. Don't have dinosaur views about long copy. It's not about long or short. It's about interesting or uninteresting.

Get your head out from up your wotsit and start testing. Then you will know.

If you take 2 pages to write something that should be on one page - you will lose the reader because you'll be rambling. If you need 2 pages to sell something and you cram it on one, your layout will be unattractive and you'll lose them as well.

9. Don't forget the vital importance of effective punctuation. Commas, dashes colons, underlines, parentheses and others are all essential weapons for the knowledgeable writer.

This is absolutely essential. Good use of punctuation allows the writer to control the pace of the selling delivery. The pros have known this for decades.

The comma is my best friend. I take it everywhere with me.

10. The most important word in the copywriter's armoury is YOU. The second one is FREE. This will never change until the world stops turning.

Do you know some people are still afraid of FREE?

I still have conversations about it. "*Could damage our brand*" "*Not our image*". And other crap like that.

These are the same cretins who want to spend 75% of the message delivery talking about who they are, how long they've been in business and how many of this and that they have - and other useless stuff.

When they should instead, be telling the reader the benefits that he or she will enjoy as a result of all these things.

A *massive* difference.

OK playmates, I'm done.

Except, I can't sign off without commenting on this...



The Direct Mail Seed Box Campaign

Did you receive this in the last week or so?

Oh my God, how bad is it? It's the biggest load of tosh I think I've seen in years.

I bet it has cost a tidy sum to create as well. Which, in my humble opinion, is a criminal waste of time and money. Because it will never achieve the objectives in a million years...

I have spoken with at least a dozen people in our business in the last few days that have received this - and everyone - bar *none* - feels the same.

It was created to promote the use of direct mail. All these small booklets contained details on various elements of a direct mail campaign.

Do they think that people will actually *read* these booklets? Do they?

I'll tell you this, it will actually damage the direct mail story, not encourage people to use it. It's already doing it. The laughter is coast to coast...

Do you know when I managed to open it -damaging it in the process - all the little booklets that were supposed to be neatly lined up, were all loose in the box!

Are we surprised, when you consider who delivered it?

...you couldn't make it up...

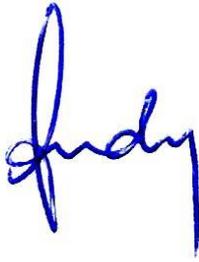
Just *stunningly* bad.

Give me half the budget wasted on this and I would deliver 100 times more benefit, for the Royal Mail, using a simple well-written letter and a small brochure in an overprinted envelope.

Bet you I never get the call...

See you next month, when the whole article will be devoted to probably the greatest writer our business has ever produced - **the incredible Bill Jayme...**

Keep the faith...



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.

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*****New critique service ***** www.andyowen.co.uk/critiqueservice.html

If you feel your company could benefit from one of these, please contact Andy for details.

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All Andy's previous articles are available to view and download at www.andyowen.co.uk/articles.html