



Every word is a weapon – recognise the incredible power of the *right* words

I *love* you.

Three incredible words.

How many times have you said those words to someone?

Once? More than once? Did you really mean it?

Were you scared? If you were - why didn't you say, I *like* you?

Almost certainly, because you knew the massive difference between '*love*' and '*like*'.

Most people do, I would think, because there isn't just a difference, there's a chasm...

So, if people know the difference between '*love*' and '*like*', why don't they know the difference in power, of words and phrases they use in their promotional literature and collateral?

Such as, '*when*' and '*if*', '*fantastic*' and '*wonderful*', '*big* and '*sumptuous*'. And hundreds of word examples like those.

Or phrases such as '*if you think that*' against '*if you thought that*', or '*50% OFF*' and '*Half Price*' or '*absolutely FREE*' against '*with our compliments*'.

Using the right words can be the difference in campaign terms, of enjoying a successful campaign or having a 'head in the hands' turkey. But trust me, most people in marketing don't know this.

It never ceases to amaze me, how incredibly naïve and misinformed, most marketers are today, regarding copy.

I regularly see campaigns that have clearly cost a lot of money to create and produce – yet the copy seems to have been written by the night watchman.

Actually it's not just copy either. It's creative techniques as well.

Here's what I mean, from a company that should know better...

Summer sounds better with Bose **BOSE**

Ref: A-22902

Mr A Owen
27 Berkswell Close
Solithull
West Midlands
B91 2EH

6532
v2f0035754

WAVE® music system - DAB
with FREE WAVE® connect kit for iPod

ACOUSTIC WAVE® music system II - DAB
with FREE BOSE® Travel Case and Power Pack

SoundDock® digital music system

Dear Mr Owen,

We recently sent you our new and exciting **Summer 2009 Catalogue** featuring all of our best selling products and latest special offers. With many of these offers due to expire at the end of August this is a reminder that you should order now to take full advantage of our amazing summer offer. Each and every item in the catalogue is available on a risk-free all summer long home audition and if you order today, you'll also receive **FREE UK delivery***, offering an additional saving of up to **£25!** If by the 31st August you decide that the product is not right for you, we will collect it at our expense and you won't owe us a penny. There is no catch; any BOSE® product, from our SoundDock® Portable system to our best selling WAVE® music system – DAB is yours to enjoy all summer long when you order direct from Bose.

An 8 line opening paragraph, with no headline! The product is undoubted quality, yet their copy is disastrous. 99% of the recipients would not have bothered to even try to read a daunting block of copy like that.

I find it amazing that a company like Bose doesn't know this.

In my view, it's because, people in marketing today, are less knowledgeable and informed about fundamental communication techniques than any of their predecessors. I don't think that can be argued at all.

The reason is simple. They don't *study*. No one does, anymore.

I find marketers today, incredibly blinkered. They know everything about their business, but nothing about anything else. They spend their life talking to marketing people, about marketing.

This is why most of them have narrow minds.

I know I have continually raised the 'study' point in *Copycats* over the years, but it's a fact. Marketers knew much more about the selling process 60/70 years ago, than most of these charlatans know now.

How crazy is that? How embarrassing for our industry.

Look at this pile of garbage. You'd have never seen stuff like this, then. It would have been thrown out.



They're a big bank too. How on earth was this allowed to go out?

In the halcyon days, marketers – in the main – were brave and committed. And they were passionate. They tested furiously and consistently.

They shared information. They employed specialists, gladly paid top whack and gave those specialists the room to breathe and create.

And they enjoyed great success as a result.

A lot of those campaigns still excite and astonish, because they were so good. And copy played a starring role.

I regularly include some of those old campaigns in Masterclasses I present around the world – and people are amazed at their quality.

I can tell you, that I get many more requests for these, than any new campaigns I showcase, so at least some of you out there want to get better.

Not like this lot...



"You know we are always looking to offer you the best possible products and services..."

...I think I'm going to be sick. Do they honestly believe that anyone would read that horrific line and buy into it? Noooooo...

And that's the opening line. Second only in importance to the headline. And that is just as bad. "...will come as no surprise to you..." Give me strength...

A total disaster. No wonder they went bust.

There are proven fundamentals – *commandments* - if you like, that **MUST** be adhered to if your 'forced communication' as Herschell referred to it all those years ago, is to generate response and sales.

The wonderful Murray Raphel, believed that certain phrases, techniques and words make the difference between "I'm just looking" and "I'll take this."

Murray had found that through disciplined testing and sharing information with other sales people, he confirmed that what we say, often makes the difference between a sale and a disappointment.

Murray put his findings together in his superb book, 'Selling Rules'. It distilled brilliantly the challenge of getting people to buy.

He listed 52 rules for making sales (one for every week of the year) and put each one on a page by itself.

Obviously, I can't list all 52 here, but I've taken a couple of the most relevant and incorporated some of the findings into the next few pages of this article.

(By the way, buy the book. It's not expensive and you'll benefit enormously from the wisdom within it.)

The Importance of "You"

Those of us who write for a living know that the word "you" is THE most important word in selling copy.

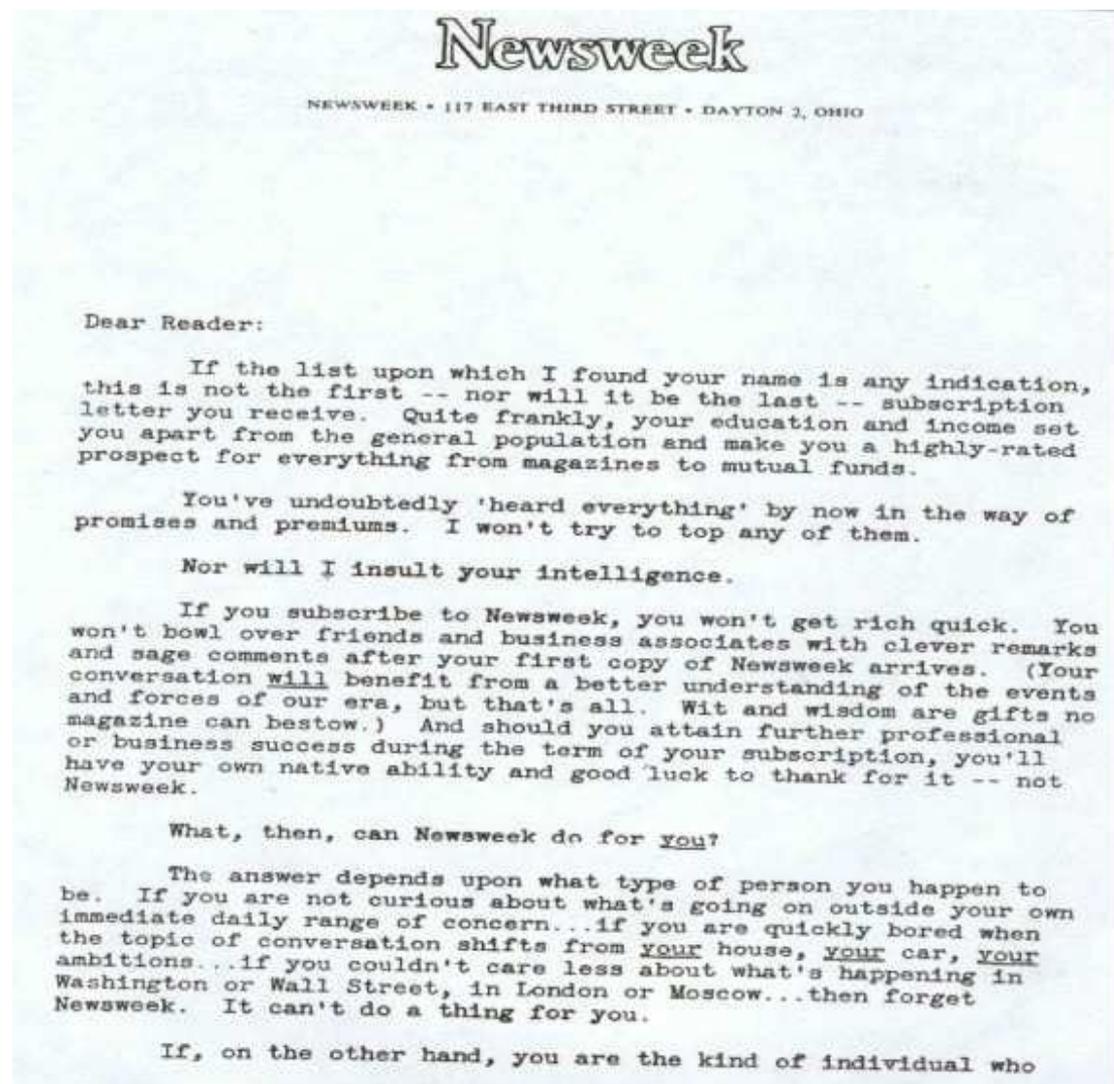
A good example of how to use 'you' effectively, is the *Newsweek* subscription letter written by legendary copywriter Ed McLean - and used for nearly 15 years.

Just think about that for a moment. 15 years being tested against hundreds of alternative letters and it beat *every one, every time*.

The letter consistently returned a higher rate of subscriptions than all the other letters *Newsweek* tried. More than 100 million copies of this letter were mailed!

Absolutely astonishing.

The word 'you' or 'yours' is used 26 times on the first page alone and 53 times in the whole letter. Here's how the letter began:



An absolute classic...

In Murray's book, he also included a true story to underline the importance of 'you' copy in the human psyche. I'd like to share it with you...

Max Hart of the clothing firm, Hart Schaffner & Marx, disliked long copy in his ads. He was always returning creative work with the instruction to his ad agency to cut words out of the copy.

One time, a frustrated copywriter approached Hart with an ad describing the quality of wool and fine tailoring used in the firm's clothing - the main benefit of the company's products.

Hart once again said there were too many words and rejected the ad.

The copywriter said, "*Mr. Hart, if I show you a headline that would make you want to read every word in the ad, no matter how many words I use, will you run this ad?*"

Hart said he would.

The copywriter went away and came back the following day with a new headline. Hart read it and said, "*Run the ad!*"

What was the new headline?

"This Ad Is All About Max Hart."

How different words can - and do - make a difference

Different words CAN and DO make a difference. Believe it, because it's been proven a million times. Every word is a weapon, so it's vital that you consider every one very carefully.

You wouldn't end a sales presentation by telling the customer to "*sign here.*" You would, if you were intelligent, soften the blow a little by saying they can "*OK the paperwork*" or "*approve this form.*"

It's less threatening. Softer. More attractive.

It's the same with your body copy. You don't say "*price*" or "*cost*," you say "*investment.*" You don't say "*house*," you say "*home.*"

You don't say "*sales pitch*," you say "*presentation.*" Don't say, "*used car*," say "*previously owned.*" Don't say "*deposit*," say "*initial investment.*"

Don't say, "*contract*," say "*agreement.*" Don't say, "*buy*," say "*own.*"

Try never to use negative words, like *death, fail, lose, worry, obligation*. Why would you want to, anyway? And, don't use neutral words like '*quality*', '*service*' and '*value*' - as they say absolutely nothing - and therefore have no place in selling copy.

Always try to use positive words, like *easy, guarantee, safety, comfort*, and words with emotion, energy and belief, like *wonderful, announcing, introducing, incredible* (I have provided lists of these for you, in previous articles).

Murray found that the value of using the right words in positive speaking was emphasised in a *Wall Street Journal* story he spotted. The paper reported 40 congressmen receiving nine hours of language training and media coaching.

The purpose of the programme was to help lawmakers use more attractive words and phrases (tested in polling) to sell basic themes like education, social security, defence and tax cuts.

Among the "power adjectives" Republicans were told to use, were '*able*' and '*American*' and to avoid words like '*inoperative*' '*cash flow*', '*feedback*', and almost any word that ends in '*ion*'.

You would think that marketers would know by now, that every word conveys a positive or negative meaning and you have to be very careful with the words you use.

You would also think they would understand that banal phrases and puffery, stop people reading immediately? And that bad spelling, punctuation and grammar, turns people off immediately, especially the more mature audiences.

Well, my friends, you would be *wrong*.

And here are a few bits of junk that I have received, that prove my point.

People do not know these things.



"*I deem it my duty*" Bloody hell. Sounds like D'Artagnan geeing up Aramis, Athos and Porthos, before the Roundheads arrive...



This is just ridiculous. Talk about lack of punctuation. Debenhams certainly don't like commas, that's for sure.

Five lines of copy, 67 words - and only one comma and two full stops.

If it wasn't so serious, it would be funny...

Of course, the creative concept and design of any piece is very important, whether it's an ad, insert, DM pack, email or web page. But, being a direct marketer I can tell you that words are more so.

Words are our common language. Words make people buy, not pictures.

In direct mail for example "the letter sells, the brochure tells" This is proven and without dispute.

How many million times have you heard this? Yet some bozos **still** send brochures out without a letter and concentrate more on pretty pictures than on the copy.

A direct mail pack without a letter is simply a waste of money. DM is the most effective one to one medium available to marketers today. Yes, still.

And the letter is the star. The letter does the selling. A mailpack without one will fail. Simple as that.

I have received two at work, only this week.

I despair. I really do.

How do these idiots get a job, when they know so little?

I archived a quote many years ago that puts it better than I could possibly do:

"The right words focus the reader's attention on your brand by communicating a powerful, attractive big idea.

That idea about your brand, helps build front-of-mind, unaided awareness. The right words that communicate this unexpected idea, give your brand a vitality and a freshness that continue well after the advertising sails into the sunset."

So, playmates, underestimate the power of words at your peril...

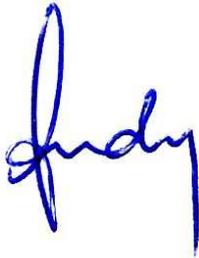
Words, not pictures or numbers, are the TRUE currency of business these days.

I passionately believe that.

The words we use every day, CAN and DO have a massive impact on our lives. The right words can bring us success and everything we want in life.

The wrong words can - and very often do - bring us poor results and failure.

Keep the faith...



About the Author

Andy Owen is Managing Director of Andy Owen & Associates, a leading International direct marketing consultancy, specialising in all aspects of creative and copywriting for direct marketing.

The company has offices in UK, Dubai, Bucharest and Moscow.

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 Masterclasses, Workshops and Seminars for companies and organisations all over the world. <http://www.andyowen.co.uk/speaker-presenter.html>

If you feel your company could benefit from any of these, or if you would like further information on any aspect of copywriting and creative for direct marketing, please contact Andy personally at andyowen@aol.com

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