



Learn From The Best

Continuing the popular Copycat series on contemporary copywriting, Andy Owen this month looks at how the knowledge of the past can be harnessed and utilised effectively in today's competitive marketplace.

Have you ever wondered how the truly great in our business get there and stay there?

It's simple. They study the business.

They watch. They listen. They test. They revisit and they evaluate.

As a result they get better and better. Every single day they obtain more knowledge and they grow. The distance between them and the rest just increases until they are over the hill and gone...

They become leaders. Gurus. Call them what you will.

It's the same in any walk of life. Take David Beckham and his free kicks. He is the best in the world at that skill. And, it's no accident. He practices every single day. He is still on the training ground when everyone else has gone home.

That's what it takes to be the best.

Cindy Crawford was famously quoted in 1994 when asked about her looks.

"You don't think I look like this naturally do you? I work 8 hours a day to look like this. It's very hard".

People in our business don't study. Period. I know of only a handful that do. It staggers me, I have to say...

An awful amount of money could be saved by studying past marketing and communication examples and techniques. And this includes copywriting.

Let's face it. Times change, but, by and large, people don't. It is very likely that a good idea decades ago, would still be a good idea today. And, a bad idea then, has every chance of being a bad idea now.

With a couple of exceptions, most of the books that are best in our business are old. What does that say about our industry today?

How many of you out there have read the works of people like *John Caples, James Webb Young, David Ogilvy, Bill Jayme, Drayton Bird, Murray Raphel and Herschell Gordon Lewis*, to name but seven...?

Very few, if my experience is anything to go by.

A lot of people I have spoken to have never read any of them. A top agency boss I met recently, admitted to have never heard of Caples, Young or Jayme.

I find it both astonishing and very sad.

These people are GIANTS in our business. We can all learn so much from them. I know I do. Every day.

Because of these guys, I came to realise very early that there is NO tougher discipline than writing to pull response...writing copy that sells is a specialist art...

And a bloody tough one, too...

But, after 20+ years in this crazy business, it is my strong belief that this fact is completely misunderstood. Not only by client companies, but by agencies, advisers, consultants and, to a certain degree, by the Industry Associations and the leaders themselves.

You only have to look at the garbage masquerading as direct mail that drops on your desks at work and through your letterboxes at home, every day.

I rest my case.

An understanding of how direct mail works would help. And how the copywriter plays an absolutely crucial role. Here's a quick overview:

A direct mail pack has 5 elements: The Targeting, The Letter, The Offer, The Timing and The Creative.

Over the past 4 or 5 decades, a huge amount of testing has been effected to identify the importance of all of these elements. There are various positions by the experts on this, but most are very close.

Here is mine for what it's worth, based on experience with campaign activity over 2 decades:

Targeting 50%
Letter 22%
Offer 15%
Timing 8%
Creative 5%



Just consider these figures for a moment. And remember, they are importance values. Elements which greatly affect the performance of the mailing pack.

The letter, as you can see, is over 4 times more important than the creative.

It's always been the case, incidentally. In direct mail, it is a proven fact that "the letter sells, the brochure tells".

(So, any of you that are thinking about sending just a brochure on its own -don't. You will be throwing valuable budget down the toilet.)

Do you pay your copywriter 4 times more than you pay your agency or design house for the creative? I bet you don't.

But you should.

These days, there is so much dross out there. As a result, the recipient of your message has a shortening attention span. Latest figures show that most people in the UK receive, in various forms, over 3,000 marketing messages a week.

So, connecting to the reader is absolutely vital. In one-to-one marketing, it is the words that connect. Not the pictures.

It is estimated that the success of a direct mail pack is determined in the first 2-6 seconds, when the reader considers the opening and the PS of the letter.

If there is no relevance to the reader, or the copy contains no benefits or news, then all will be lost. No amount of pretty pictures or budget-busting creative ideas will save it.

Not an opinion by the way. A proven fact.

The lessons are there for all to see. Don't play games with your copywriting. Employ professionals.

Why? Well, I can give you 100 reasons why. Here's the best:

Because they will write better than you. That's why.

But, be sure you don't give your direct mail copywriting brief to your ad agency, sales promotion agency, your PR company or your design house.

They won't have a clue how to write effectively to pull response...

...they won't admit it, though...

Why would you want to do that anyway? When you have a design brief, you don't go to your copywriter. When you get toothache you don't go to your doctor, you go to your dentist.

Horses for courses. Same with copywriting.

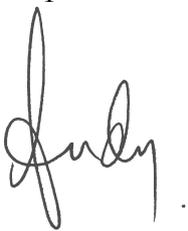
If you have a dm copy requirement, it pays to use someone who understands...

...but preferably one who studies the business...

If you feel like trying yourself, the best place to start is to buy some books from the above individuals and read them from cover to cover. Then read them again.

You'll not get better advice.

Keep the faith...



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>