



10 simple copy tips to make your letters, emails, ads and web pages deliver better results.

When copywriting for response, it's essential to keep it simple...

Because, for your copy to deliver the results you want, **you need to write the way human beings want to read.**

And, in general terms, that means short words, short sentences and short paragraphs.

Believe it, because it is true. Don't be swayed from it. If you are, then be prepared for your copy - and your promotion - to perform poorly.

What is so sad in copy today, is that some of the big brands, now try and set 'tone' in their copy. They have 'brand guardians' who advise on how their copy should 'feel'.

What's staggering about this, is that those brand guardians have never written copy in their lives. Yet, they hog-tie those that do, to such an extent, that what is created, is pedestrian, sterilised and doesn't sell.

It would be laughable if it wasn't so sad.

I could name names here. But I won't. When they read this, they will recognise themselves. They will smile. But they won't change.

Neither will I. I'll continue to challenge them. Because they are wrong.

Every one of us carefully considers the words we use, when we want to get something. It might be chatting to that person you really fancy. It might be the Boss, when you are discussing a salary increase.

Or, a potential customer you are trying to seduce.

In those situations, the correct use of vocabulary is absolutely vital if you want to get the right result. It's the same when you prepare copy for a marketing or promotional campaign.

The most effective writing is simple, transparent writing.

It's not *literary* writing. But a hell of a lot of clients out there today, simply don't realise that. And they are wasting millions because of their naiveté.

We see it everyday, in letters, emails and press ads. On TV and radio. And, especially in websites. The words used – and the way they are delivered – is simply *wrong*.

"Oh yes", they say. "But these are the words - and this is the tone - that our customers expect from us".

Have you ever heard such tripe? Sometimes, this industry just kills me, because it's so full of crap.

Here are some very wise observations on brand absurdity from my chum in Australia - Malcolm Auld - who is one of the smartest direct marketers on the planet today - and he writes a fabulous blog.

These comments were included in a recent piece he wrote about Content Marketing, (known as '*sex without the climax*', because that's effectively what it is), but they are spot on, when talking about customers and brands.

Insight 1: Customers don't really care about brands

Insight 2: Customers don't want relationships with brands

Insight 3: Customers don't want to engage with brands

Insight 4: Customers don't want to join a conversation with a brand

Insight 5: Customers get turned off, if you irritate them with irrelevant marketing about your brand.

It's the same with copy. Customers are not interested in tone and style at all. They are only interested in what's in it for them. Deals and value.

And, as we know, the best way to deliver a valuable deal or an offer is as simple as possible, dripping with emotion and energy, not using robotic and 'fall asleep' copy that is so prevalent these days.

William Zinsser (who sadly died this year, aged 92) wrote one of the classic books on writing, called '*On Writing Well*' in 1976.

It has sold 1.5 million copies and you will find it on the shelf in every serious copywriter's office. Zinsser advocated simplicity, efficiency and enthusiasm when writing. He said:

"Executives and managers at every level are prisoners of the notion that a simple style reflects a simple mind. Actually a simple style is the result of hard work and hard thinking; a muddled style reflects a muddled thinker or a person too dumb or too lazy to organize his thoughts".

How true that is. I can tell you, that writing well is very hard work.

It is much harder to simplify than to complicate. Writing simply and directly only looks easy. But the reality is, it takes loads of skill and experience to compose - and then edit, edit, edit...

You can't write effective copy, if you don't know how copy works.

And most marketers today, don't. What's more, they have no interest in finding out. It's a sad fact, but it explains why we are in such a mess.

The direct marketing industry is virtually dead now. The small number of DMA's around the world that are left, are fighting a losing battle just to survive.

The general marketing industry is fast following it. But it's no surprise to anyone. It's polluted with people that know very little compared to their predecessors - but they have no desire to do anything about it.

Let's face it, if you don't understand copy, then you won't write copy that connects, persuades and sells. And, if you don't write copy that connects, persuades and sells - your promotions will do badly.

If you are the writer, you must take 50% of the blame. If you are the person that signs the copy off, you shoulder the other 50%.

So, here's my attempt to educate that ever-dwindling group, that at least have a desire to get better. Here's how getting back to basics and considering some proven copy commandments will improve your copy.

I have literally hundreds of these - but I've selected these 10 at random, to share with you 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 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. Don't 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. Recognise the 4 platforms of success in contemporary copywriting. They 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 sales letter. It's less than that for an email.

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

(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? If the reader spots an inconsistency, or has reason to doubt something, they're out of your copy in a heartbeat. And won't come back.

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 copy like this works.

Because its warmth and connectivity at reader level, disarms the reader and makes the selling approach more effective.

Here's what Ogilvy 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..."

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

Every one of those 5 words can be replaced with something more meaningful and believable. 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 of your readers will stop reading your letter, email or ad, right there.

Your offer must be in the headline. If it isn't, why should anyone read on?

Every day, millions of pounds are wasted on letters and ads that forget this vital commandment.

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.

Nowadays, this is more important than ever. You must give them *something*. If you don't, they'll go to someone who will. It doesn't have to be 50% OFF. It could be added value – a gift or FREE delivery - or a million other things.

But there has to be something of value. They expect it. Don't disappoint them.

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

There's an easy way to prove this. Start some meaningful testing.

Then you will know.

If you take two pages to write something that should be on one page – you will lose the reader because you'll be rambling. If you need two pages to sell something and you try and cram it on one, your layout will be unattractive and people won't bother reading it.

Write as much or as little copy as is needed to do the complete selling job.

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.

Please believe this, because it's true.

Good use of punctuation allows the writer to control the pace of the selling delivery. The pros have known this for generations.

Commas, dashes and the rest, are a copywriter's best friends. Use them.

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

YOU is the most powerful word because it is talking to the reader – about the reader. We all like to hear about ourselves. We connect with copy that talks about us.

I still hear banal opinions about FREE. "*Could damage our brand*" "*Not our image*". And other crap like that, you hear regularly spouted. These are the same people who want to spend 75% of the message delivery, talking about who they are, how long they've been in business, their mission statement (*no one is in the slightest bit interested*) and other useless stuff.

They should, instead, be telling the reader the benefits that he or she will enjoy as a result of all these things. That's a *massive* difference.

So, there we are, playmates. TEN great bits of advice. Embrace them and use them with my compliments - and your response levels will rise. I guarantee it.

But please, *please*, don't take copy for granted like most marketers appear to do in the industry today. Learn how copy works – and why it works. Nothing in marketing today is more important.

Whatever you are doing, whatever media you use, you need words. And the right ones will bring you success and everything you want in life. But the wrong ones will bring you poor results and failure.

I'll leave the last word to William Zinsser. "*You'll never be a good writer unless you develop a respect for words and a curiosity about their shades of meaning, that is almost obsessive.*

"Study the masters, but also your contemporaries. Writing is learned by imitation. If anyone asked me how I learned to write, I'd say I learned by reading the men and women who were doing the kind of writing I wanted to do - and then tried to figure out how they did it."

Amen to that. It just reminds me of this classic line:

'If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants...'

Keep the faith...



ABOUT YOUR AUTHOR

Andy Owen is MD of **Andy Owen Copy & Creative Ltd**, one of the world's most respected and experienced International direct marketing consultancies, specialising in all aspects of creative, copy and strategy for direct and digital marketing.

Andy has been writing copy for marketing campaigns for 31 years. He writes copy and full campaigns every day.

He was inducted into the Direct Marketing Hall Of Fame in February 2015.

Visit www.andyowencopyandcreative.com

Andy runs in-house copywriting training for companies of all types and also presents direct marketing Masterclasses, Workshops and Seminars all over the world.

If you would like further information on these, or indeed any aspect of copywriting and creative for direct marketing, please contact Andy personally at andyowen@aol.com

All the previous **Copycat** articles are available to read and download at www.andyowencopyandcreative.com/thelegend.html

Also discover **Andy's FREE marketing advice and observations** at www.andyowencopyandcreative.com/marketingadvice.html