



“You can say the right thing about a product – and no one will listen. You’ve got to say it in such a way that people will feel it in their gut.

Because, if they don’t feel it there, nothing will happen”.

Bill Bernbach said that.

I’ll tell you something, the great man would have ulcers the size of footballs if he was here today.

Why?

Because, Bill was a stickler for getting it right. He hated mediocre work as he felt it was lazy work. He was a consummate communications professional and taught us so much about what is good in our business.

And he *cared*.

He would look at the vast majority of work produced today and immediately reach for the bottle. Because, it is very rare indeed these days, to read or see a promotional ad, letter, email, webpage or anything else for that matter, that moves anyone *remotely* like his quote at the top of this page.

Most of the work I see these days, just doesn’t say *anything*. It’s simply garbage that rarely connects or influences the reader. It just *exists*...

Bill simply wouldn’t believe it.

He would be as perplexed and mystified as I am. And I’m not alone.

I was having lunch the other day with a group of people who have graced this industry with their talents, collectively, for over 150 years. Every single one of us around the table, agreed that today's marketers and so-called creatives are producing the worst quality of work seen in our industry, ever.

So, why are the majority of marketers today happy with sub-standard work?

I can tell you. It's simple.

Because they know shit. That's why...

Sorry, but it had to be said. And I'm going to show you some incredibly bad examples later to back that up. Here's one to start with:

Sapphire gb
delivering *your* success

Mr Andy Owen
Head of Marketing
Andy Owen & Associates Ltd
1 Highfield Road
Hall Green
Birmingham
B28 0EL

m226

Dear Mr Owen

Information! Information! More information! Online, emailed, web, engine searched. In 2006 the newest buzzword is WOM!

Since Eve gave Adam the apple and told him how delicious it was, WOM has been rediscovered in this Googled age!

Sapphiregb have kept abreast of all the newest techno ways of functioning but we have always relied on our clients passing our name on via WOM.

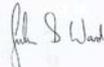
We are an infectiously optimistic team that thrive on achieving our aims! Our aim is the same as yours - business growth. The Internet is no substitute for WOM because people love interaction not just with a screen!!

Having a Website and relying on its promise of anonymous customers and great wealth would be wonderful. However without WOM and a physical presence of your URL address how will you be found in the Google Haystack.

Why don't you consider the Sapphiregb print and mailing service. Send out something that will create some WOM from your potential customers.

Hope you like our aim with our postcards!

Email: enquiries@sapphiregb.com
or via telephone on 0191 4972828 for a quotation.

Yours sincerely

Julian & the Sapphiregb team

P.S. For those who are still wondering WOM=Word of mouth!!

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You simply couldn't make it up. It makes me cringe just reading it. And look at the letterhead layout too. It's beyond my comprehension.

2015 did not start well for me. I came back from a nice holiday over Christmas and New Year, fully relaxed and recharged and ready to go.

Then I walked into a shower of you know what...

Since January 5th and for most days since, I have seen so much poor work in this New Year, that it has greatly depressed me. The apology for a DM letter above, was part of this.

So, I felt I had to write about it.

Dross is seemingly everywhere. I have been shaking my head more than Stevie Wonder in the last few weeks.

Three questions come immediately to mind. Who is creating this rubbish? Who is signing it off? And why is it happening?

I'll tell you the answer to the first two questions, because they're easy.

That despicable double act. Charlatans and Buffoons.

The charlatans creating this work haven't got a clue about communication. They have no idea what works and what doesn't.

That's because they don't study, so they have no idea about what is good and what is bad – and, more importantly, what works and what doesn't.

What makes it totally unforgivable for me, is the fact that this information is available to them. All they have to do is look for it.

Bill left us with so much knowledge. So did David (Ogilvy). John Caples. and Claude Hopkins. Gene Schwartz and Vic Schwab. James Webb Young and Howard Gossage. And Joe Sugarman, Drayton, Murray and Herschell continue to do so.

There are many others, too...

Here's some advice at where to start looking:

<http://www.andyowencopyandcreative.com/thebooksyoushouldread.html>

Let me be blunt here. I'm not going to pussyfoot around this anymore.

If you work in creative and copy and you are serious about what you do, you must start learning from these great people.

They set the whole bloody thing up. You wouldn't be working in the industry if it wasn't for them. They are immense people and your work will be instantly better and more effective if you took their advice.

So, now let's turn our attention to the buffoons. These are the people in marketing who sign this dreadful work off. I can tell you now, that they have even less knowledge than the charlatans.

Hard to believe, but true.

This is how it works. The charlatans create abysmal work. The buffoons, who know no better, like it and sign it off.

What this means, is the partially sighted are leading the blind. Not a good idea when you are walking through a minefield. Because, someone is going to put their foot on something that will go 'bang'.

And believe me, those explosions are deafening right now.

I suppose we shouldn't care. After all, it's their budget they are wasting and their career they are jeopardising.

But I do care. I care *passionately*.

Because we are damaging the communication process. Irreparably.

The recipients of these communications are getting more and more pissed off by the whole process. And that is hurting us all.

Consumers and business people are receiving so much badly written and conceived communications, that they are now in a negative state of mind before they even look at it. You only have to see what is happening with emails to see that.

10% opening rates and this percentage is going south at a rate of knots.

It's now happening with all the other media as well.

No one really looks forward to receiving mail any more. Off-the-page ads are wallpaper and rarely deliver. TV ads are getting fast forwarded because there is little or no interest. Social media is rapidly getting on people's nerves. SMS's are received by eyes that have glazed over long ago.

Website visitors are leaving web pages after less than 10 seconds, because the creative and copy aren't powerful enough to make an impression on them.

Everywhere you go, apathy and disinterest rules. And it's our fault.

Sadly, this isn't a surprise. This has been coming for the last 20 years. In 1996, I wrote an article about the lowering of standards of copy and creative and the consequences it could have for our business.

Well, I was right. Nothing has improved in the communication business since then. Nothing. In fact, it's all gone the other way...

Listen to this story told to me by my late chum, the wonderful and irrepressible Roger Millington.

A few years ago I was asked by a "consultancy" to give them my overview of a marketing plan they had put together for a major client. As far as my memory goes, the client was about to launch some radically new type of TV's -- it may have been the first flat-screen TV's.

Anyway, the marketing consultancy had come up with some unbelievably complex plan.

First they researched and analysed the UK population on the basis of age, family structure, where they lived and previous TV purchases.

Then, various plans went into effect, based on totally arbitrary criteria. For instance, is someone who lives in a council flat more likely to buy an expensive new telly than someone who lives in a mansion?

With not the slightest idea of the answer, the consultancy came up with entirely different plans for each segment. Whichever social group you were in, you received a different sequence of phone calls and mailings instructing you to apply for permission to visit a stockist on Launch Day.

You might have to follow four or five steps before you got the magic ticket allowing you to go into your nearest John Lewis store.

From start to finish the whole exercise would take several months and cost several hundred thousand pounds. Apparently the client adored the whole thing.

I was given a huge document to review over the weekend. On Monday, I was asked to contact the consultancy to let them know if I had spotted any flaws.

I called them on Monday:

"You will get better results for £1,000"

"Is that your fee, Roger?"

"No, my fee is £25. This is what you do.

You buy 800 pots of whitewash and 800 brushes, and mail them to the managers of the 800 biggest shops with instructions to paint a notice on the window on Launch Day: AMAZING NEW TYPE OF TV IN-STORE TODAY AT 10am"

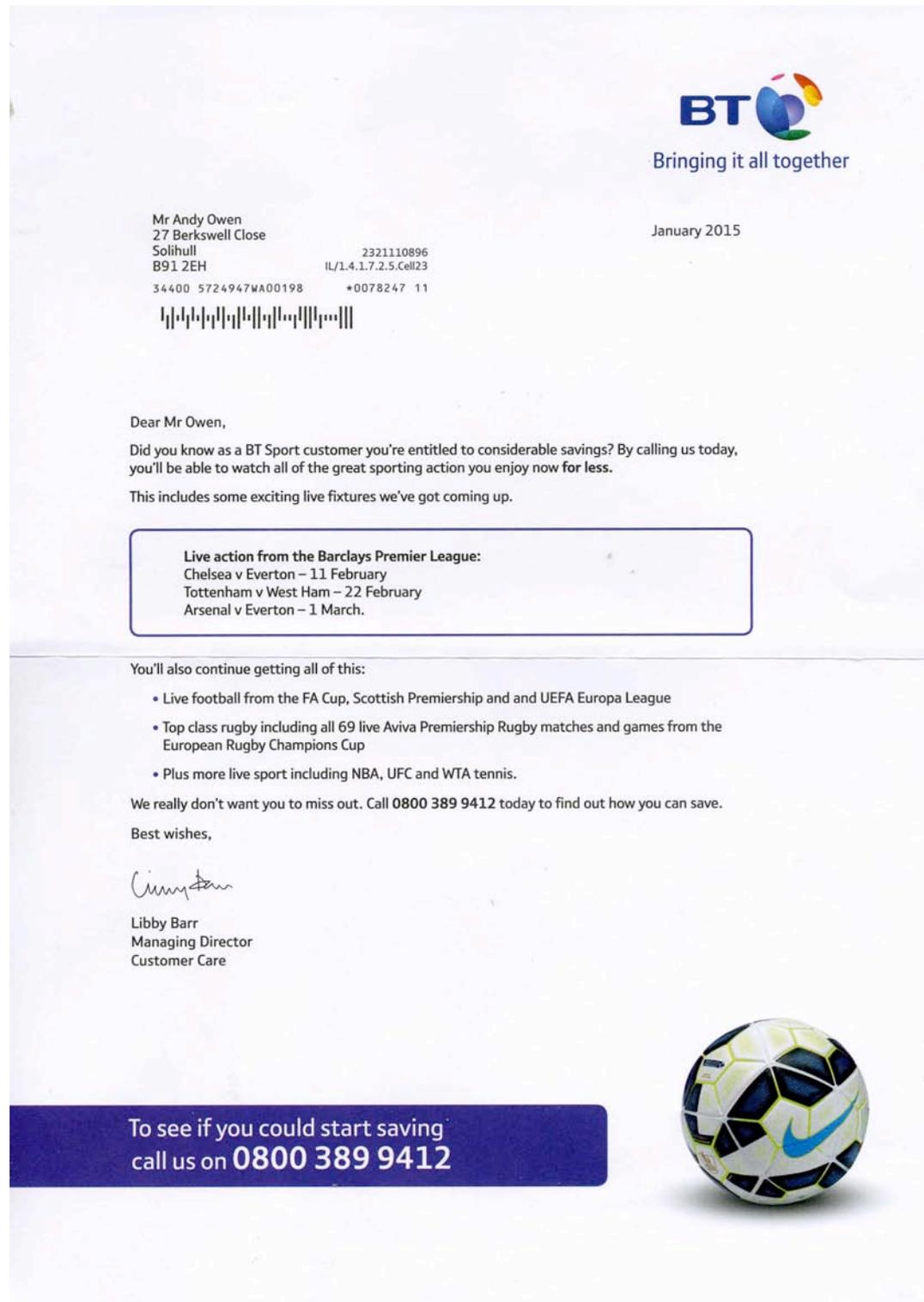
"You're having us on!"

"No. My £1,000 budget will work. Your £250,000 budget won't"

I never got my £25 fee.

The dopey client then went on to be Marketing Director of British Telecom.

I think he might still be there. Just look at this appalling direct mail letter I received recently.



Just another incredibly bad letter from BT. They haven't got a clue about how to do DM right. It's been that way for as long as I can remember. They're hopeless. Probably only Royal Mail are consistently worse.

Let me tell you why this letter is bad...

I am already a BT Sport customer. I subscribe for Premier League football. So all that action they refer to, I am already getting.

But that very weak opening line, asks me to call them to find out how I can get 'considerable savings' that apparently I am entitled to.

The answer is 'no'. I will not call you. I have better things to do.

You had a great opportunity to use this letter to TELL me what the offer was. Not use the space to witter on about stuff I already have and know.

I would like to bet, that this letter bombed and I will get another one very soon which will outline whatever the offer is, in more detail. You can put your mortgage on the fact that it will have something to do with changing my phone provider to BT. I'm on Virgin.

Well, BT, here's a bit of FREE advice. Put in your letter, exactly what the benefits are to me doing this. Tell me what I will get that's better than what I have at the moment. It's not rocket science.

I'll gladly write the campaign for you.

This is a poster I saw on the London Underground.



REVEL? When was the last time you used that word? I was totally stunned when I saw it. It looks SO wrong. "Revel in cashback on my shopping". Are they serious? Could they have said it better? YES!

PPI COMPENSATION!

TODAY IS THE DAY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!



**LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO
BEAT THE BANKS AND GET YOU
YOUR MONEY BACK + INTEREST!**

YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE AND EVERYTHING TO GAIN!

**GET BACK WHAT
IS RIGHTFULLY
YOURS!**

Have you taken out or paid off a loan,
credit card, store card or mortgage or any
hire purchase agreement **IN THE LAST 10
YEARS? IF SO, YOU COULD BE OWED
THOUSANDS**, call now 0800 088 7210!

MRS GILL
RECENTLY WON **£50,048**

MR GUMLEY
RECENTLY WON **£121,642**

WITH NO UP FRONT FEES!

No account details? No Problems!

Universal suspicion & distrust by the banks

Banks made
to pay back
billions to
PPI victims

**Lloyds admits
errors after PPI
mis-sell sting**

**"Only 1 in 10
people sold PPI
have claimed
so far"**

Natalie Ceeney
(Chief Ombudsman)



**"Claim4Refunds got me £10,800.
I'm delighted as I didn't have the time
or confidence to do this myself."**

Mr Bash, Manchester

**"Claim4Refunds won my
claim in just 20 days!"**

Mr Bovingdon, London



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*Customer satisfaction rate not scientific and based on number of claims dealt with versus number of complaints received. A FOS complaint rate begins to rise up to 8 weeks to investigate your claim. These weeks may not be typical and should not be expected that we will win your claim within three weeks. *Not available for all banks, please contact us for details. † Claim4Refunds operates on a 'No Win No Fee' basis. A condition for a payment of your funds that being restricted to 20 hrs on your behalf and after 14 days of making your 'Letter of Authorisation' you do not wish to continue pursue your claim with us. The condition fee is the reasonable costs incurred for the work undertaken. Please see our terms and conditions.

Just look at this closely. There are SEVEN exclamation marks in this!

Virtually every statement is followed by an exclamation mark.

Herschell told us many years ago, that if you emphasise everything, you emphasise nothing. And this is what has happened here. Add to that, the overuse of caps instead of upper/lower case and a layout that was originated in junior school and you have a total mess.

Are you starting to understand now, why I had to write this Copycat?

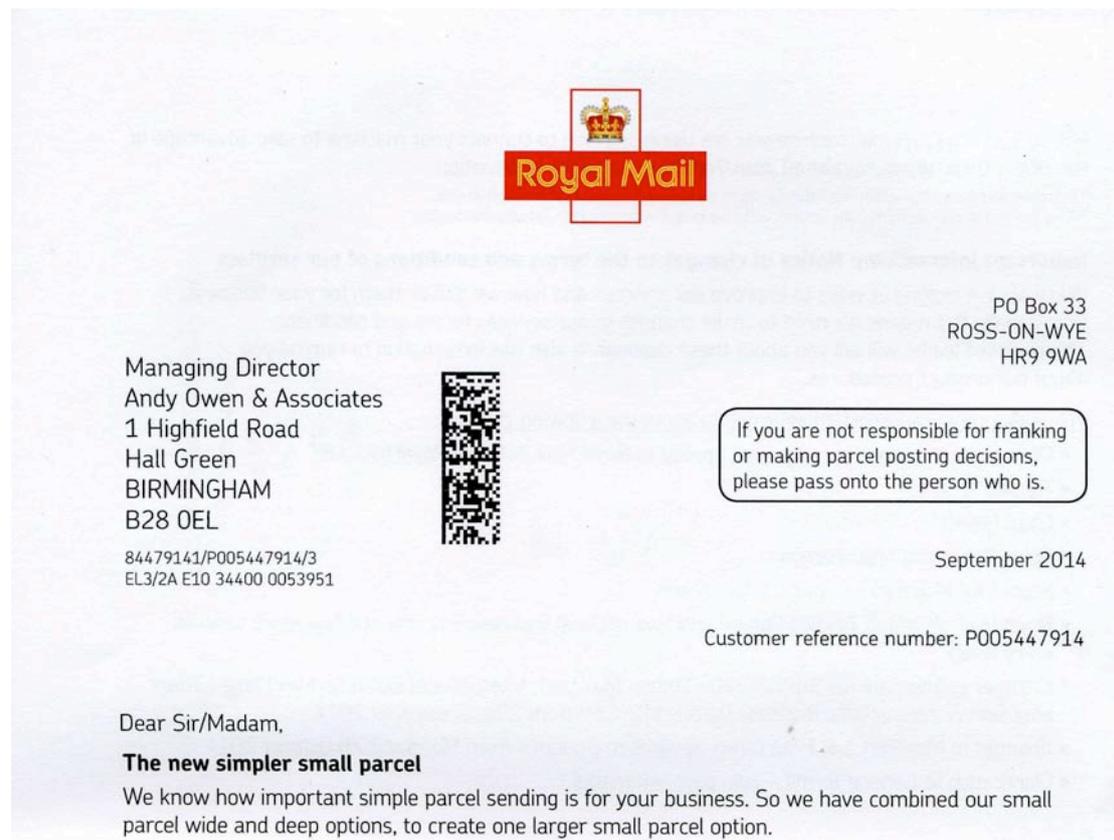
If you care about our business as strongly as I do, then you will have seen how gross like the above examples (I have at least another 20, received since the turn of the year), has given me the chills.

There is no doubt in my mind that things are getting worse.

Regular readers of this column will understand the huge importance of the opening lines of copy in a letter, email, ad, website etc.

If you don't hook the reader early, they will leave. They are only looking for a reason to stop reading. So don't give them one.

Here are two examples of how not to do it...



You can always rely on good old Royal Mail to get it wrong. They do very little else in their DM.

One of the worst things you can do in any sales communication, is 'preach' to the reader. Most people switch off instantly. In this example, I read the opening line and replied out loud, "No you don't".

I suspect most other recipients did the same thing.

Absolutely awful.

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www.capiota.co.uk

Dear Mr Owen

Ref: Unsecured business finance

At Capiota we love hearing success stories about how our innovative Business Loan helps to improve and support companies throughout the UK. Whether the finance is used for a new product range or additional staff, it's amazing what a cash injection can do for your business.

Another mistake which is instant death in copy, is talking about yourself. No one is interested in you or your company at all. So, if anyone at Capiota is listening, tell me what you are going to do for me.

Not what you think.

It continues. Anyone out there, have any idea about what this is about?

Premier Banking

Enjoy up to £1,000 overdraft buffer with a Barclays Premier Current Account, just for being **STU**

Barclays Premier rewards you for being you

It's nice to have a bit of leeway with your finances and a Barclays Premier Current Account allows you the freedom with a no fee, no interest overdraft buffer of up to £1,000.

Representative example – If you use an overdraft of £1,200 you will be charged £1.50 a day. All overdrafts are subject to status and application. Overdrafts are payable on demand.

To open a Barclays Premier Current Account, you'll need an annual gross income of £75,000+ or savings or investments of £100,000+.

To find out more pop into any branch or visit barclays.co.uk/premier

BARCLAYS

I must finish with this piece of utter garbage. Perhaps this explains it all.

I was in Dubai a couple of weeks ago and picked up Campaign magazine to read over lunch. This was in a piece by the Editor. I have highlighted the paragraph.

Read it and weep...

integrated services come from? Industry watchers are suggesting that it might be from the airline.

A one-trick pony is history. And the existence of ring-fenced silos is proving counterproductive to agility that the eternal beta mode demands.

What a shop is best at might not always be in demand or command a premium.

I read it and stared into space. He is apparently talking about agencies.

It's bullshit. And it's total bollocks. And it is very worrying.

OK. Unfortunately I haven't got time to share anymore of this nonsense with you now, because I have to write campaigns that sell products for my clients. Remember that? Selling?

It used to be all the rage once...

Anyway, I hope you share my concern about what's going on out there. Those of us that care, need to get together and try to do something about these idiots that are killing our beautiful business.

I don't know what we can do, but we have to do *something*...

Their naivete and stupidity comes from lack of knowledge. But there is no excuse for it. Everything they need to get better, is out there.

Very few creatives and marketing decision makers today know about the great people I have highlighted earlier in this article.

And those that might have heard their names, seem to have zero interest in them. So, realistically, improvement won't happen. You know it and so do I.

But we have to try...

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.

He was recently inducted into the Direct Marketing Hall of Fame.

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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

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