



A story about the legendary Gene Schwartz – and why good copywriters must always study, listen and possess a great insight into human nature

It was 1976.

Martin Edelston had a dream. But, it was quickly turning into a nightmare.

He was running his tiny business from the basement of his home in New York, to save money. He even ran the phone line down himself - and it was hanging along the ceiling like an old curtain rail.

His desk and one filing cabinet were squeezed next to the boiler.

He had already burned a hole in his limited start-up capital. He was down to his last \$3,500.

Martin KNEW he had a great idea. He was convinced about it. And he had the passion and ambition to make it happen. But, without sales, he was struggling.

Very badly.

Martin was an entrepreneur with extraordinary vision and oodles of talent. But, as with many hugely talented businessmen and women, he had little or no understanding of marketing and communication – and how they work.

He simply didn't know how to communicate the tremendous value and benefits of his product to his perceived market.

He went upstairs to the kitchen and made himself a cup of coffee. He turned and looked at himself in the mirror. He saw a worried man. He was fast going broke. And it was making him ill.

He had to do something - and fast.

A few months before, a colleague had told him about a guy that was creating quite a stir in advertising circles. People were calling him a genius, as the ads he wrote and created, were delivering incredible results.

His name was Eugene M. Schwartz. But everyone referred to him as Gene Schwartz.

Martin decided to call him and see if he could help. Surely, he thought, if there was anyone that has the ability to give me the sales I need, it was Gene Schwartz.

He spoke with Gene on the phone and told him he needed an ad for his company. They agreed to meet the very next day.

Gene told him he would write the ad, but it would cost Martin \$2,500. Just to give you an idea, that's about \$12,000 in today's money.

It virtually drained his entire company budget, leaving him only \$1,000 left.

But, Martin felt there was something about this guy. He agreed without hesitation. They went right to work, and for the next four hours, Martin talked about his idea, while Schwartz took copious notes.

Gene liked Martin right away - and let him talk enthusiastically and passionately about his product - a new business newsletter called *Boardroom* - and why it was unique and what it would do for its subscribers.

He found out that the main benefit was that subscribers would enjoy a small library of business knowledge condensed and packed into one short, tightly edited document they could read in an hour.

After Martin had gone, Gene mulled over their conversation. He looked again at his notes and scribbled a few more. Ideas started to bubble in his mind. He continued to develop them in the car, as he drove home.

Gene and his wife were going out to dinner with friends that night. He shaved, showered and changed - then poured himself a drink. He was still thinking of Martin Edelston and their conversation.

He picked up his pad. And that night, in the time it took his wife to put on her makeup, Gene Schwartz wrote the ad that was about to make Martin's life a hell of a lot better.

Gene tells the story. *"My wife takes a long time to make up. While she did that, I wrote the ad. I put in the ad from stern to stern. I couldn't give it to him the same night because he would think it was worth nothing. So I then put it away for two weeks".*

"And in two weeks, I sent it to him".

The headline of the ad read:

Do the legwork first. Study, research, dig and dig deeper...

Schwartz was a consummate craftsman. He read, re-read and re-read again, all the information he could find about the product or service he was selling - and dug out all the nuggets - the benefits - one by one.

He said many times, that by the end of a brief, he'd know more about a product than the person who'd created it.

This is the way any serious copywriter must work.

You can't sell anything, unless you know everything - and more - about it. If you don't do the legwork on research, your copy will fail.

I always say to my clients, "*You know more about your business than I do. Yet I know more about communication than you.*"

For me to deliver effective work for you, it is essential that I understand your business and the challenges you face, as well as you. So give me as full a brief as you can."

Good copywriters must be great listeners, be very street-wise and understand human nature

Gene also believed that to be an effective copywriter, you had to understand human nature and be an avid reader, listener and never lose touch with the real people in the world.

I share that belief, passionately. And I covered that very topic in a previous *Copycat*, called '**Understanding people and human nature are essential skills for a copywriter**'.

http://www.andyowencopyandcreative.com/pdfs/direct_response_copywriting_techniques_human_nature.pdf

I'll leave it to Gene, to explain his views on this vital area...

"I come from Butte, Montana. Now, you've probably come from a lot of different places rather than this particular place. I was very fortunate to be born in Butte, Montana. It's a very small town of 30,000 people. I grew up there. I left when I was 15. I live in Manhattan - I lead an extremely sophisticated life in Manhattan. But I try never to lose the Butte, Montana in me.

Why? Because the Butte, Montana in me, is everybody, in this huge country of ours".

What a fabulous last line. But he is so right. You have to keep in touch with the real world. Read everything, even if it isn't your particular area of interest. Watch as many movies as you can.

Talk to every cab driver you meet. Speak to everyone you can. Be the best listener you have ever met. Gene used to say, "*Talk little, listen much*".

And the reason is simple. Because it's your market talking.

Remember, you don't have to have great ideas, if you can *hear* great ideas.

When you are writing for response, you find out quickly that the creativity is in the market and in the product. All a good writer is doing is joining the two together.

And the only meaningful way you can get the creativity out of your product and your market - is to research, study and dig it out.

I believe the success I enjoy as a copywriter is because I work harder than most - and I totally immerse myself in every copy challenge I handle. Add to that, a fair amount of 'street nous' and a sprinkling of understanding people - and what gets put down on paper as a result, works nearly every time.

So, if you want to write successful copy, stop talking - and start listening more...

When you are at parties or get-togethers, introduce yourself - and then be a listener. The technique of listening is extremely simple, yet most people don't really practice it.

Gene tells a fabulous story about this...

"You look the other person in the eye and you say, "Gee, you're wonderful.

You say, 'Well, isn't that interesting. What do you do?' 'Oh, I'm in publishing' 'Who do you work for?' 'Phillips Publishing.'

'Oh, terrific! What do you do there?'

And you sit and you listen - and you listen - and you listen.

And every time they say something, you nod. And you memorize specific statements, so you can feed them back to them in the same conversation. In that way, the person goes into a talking frenzy.

She begins to feel very important, very comfortable and very happy - and she loves you and will confide in you. That gives you her inner secrets.

Pardon me for saying this - but I have had a dinner conversation with a woman I have never met before, at which the entire table around us - 12 people - stopped when she said, 'I tell you my cervix is no larger than my little fingernail!'

This is because people will become hypnotized by their own stories".

Copywriters should be made aware of the campaign results

As well as being good listeners, Gene & I also share a strong belief that copywriters should be completely conversant with the statistics and returns relating to their work.

But, many clients don't do this. But they should.

The worst thing you can do to your copywriters is to separate them from the results of the campaigns they have toiled over, including every list, every test and every cell.

They are a vital part of the process. The information and knowledge gained from past campaigns is absolute gold dust for the professional writer, as they can incorporate this into future campaigns.

So, clients, don't keep this information to yourself. Share and discuss it with your copywriter...

I'll let Gene give you his thoughts on this...

"Copywriters who write copy for the sake of copy and words alone are doomed to failure. If you keep your copywriters away from their results - and their comparative results on every single test, they're not going to do very much for you.

Boardroom sends me thick packages of results. And I will spend three or four or five hours going over the results in detail for them. I think of myself as a person who creates 20% difference in returns. And I like decimal points. You've got to get those results. You can't know something from the outside. You have to know it inside".



The inspirational Eugene M. Schwartz, died of a heart attack on 6th September 1995 at his home in Manhattan.

He was only 68.

The industry lost a great man on that day. To some people I know, he was the best ever. Whether he was or not, Gene certainly was up there as a copywriter of the highest order – and someone who made a real difference.

Gene understood copywriting and the power of words. He knew that good copywriting was pure salesmanship in print.

As with all the greats, you can learn so much from him.

He wrote some of the most celebrated lines in direct-mail advertising, such as "Give Me 15 Minutes and I'll Give You a Super-Power Memory," which launched the first book of the memory expert Harry Lorraine. He left us 10 books, including the most notable – '*Breakthrough Advertising*' – which is so rare now, it will cost you over £100 – if you could find a copy.

They say there are only 130 copies left in the world.

One final point, as this is one that needs to be made, constantly...

The right words, written by the right copywriter, can change lives and company fortunes – as was proved with Martin Edelston. It is very likely that if Gene hadn't written that ad in 1976, a \$100 million dollar company would never have existed.

Just think about that for a minute...

That's what the power of words – the right ones, anyway – can do...

Never forget it...

Keep the faith



P.S. Have you had a good look around my new website yet? If you haven't, then I worry about you. There are so many goodies in there for you, including a number of really useful 'How To' documents, all FREE to download, plus some archive stuff never been made available before. And, much, much more...

ABOUT YOUR AUTHOR

Andy Owen is MD of **Andy Owen Copy & Creative Ltd**, a leading International direct marketing consultancy, specialising in all aspects of creative, copy and strategy for direct and digital marketing.

The company's corporate website is www.andyowencopyandcreative.com

Andy is personally involved in every creative and copy element that is produced by the consultancy. 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.

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 Copycat articles are available to read and download at <http://www.andyowencopyandcreative.com/thelegend.html>