



### How to use the envelope for maximum effect

Probably the greatest envelope line ever written in our business is this...

*"How much should you tip the waiter if you're planning to steal the ashtray?"*

This was the strapline on a subscription mailing envelope for *Psychology Today* magazine, created by the late, great, Bill Jayme...

Bill also wrote this envelope line for the same magazine...

*"Do you lock the bathroom door behind you, even if there's no one home?"*

Bill was a genius when it came to subscription mailings. He was the best. Almost certainly, the best ever. And, he had style. Bags of it...

Here's a very rare shot of Bill - he's on the left - with another couple of legends - good friend Murray Raphael and Walter Schmid, taken in Sydney, Australia, many years ago.



It is said that Bill charged over \$40,000 to write a subs mailing. That was 20 years ago. What's more, he got it. Because he was THAT good...

He lived in California. Clients had to come to him. He NEVER visited them.

And, there was a three-month waiting list.

I never met him. And I regret that enormously...

Of course, in those days, greatness was recognised. Clients these days would probably find that story amazing. Simply because they haven't got a clue anymore about what's great work and what isn't.

Asking some of the marketing dumbos today to pay \$40 grand and wait 3 months for a top-class subscription pack that works, would be greeted with hilarity.

It would be beyond their comprehension.

They just prefer to bumble on with something in-house, probably created by a recently hired graduate, breathed on by the editor and out it goes....

I call it 'tick in the box mentality'...

That's why subs packs are in general, underperforming now. They all look and sound the same, and are so weak and flaccid. Even the great names have caught the disease...

Harvard Business Review used to do fantastic mailings. Now they're awful. Time Magazine the same...

And our UK B2B industry stuff – Precision Marketing, Marketing, Marketing Week, Admap - people who should know better – are just putting out very poor stuff...

Bill's style was storytelling copy. Something else that's disappeared these days. But, for what it's worth, I think it could well have a renaissance. Quite soon, too...

...watch this space...

Mind you, that needs a brave client. And the last one was seen around 10 years ago, leaving for the coast...

Anyway, as usual, I digress...back to the subject matter of this article...

Envelopes and how they should be used, has been a subject of many a debate for a long, long time. The battle was raging long before you or I got into this business.

I remember one of the first questions I was asked on the subject: *"Does copy on the outer envelope help or hurt?"*

I still get asked this same question. I always answer the same...

The outer envelope has a single purpose in the selling process and that's TO GET ITSELF OPENED...

Here's my favourite envelope of all time. It was sent to my wife, who, like myself, loves animals in general and dogs in particular. Especially greyhounds...

This was a fundraising mailing to generate much-needed help for retired greyhounds...and of course, was pure emotion.

Just look at those eyes and the supporting message...it's an absolutely brilliant outer – completely irresistible...



The envelope has to give the recipient a relevant and benefit-laden reason to open it...

As Herschell once said. "Start your story on the envelope. But don't finish it. The reader has to open your envelope to hear the rest of the story". As usual, from the great man, sound, intelligent advice.

But the story must have relevance. And it must offer a benefit...

Here's a good example...



This is one of ours - and was created as part of a new mailing pack to be tested against the client's current control. The pack worked very well and beat the control by some distance...

If your brand is very strong, your logo can be a pull in itself. But that's very rare these days, as very few companies can still boast it.

You should test envelopes ruthlessly. There are many things you could try.

Things like different inclusions, use of a real stamp, lasered envelopes against window envelopes, different offers - and also a proven little creative trick of having something interesting just peeping out of the corner of the window...

And, why not test something other than a typical envelope? A box, a sleeve, something that will stand out. Three-dimensional mailers work very well in all the tests I've seen. But you see so few these days...

But it's all about making an impression...

Direct marketing guru Siegfried Vogele, Dean of the Institute for Direct Marketing in Munich, Germany, once said...

*"There is a direct correlation between direct mail and personal selling. The envelope is a sales person who must make a good first impression. You never have a second chance to make a good first impression."*

Have a think about that for a minute and then look at your envelopes. Do they make a good first impression? Do your salesmen consistently get turned away at the gate...?

Poor quality envelopes, by the way, are the equivalent of a badly dressed salesman. Penny pinch on quality and you'll suffer.

And rightly so, in my book. Cheapskates should burn at the stake...

Better paper creates a better impression and makes your piece rise above the general noise level. It shows respect ...

The envelope these days is a key part of the overall selling process in direct mail and, increasingly in non-personalised door drops. Put a teaser message on the envelope - something that makes it more attractive and inviting than all the other letters of the day.

Here's how not to do it. As we all know to our cost, most companies in the financial services industry, really have lost the plot these days. Now the consumers have seen through all their tricks, they quite clearly are running out of ideas.

Look at this piece of total garbage...



Mr Andrew E Owen  
27 Berkswell Close  
SOLIHULL  
West Midlands  
B91 2EH

30471

Great news — **We've**  
**Nothing**  
to offer you...

With a message like that, why should anyone do anything other than throw it in the bin? In my view, it's time to pack up when you put out something like that ...

A few knowledgeable creatives spend as much as 50% of their time on the envelope. Why? Well, it's simple...if you don't get the audience past the envelope, it doesn't matter what's inside - it won't be read.

Here's a nice little example I picked up in South Africa recently, aimed at the fairer sex. It worked exceptionally well by all accounts - and deservedly so.

Very clever...



*"The role of the envelope is to create standout in a cluttered environment - to get someone to take notice and read the content..."*says Paul Tullo of Tullo Marshall Warren.

Paul is quite right of course. That's exactly what we should be trying to achieve.

Mind you, our bumbling friends at Royal Mail have not helped the cause in recent times. The flawed 'pricing in proportion' decision is already starting to cause problems for clients.

I know of two personally, that changed previously successful 220 square packs to 185 square to save postage increases. Immediately they saw response levels go down.

So much so, both of them have reverted back to the original size and immediately they have seen a return to the response levels they were previously enjoying.

Why has this happened? Well, I've had many discussions on this subject lately. And, the consensus of opinion is the smaller sizes are not, in the main, proving as attractive to the recipients.

Funnily enough, we saw this happen many years ago when we started to test C5 packs against previously successful DL controls. That's been continued of course, with C5 now far and away the most popular.

It does appear that for envelopes at least, small is not beautiful...

All this of course, is just another example of *"it's not what it costs in our business - it's what it delivers..."*

But, because of PIP, clients just won't have it. I've lost count of the frustrations we have had trying to convince them to pay a little more to stand out.

Everything has to be as cheap as possible. Nothing else seems to matter....

Overprint or plain? The debate continues...

Overprinted envelopes can be tremendously effective, but also, on occasions, plain outers can get the job done.

This is due to the increasing volume of crap direct mail people are receiving, plus the fact that a lot of them now recognise their new-found sense of power. So it makes them feel good to dump something, purely based on the message on the outer.

In B2B for example, battleaxe secretaries protecting certain executives and those blinkered executives themselves, will now instantly dump any mail they perceive as containing promotional material without even opening it.

And clearly, an outer message basically tells them...

But, be assured of this. They are in the minority. Latest industry figures suggest that 85% of consumer direct mail is opened and read. The figure is slightly less at 78% for business mail.

*(...incidentally, that's a damn sight higher than ad, insert or door-drop percentages and in a completely different division to emails...)*

So, if your boss tells you that your outer envelopes must not contain a promotional message, because *"no one opens them if they do"*, show him/her the figures. And suggest if he/she doesn't believe them, do a test.

Then you'll know for certain.

And, while you're at it, also add that you're pleased that your customers are as far removed from your boss's short-sighted attitudes as it's possible to be. Otherwise you'd be out of business...

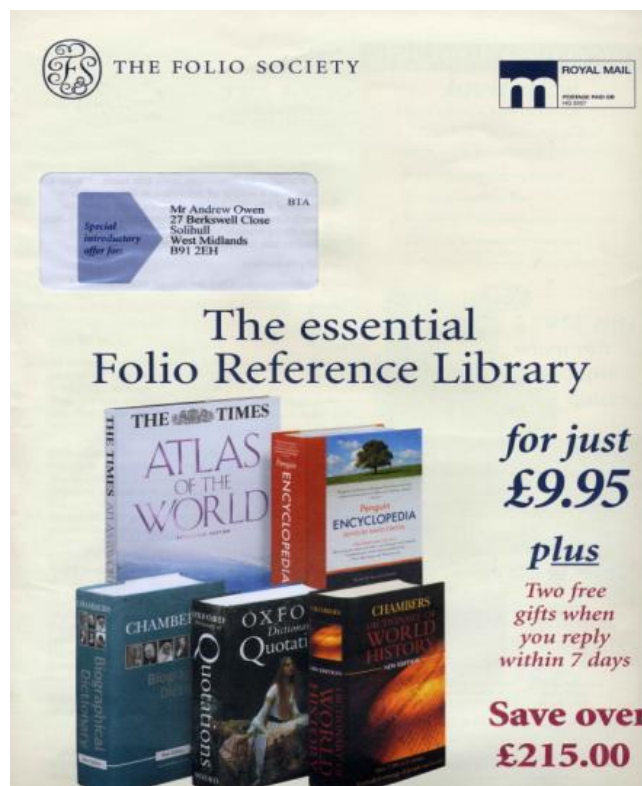
That should make for a fun day...

Here are 9 ways to make your envelopes work better:

1. **Connect.** Ensure the flavour of the envelope is correct for your company and for the audience you are approaching
2. **Lead with your very best offer.** Make it as strong as you can. This will influence the recipient to open your envelope.
3. **Show and tell with graphics.** Graphics get attention. People like pictures, drawings, graphs and things. Use them on your envelope.
4. **If you can, use images of people.** People like people.
5. **Benefits, benefits, benefits.** Provide real benefits to your audience.
6. **Be specific.** This will help you gain attention. This is what you want when your envelope is just one of many.
7. **Use photography.** Photography is more believable than illustrations. People believe photography.
8. **Use window envelopes or print the address directly on the front.** Never, ever use self-adhesive labels. They show you don't care.
9. **Consider using the back of the envelope.** 3 out of 4 people who touch the envelope will turn it over. And 50% of received envelopes will have the back viewed first.

To finish, one final example. Not a good one...

In my view, it represents an incredible lost selling opportunity. And, from a company you would have thought possessed the necessary knowledge and expertise...



When you have a good look at this, it makes you cry. I show this at events around the world and it amazes audiences young and old.

The hero here, is the saving – a staggering £215. Not to be sneezed at. In fact, whichever way you look at it, it's a fantastic offer.

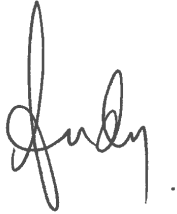
So, what does the creator of this envelope do? Give greater prominence to £9.95 than to the real star of the show - £215. If the emphasis was changed to something like – “5 Books worth £215 - yours for only £9.95...PLUS two free gifts if you reply within 7 days...” this mailing would have worked much, much better.

It's amazing to me how valuable budget is continually wasted these days. It's criminal.

Anyway, have fun with your envelope challenges - and don't forget to TEST!

See you next month...

Keep the faith...

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy". The signature is stylized with a large, looped 'A' and a cursive 'y'.

See you next month.

If anyone would like complete copies of any examples reviewed here, please contact Andy direct at [andyowen@aol.com](mailto:andyowen@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, Russia and Romania.

The company's corporate website is [www.andyowen.co.uk](http://www.andyowen.co.uk) The specialist copy division has its own site at [www.copywritingthatsells.com](http://www.copywritingthatsells.com)

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.

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Don't forget to check to see if Andy is speaking near you in the near future. Andy's 2007 gig list can be viewed at: [www.andyowen.co.uk/andys-events.html](http://www.andyowen.co.uk/andys-events.html)