



Marketing meltdown – but does anyone care?

What the hell is going on?

I'm going to have a real rant this month. Truth is, I'm getting rather raked off with all of this now. This business is going to hell in a handcart...

...very, very quickly...

Is it me, or what? EVERYTHING I seem to see and receive these days is garbage.

EVERY BLOODY THING. Tripe rules...

I cannot remember the last time I received anything that impressed me.

Communications are getting less relevant, increasingly badly written and poorly created - and now, to top it all off, approaches are becoming consistently tacky and cheap...

It would drive me to drink, if other things hadn't already got there first...

And just at a time when everything needs to work much harder. I can't understand it. Of course, I realize that pressure does strange things, but this is ridiculous.

The world is in meltdown and it's affecting everything we do in a major way. Blinkered FD's determine how much marketers can spend and, in a lot of crazy situations, what they can spend it on.

One thing is certain. Everyone has less marketing budget to play with. What's more, every one of the potential targets has got less money to spend. And even less inclination to spend it.

This means that **every penny marketers have been given, has to work harder than it has ever done.**

This isn't happening. Quite the contrary, in fact.

So many people seem to think that as they have got less money to spend, everything they do has to be on the cheap. No, no, bloody hell, NO!

Making pennies work harder, does not mean penny pinching. It means being smart.

This doesn't mean you ignore testing. It doesn't mean continuing to fire ever-increasing numbers of badly written emails out, because it's cheaper and easier than direct mail.

It doesn't mean writing copy in-house, because you don't want to spend extra by using a pro...

That's not being smart. In fact, it's being immensely *dumb*.

But dumb rules right now - and that's a fact. Here's an astonishing example.

The art of testing

Testing was the rock on which we built our direct marketing church. It is absolutely vital. Now, today's marketers ignore it.

This week, I received two mailing packs, both created by myself and my team, over two years ago. Both were created for two big publishers in the UK. (I cannot name them, for obvious reasons). Bar for a couple of images used in the packs, they were the same packs we created all that time ago. Nothing has changed.

Both these packs broke response records when they were first mailed. They have continued to perform well over the last two years, which is great.

But, these two companies have never come back to us (or anyone else by the way), to create new packs to test against them.

In short, they have run the same packs for over 2 years - Nothing else. No tests at all. It's lazy and incredibly stupid.

It beggars belief, doesn't it? Yet when I spoke to one of the clients, the attitude was basically "so what"?

So what? Just think of the knowledge that could have been gained by running a meaningful test programme, which started with two real winners...

I give up. I really do. Have we learned nothing in our business in the last 85 years, since Claude Hopkins wrote the classic '*Scientific Advertising*'?

Seems not...

And one final thing while we are on the subject of crap.

Have any of you out there in the UK started to get these automated marketing calls?

Can you believe it? It's beyond my comprehension, I have to say. How can anyone think that this is a good idea...

Brainless berks...

Anyway, something else happened recently, that I need to share with you. I was recently described as 'old fashioned'...

Well...

If it was referring to my roots in music, or my love for that greatest time of all – the sixties – when there was magic in the air...seemingly *every* day...I wholeheartedly agree...

But it wasn't...

It was referring to the art of contemporary communication. What works and what doesn't. What has ALWAYS worked and what ALWAYS will...

I was talking with Mr Smarmy. Mr Young Agency Smarmy to give him his full name. The conversation took place in London.

There are many young Mr Smarmy's in our business and I try to avoid them like the plague, but, because of what I do, I unfortunately meet them now and again.

This very dislikeable young man was referring to certain aspects of a recent presentation I had just made regarding contemporary communication. I had just presented a copy and creative Masterclass to a large group of marketing people.

All, bar him, it would appear, loved it.

He didn't. Which is his prerogative. Then he called me 'old fashioned'.

He came to that conclusion mainly because I injected work into my presentation from the giants in our business – *Hopkins, Caples, Ogilvy, Sugarman, Bird, Raphel, Gordon-Lewis* and others.

He felt that for today's challenges, nothing could be learned from these people. "*they have no relevance today*" he said. "*Old farts...*"

"And one other thing I want to pick you up on. Digital is king. Everyone knows that. Direct mail is dead. If you don't accept that, you are a dinosaur and will go the same way as a lot of those old fogies you seem to rate..."

First, I just laughed at his stupidity. Reminded him that I am invited to share my observations and opinions with knowledgeable audiences worldwide and travel over 100,000 miles a year doing it.

But he ignored this and kept on waffling, so I got irritated. Finally I just shared a few good old Anglo-Saxon words with him and walked away - otherwise I would have whacked him...

Now, before we go any farther, let's put a big stake in the ground here...

Times change, but people don't. It's an unmovable commandment in contemporary communication. The way we are attracted to offer-based communications is the same today, as it was in the 20's and 30's. And since...

Proven techniques *work*. And it will be the same 100 years from now.

Be seduced by digital by all means. The rest of the world have. But don't get married to it. It's not the be all and end all.

Digital is just another route to market. With good and bad points. Include it in your activity and test its effectiveness. Just like everything else.

Yes, email is cheap. And, like all cheap things it's OK - for a while. But, as a prospecting tool, I can tell you it's struggling big time now.

In fact, millions of marketing dollars are being wasted on it every day. But smart marketers who test everything, are now finding this out and are reducing their spend in this area and considering other options.

Do you know what is the most popular of those options? Direct mail. Yes, the old girl is back. (For the knowledgeable and smart, she never went away...)

Mr Smarmy was wrong. Very wrong. Direct mail has not been killed off by email. Quite the reverse.

But it's like déjà vu to me, all this...

Remember when they said records would kill live music performances. They were wrong. In fact, they added to its power. Remember how they said that video would kill cinema. They were wrong. It actually made it more popular.

Same with email. It won't replace direct mail. Not in my lifetime anyway. But, its current general ineffectiveness is now creating a renaissance in the medium.

Not just here, but in the U.S. as well...

Stick that where the sun don't shine, Mr Smarmy...

Now I've got that off my chest, here's something else...

Whatever's happened to the cutting edge in our marketing thinking?

Learning, growing and applying knowledge? Having passion and enthusiasm.

Seems to me that we're all in a vacuum now. The robots preside and everyone's just going through the motions.

23 year old Marketing Managers and Directors now '*understand*'. You *know* what I mean? 23 years old. Living in their own little bubble.

They know everything about fuck all. And nothing about the rest...

This is not the way it was supposed to be...

When we were building this thing called direct marketing - yes, it had to be built - from scratch, by visionaries... there was an ENERGY - a real strong passion - call it a vocation if you like, about the business...

Well, that passion is still around, but it appears to me, only in a handful of people - and most of them are old liggers. It's our baby, don't you see...?

But the sad fact remains. What now passes for direct marketing, is as far removed from the real thing, as you could possibly imagine.

Why are people so *dumb* in our business?

Why don't people *study*?

Why are people happy creating *crap*?

What has happened to our *industry*?

See you next month...

Keep the faith...



About the Author

Andy Owen is Managing Director of Andy Owen & Associates, a leading International direct marketing consultancy, specialising in all aspects of creative and copywriting for direct marketing.

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