



The *enormous* power of copy is about to be realised...

Happy New Year, everyone...

I think I am going to find this next year *very* interesting...

And, probably the year after, too. Simply because of one thing.

Copy...

Well-written copy is about to come into its own. Trust me.

Its power will be there for all who are prepared to open their minds.

We're in the biggest business hole that a lot of you will have ever seen. And there is no prospect of any improvement for a long time.

Quite the opposite, in fact.

How you communicate with your customers and prospects in this worrying scenario, will be absolutely vital to your survival, especially as you will certainly have less budget to play with.

One thing is certain. Direct marketing will become even more important than it is now. I'm old enough to remember two previous downturns - and on both occasions, direct marketing became increasingly popular - and delivered better results than any other marketing route.

I confidently predict that this will happen again.

That's because it's the only accountable and measurable option out there. It's also the only option that allows you to get down and personal with the people who matter in your business life more than any other - your customers.

In tough times like the one we face now, it's your customers that will keep you warm.

Ignore them at your peril, because they are totally in charge now. They will only stay with you, if you talk to them regularly, tell them how much you love them and give them regular offers with real value.

To a lot of companies, that prospect is daunting, because they really don't know how. Their marketing strategy for the last decade has been totally brand-driven and mass communicated.

Business has been buoyant in every sector. Just open the doors and in it comes. Retailers, hotels, airlines, restaurants to name but four, really haven't had to work hard for it. It's just been there.

Well, not any more. Things have changed. Probably forever.

Now these companies will have to completely rethink and adjust their strategy.

What's more, they will have to do it under a level of pressure they have never experienced before.

That's why professional copywriters like myself, feel that this downturn offers a fantastic opportunity. Because, on behalf of our knowledgeable clients, we'll be going to war against an enemy that is totally ill-equipped and naïve.

For example, I'm looking forward to going head to head with my copy against those who that think that image is more important than offer.

Those misinformed individuals in marketing and advertising who go their customers and prospects saying "*here we are*".

I'll be going to those same customers saying, "*here's the deal*".

I'll tell you now, it will be a no-contest. That's because, what you say, is more important, than how you say it, as the great David Ogilvy told us, decades ago.

That's why, on many occasions, simple mailings can outpull lavish 6 colour jobs containing bells and whistles. That's why, a half page black and white ad can often deliver more business than a full page, full colour ad.

It's all about using the *right* words...

The marketing battlefield we all face now is going to be tough and bloody. Getting a sale will be paramount, but harder than ever. Companies will have to recognise this or die. It's as simple as that.

I can predict now, that the most successful radio station in the world in the next two years, will be **WII FM**.

Never heard of it? You will.

It stands for 'What's In It For Me'

That's what your customers and prospects will be looking for, in your promotional communications. Whether it be an ad, a website, an email, a letter, an insert or a door drop – they will be looking for a deal.

If you don't give them one, they'll go to someone who will. Everything you produce from now on, has to bear this in mind. You have to ask yourself this question when creating your next promotion:

"What will my customer or prospect GAIN by responding to my communication? What will he/she EARN, MAKE, ENJOY or SAVE?"

This must be your focus. Nothing else. And words will be a vital element in delivering these essential messages.

But, they have to be the right words. Words that connect. Words that influence people - and words that make people do *positive* things.

Get rid of all the waffle and garbage. Things like "less is more", "the best just got better", "think, feel, drive" and other examples of useless verbiage, normally written by traditional copywriters – 'wordstringers' I call them - who have never worked at the very demanding coalface of response marketing.

A professional direct response copywriter would never write such tosh. Because the pro's recognise that every word is a weapon.

These 'wordstringers' are storytellers. We are *salesmen*. Because we have to be...

We know and recognise the power of words. For example, we know how to use the words 'and' and 'but' correctly. We know that 'when' is more powerful than 'if' in a sales message. But it's no match for 'as soon as'.

We know that substituting 'will' for 'can' increases response. There are hundreds more similar examples I could share with you.

Little things. But in sales copy, they can make a BIG difference.

Here's something I will share with you to emphasise the point even more. I have just received an insurance mailing, trying to get me to sign up for home insurance.

The headline of the letter, says *"If you are protected by traditional homeowners insurance..."*

There are so many things wrong with a statement like that. In my book the worst, is the word 'protected'. It's a bad choice. Because, if it has protected me, it's done its job, hasn't it? I would have written it like this...

"If your insurance company has been selling you old-fashioned homeowners insurance..."

This infers that my current deal is poor and can be bettered. So, I will read on, to see what they have to offer. The one I have received, offers me no reason to be interested at all.

See what I mean? Just a simple example, but if tested against each other, the response rates to these letters would be massively different.

Here's another example. If you've got an interest free offer, how would you best deliver it? Well, here's my league table of how to do it, starting with the weakest.

0% INTEREST *Percentages make the eyes glaze over. The absorption of 0 is diluted by the percentage sign*

ZERO INTEREST *Delivered at arms length, starting with a negative*

NO INTEREST CHARGES *'No' is a poor opener*

YOU DON'T PAY ONE PENNY INTEREST *Much better. More positive and appealing*

YOU DON'T PAY EVEN ONE PENNY INTEREST *The emphasis of the word 'even' makes it better still*

FREE OF INTEREST CHARGES *Even better. Starts with the second most powerful word in the copywriter's armoury*

COMPLETELY INTEREST FREE *The best. Starts and ends powerfully and oozes confidence*

Now if you think I'm nit-picking with all the above examples, then you're right.

I am.

But, that nit-picking, linked to the understanding of the power of words, separates the professional communicator like me, from the other charlatans, dilettantes and amateurs that seem to pollute the world of communication these days.

So, if it's alright with you, I'll continue to do it.

Take it from me. The simple, well-written sales letter is going to come into its own in 2009.

A well-written email as well, of course, although that culture, as we all know to our cost, is strewn with other problems that have to be overcome first.

But, although it might sound simple, it isn't. As with anything, you have to get the key elements right.

You have to understand how copy *works*.

If you don't, then employ someone who does – as they will give you a real advantage in the tough trading period that we're all now facing.

Keep the faith...



*****STOP PRESS*****. For all of my Gulf readers, don't forget to register for my forthcoming Masterclass in Dubai on 21st January. Click the link for full details and how to book www.andyowen.co.uk/middle-east

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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If you feel your company could benefit from any of these, please contact Andy for details.

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All Andy's previous articles are available to view and download at www.andyowen.co.uk/articles.html