



Getting personal, a ‘salesman in an envelope’ – and the genius that is Seigfried Vögele...

You’ve heard me talk about *power words*, many, many times in Copycat.

These are the words that make people sit up and take notice. Words that make people do positive things, as a result of reading your copy.

To the copywriting archer, they are the most powerful arrows in the quiver.

Well, today, I’m going to let you in on a closely guarded secret. I’m going to tell you the single most powerful word for any copywriter.

And, it isn’t ‘You’ or ‘Free’, either.

I know I have told you on numerous occasions, both in print and in person during Masterclasses, that those two words were by far, the two most powerful in copy.

But I lied. *Sorry...*

This word you won’t even find in a dictionary. It’s the word that will, without exception, get the reader’s attention - always - no matter who they are, how old they may be - and what demographic group they belong to.

It’s a word that has an almost magical effect every time you see it or hear it.

It is “your name”.

For me, it’s “Andy”.

For you, it may be "Rozelle", "Drayton", "Vatsal" or "Charlotte". Whatever your name, you will immediately take notice, when it is written or spoken.

In the wonderful days of yore, when we knew what we were doing in this business, the greats fully understood this. Dale Carnegie, way back in 1936 in the great ad "How to Win Friends & Influence People", wrote, "*Remember that a person's name, is to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language.*"

Yes, we are talking here, about *personalisation*.

Direct marketing is a one-to-one medium. That is its major benefit. Me to you. No baggage. No wastage. No mass-market lunacy.

So, if you don't personalise, you're missing a massive trick. What's more, your campaign will underperform.

And you can take that to the bank.

But, a lot of the charlatans in marketing these days, simply choose to ignore this, for some inexplicable reason. I have had three direct mail packs in the last week, all without a personalised letter.

One of them had a horrendous self-adhesive label on the front of the envelope, with a 'Dear Householder' salutation on the letter.

I find it impossible to understand, I really do. How did they get a job in marketing, when they don't even understand the basics of communication?

I'll bet you any money you like, that they would defend their sad attempts at selling, by saying it saved money by not personalising.

Yes, it did. But it cost you a lot of money at the other end, you dummy, because no one bought what you were selling. It's not what it costs that's important, but what it *delivers*.

I wish a few more marketers would get that.

Personalisation is a must. Don't ever forget it.

Why wouldn't you personalise anyway? Makes no sense at all in a one-to-one medium.

(By the way, before you write back to me, I know the classic Newsweek letter wasn't personalised. I have no idea why. Technology perhaps. But, if it had been personalised, then it would have enjoyed even greater success.)

"Does personalisation work with emails, too", I hear you say. Well, yes and no...

Because of the incredible problems with emails right now, it was recently suggested, in an industry report, that personalising a subject line, actually reduces opening rates. I'm not sure about that, so I'm running some tests myself.

I'll let you know what I find out, in a future Copycat.

But, I suspect that for communications that go to opt-in or existing customer email lists, then you can be pretty confident that personalisation within emails will get you closer to the recipient and therefore help you increase your response rates.

(STOP PRESS: Oh my, my. I have to share this with you. This email has just popped in to my inbox. Over the top? I should coco. And, from a company that normally produces very good DM.)

Subject: Andrew, open me, open me, open me

Date: 08/05/2013 09:57:10 GMT Daylight Time

From: theteam@mailing.virginmedia.com

Reply To: theteam-reply@mailing.virginmedia.com

To: andyowen@aol.com

You have to laugh. Even though it is so sad. You simply couldn't make it up.

For those who still might need more convincing about personalisation, just consider the difference between these two letter headlines. It's *massive*.

1. "Walk in the footsteps of heroes"
2. "Andy, walk in the footsteps of heroes"

The first is about a suggestion - an idea. The second is about me. And nothing is more interesting to me - than me.

The same applies to you.

Talking about interesting, here's something that segues very nicely with my opening topic.

At a recent Chum's Lunch in London, my good pal Ian Dewar - who is, without doubt, the world's most knowledgeable website guru - very kindly gave me three DM books from his vast collection.

One was the classic 'Handbook Of Direct Mail', by the legendary Seigfried Vögele. He was Dean of the Institute for Direct Marketing in Munich, Germany.

In this amazing book, Vögele approached the subject of creating direct mail, in a truly scientific way. He actually set up laboratory style classrooms, where he and his team would watch people as they opened and read direct mail packs. Cameras were used to detect eye movements. Instruments were employed to detect changes in skin temperature.

Vögele performed these incredible studies over a number of years and developed some amazing insights into what actually works in direct mail.

It is a truly fascinating read – and contains invaluable guidance for anyone that creates and writes direct mail.

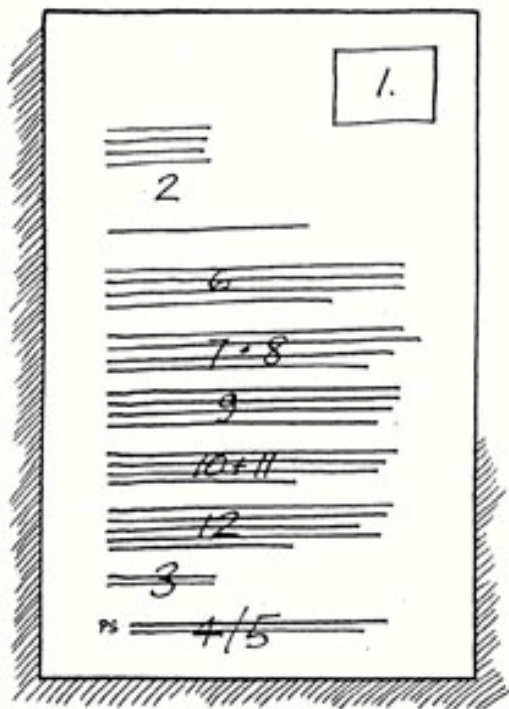
During his research, he discovered what he called the "silent dialogue". This, he maintained, occurs in the reader's mind, as that reader opens and scans a direct mail letter.

The results of his groundbreaking study on how the eye actually reads advertising material, was first presented by Vögele himself in 1986 at the Montreux International Direct Marketing Symposium.

It caused a real stir, as no one had done anything like this before. His conclusions, shown in this visual, are very interesting indeed.

They show that recipients of sales letters, subconsciously ask a number of questions – and need those questions answered, before they will consider reading the body of the letter.

Here are the main questions – together with a visual of what they are looking at, when the question comes to mind.



1. Who is writing to me?
2. How is he addressing me? What does he want?
3. Who has signed the letter?
4. Should I read the letter?
5. Of what benefit will the letter be for me?
6. Why is he writing to me in particular?
7. Do I need this?
8. How have I dealt with this need in the past?
9. What benefit does this offer me now?
10. Who can prove this?
11. How can I find out more?
12. What should I do?

Those questions above, are at the heart of the *Dialogue Method* that Vögele delivers in this fascinating book.

If you write direct mail for your company, then this list above should be invaluable to you. Here's how you could use it:

After you have initially drafted and honed your copy, simply apply it to the questions and the visual above. Have you answered the questions, in the areas shown?

If not, then go back and rework the copy. I can assure you, it will be much stronger for it.

Vögele believed that a good sales letter should closely match a dialogue that might go on between a salesman and his prospect. He referred to good direct mail copy, as the "salesman in an envelope."

It is a perfect description.

Simply because, direct mail copy has to SELL. It has no other purpose.

Does your copy perform like a good salesman?

Anyway, as we all know, the best way to sell anything is face-to-face.

A good salesman will know everything about the product he is selling - and he has ready-made answers to any objection that might crop up. And, of course, the salesman can quickly see where the prospect sits in the buying cycle, based on the positive or negative buying signals he gives off.

The salesman will analyse those positive and negative body signals, together with feedback from any questions he is asked.

To be successful, a direct mail letter has to perform like that. The selling job - the copy in the letter - should imitate all the skills of a top salesman. You may recall, in a previous Copycat, I talked about legendary copywriter John Kennedy, when he referred to good copy as 'salesmanship in print'.

How many direct mail letters have you received lately, that actually did an effective selling job on you? How many did you read for longer than 10 seconds?

Not very many, I'd like to bet.

Why has it got like this? I know marketers don't study - and that's one of the main reasons, but it goes deeper than that, in my view. I really believe, that in most marketers' minds, copy is not that important.

I can't find any other logical reason why companies continually send out the garbage that they do. With big names on the letterhead, too...

Perhaps it's because of the 'raping' of our language in digital communications. Perhaps it's because they simply don't know how to write. Perhaps it's because they still cling to the old chestnut that pretty pictures do the selling.

Or maybe it's a mixture of all of those.

I don't know anymore. But, what I do know, is that copy is getting worse and worse and worse. And, I can tell you, from someone with a passion for the written word, it hurts like hell.

Anyway, if you care, you could do yourself a massive favour and gain a real advantage over your competitors. *Buy the Vögele book.*

It is still in print. And his findings, observations and recommendations, are as valid now, as when they were first presented over 27 years ago.

His influence on the professional DM copywriters of today, is still significant - and he will influence you, too. I guarantee it.

I'll leave the last word on all this, to another giant in this business – Bill Bernbach.

One of the many great things he handed down to us, was this little gem:

"Everything you write, everything on a page, every word, every graphic symbol, every shadow – should further the message you are trying to convey"

Does your copy do this?

Keep the faith



About the Author

Andy Owen is MD of Andy Owen & Associates, 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.andyowen.co.uk

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Andy is personally involved in every creative and copy element that is produced by Andy Owen & Associates.

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.

Check his latest gigs for 2013 on the website:

<http://www.andyowen.co.uk/speaker-presenter.html>

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 articles are available to enjoy, read and download at www.andyowen.co.uk/articles.html