



A story about Big Balls, Skinny Latte and lazy writers – and how millions of pounds of marketing budget is wasted every single day...

I *hate* lazy writers. With a passion.

And there seems to be more of them out there now, than ever before.

I'm convinced it's because, to most, copy is a chore.

Here's what I mean. ABC Company have their usual weekly marketing meeting. Sales have been disappointing and budget needs to be spent to generate more sales.

So, it is decided that a new DM campaign should be originated.

Creative are called into the meeting. It is decided that a mixture of traditional DM, plus emails and ads are put together and an operational plan originated.

Creative amble away from the meeting, with a loose direction. Media, know they have to plan. But, next week will do.

The marketing team go back to their desks with a general feeling that everything in the garden is rosy.

They spend the next hour playing with their appalling digital diaries, sending impersonal messages back and forth, to confirm the next meeting in just over a week.

Then they get a coffee.

An hour and a half later, another meeting is called to discuss the new CRM system that the company is considering.

No one wants to be there. Much doodling on blank scrap pads. Much scrutiny of mobile phones. A few texts are sent.

Everyone is bored to tears.

Now it's lunchtime.

After an exciting lunch of a salad sandwich and a skinny Latte, the afternoon beckons.

More of the same. Meetings about meetings, where all is discussed, but nothing is achieved.

Meanwhile, on the next floor, the Marketing Director is being asked about the recent poor performance of the company's marketing campaigns.

"Really tough out there at the moment. Talked to Joe at XYZ Company – and they are experiencing the same problem. People are not spending ahead of the Election and the Greek crisis is affecting confidence".

"But, I have just approved a new campaign that will be going out next month and I'm excited about it. I know it will get us back on track".

Oh dear. That's a BIG mistake, my friend.

Never put your balls on the table like that, because, when balls become visible, it is very likely that someone will squeeze them.

But, of course, he's not even thinking about that. This new campaign will do gangbusters, won't it?

Of course it will...

Next week, the muppets convene again. Mind you, there were two absentees this time, because the digital diaries played up and one person had gone to the Regional Office by mistake - and another had the time and date wrong.

Creative bring along their first concepts. Much discussion about colour and images - and how that library shot contained a person who really looked like George Clooney.

All important stuff...

Two hours later, the colours were agreed and George Clooney was confirmed. Another search was agreed, to see if any decent pictures of a dog catching a ball might be available.

The marketing team go back to their desks, with a sense of déjà vu.

But, overall, there's a general feeling that everything in the garden is still rosy.

They spend the next hour again playing with their appalling digital diaries, sending more impersonal messages back and forth, to confirm the next meeting in just over a week.

Then they get another coffee.

25 meetings later, we are a week on. Creative have finalised the concepts and George and the bouncing dog now have equal billing. All agree that red is better than yellow and everything looks GREAT!

Marketing Director Big Balls congratulates everyone and chairs are pulled back. "Hold on", he says. "Where is the copy? I haven't seen any copy yet. I suppose you have sent it to me and it has gone into my spam folder? I haven't looked at that for over a week"

Silence.

Everyone looks at each other. Copy? I thought you were doing that? No, I thought you were? It's been done surely, as we've just seen it in the final creative?

"That's bloody *Latin*" said the Creative Director. "It's holding copy. Don't you know the difference between Latin and English?"

Hasn't anyone written *anything*?"

"We need to get it done today, said Big Balls. "Skinny Latte, you can do it. Please let me have it by close today. I need the 2-page DM letter, 2 emails, as I suppose we had better test something – and the copy for the 6-page brochure and outer envelope".

Skinny Latte is not happy. This was not what she signed up for.

She goes back to her desk with a general feeling that everything in the garden is not looking as rosy as it did a couple of weeks ago.

But, she spends the next hour playing with her appalling digital diary and then texting all her friends to tell them how bad this company really is – and how she is being taken for granted.

Then she gets a coffee. And responds to all the text messages coming back, sympathising with her.

Friend of Skinny Latte suggests lunch to discuss. Cool. See you in 15 minutes...

When she gets back, she feels better. Friend of Skinny Latte has helped.

But, she looks at the clock. It is now 2.15. Big Balls wants the copy by 5.30. And I'm not a copywriter.

She has the answer very quickly. Take the copy from the last three campaigns, cut and paste the best bits - and hey presto, it's done.

Great! No one will know. And I've got us out of a great big hole. I'm sure Big Balls will thank me. And my review is coming up soon.

She goes and gets a coffee and sends three texts to her closest pals, suggesting a glass of wine later.

The patchwork quilt is created over the next two hours. It's presented to Big Balls, who is delighted. Creative have no opinion. It's only words, after all.

Campaign is produced and implemented. Campaign fails.

Big Balls lasts another 3 months, before he is shown the door. Skinny Latte blames the creative. "I never liked George Clooney anyway", she mutters, as she grabs another coffee and sends a few more texts.

Now playmates, don't think I'm being glib or frivolous here. This is *real*. This what happens these days.

It is happening right now, as you read this. I know. I see it. I hear it. The lunatics now run the asylum.

I regularly receive campaigns that Skinny Latte has cobbled together and Big Balls has signed off. As you do...

Both myself and my wife buy quite a lot of things by mail. As a result, we get a lot of DM, which, obviously, in my situation, is perfect.

We probably get, on average, 5/6 pieces a day. I read them all. I got five last night, when I got home. Two of them, I am going to share with you now.

Or at least the opening lines to the letters that fronted these mail order catalogues. These are very established companies.

They should know better. But they don't.

Example 1 - a large mail order company selling food, mainly meat.

"As I'm sure you'll agree, **convenience is becoming increasingly important** to all of us. But it must not come at the expense of those warming moments of human satisfaction which are the result of good hearty cooking - **I'm talking comfort food!**"

I've emboldened it, exactly as it was written.

Appalling copy. The worst start in the world. Telling me what I think, then preaching to me. And four lines, to boot. Much too long for an opening sales pitch. Any reason to read on? No.

Example 2 – an established men's clothes company

"Welcome to the XXXX June catalogue, featuring all of our favourite shoes and clothing. Whatever you have planned for the months ahead, you're going to need to add a few great summer items to your wardrobe to deal with the warmer temperatures".

Why do Mail Order companies always use the word 'welcome'? I don't want to be welcomed to your bloody catalogue. I want benefits and value. Tell me about the deals and what's on offer. And don't tell me what I'm going to need. I can run my own life, thank you.

It's lazy, ineffective copy that could be so much better. Copy like this will lose them both a lot of money. Why don't they know this?

But, what you see here, is *everywhere*. It's the rule, not the exception.

Please, please, don't 'play' with copy. Don't take it for granted, as 99% of marketers seem to do these days.

Copy is king. It is the most important element of any marketing campaign by a million miles. Copy *sells*. Copy makes you *rich*.

Here's a true story. And it's only 24-hours old...

But, it underlines what I'm saying and highlights the incredible naiveté and unprofessionalism in copy that exists in the marketing arena these days.

I ran a targeted, new business email campaign two days ago, selling my copy expertise. A certain marketer, who will remain nameless, sent a 'remove' request within the first couple of minutes.

As I do with any such request, I immediately went to this person's website, as this helps me to try and understand why he dismissed my approach so quickly.

Being a simple boy, I am assuming from his actions that he doesn't need effective copy - and when I look at his website, I will see this clearly.

Well, he does.

And I didn't.

The first thing to hit me was the big headline on the Home Page. Right there, bold as brass, was 'award winning'. Without the hyphen. Right under that, was a 30-word copy block, with no punctuation at all.

Yes, you heard that right. 30 words. And not a comma, full stop, or hyphen to be seen anywhere.

I emailed him, of course. You wouldn't expect me to pass something up as good as that now, would you? I offered to pop up to see him over a cup of coffee.

He was in Manchester. Over 100 miles away.

Predictably, I have heard nothing. And I don't expect to. Showing a mirror to Quasimodo is rarely a good move.

So, I implore you, please take your copy *seriously*. If you don't, you will lose shed loads of money. Don't employ Big Balls – or Skinny Latte. Neither of them have a clue about how copy works – or why it works.

Whatever you are writing – a DM letter, an email, an ad, a webpage, a sales leaflet, or anything else for that matter – it is essential that the words you use are the most effective they can possibly be.

Think and write like a salesman. Use real words, not show words. Your opening is gold dust. Make it stunning. Have a breathtaking offer and deliver it with incredible energy and belief.

And NEVER cut and paste.

Good copywriting should be *invisible*.

It should take the reader from where they are, to where you want them to be - without them realising it.

But that takes great skill. And it takes great knowledge.

If you don't have those, find someone who does.

Keep the faith...



ABOUT YOUR AUTHOR

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All the previous **Copycat** articles are available to read and download at www.andyowencopyandcreative.com/thelegend.html

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