



How a copywriter's obsession can make YOUR campaigns consistently more successful...

One wrong word in your copy - and you're dead in the water.

Yes, ONE word. That's not me being dramatic. That's the truth.

The copy you write – whether it's an email, direct mail pack, website pages, social media post, or anything else for that matter - is only ever as strong as its weakest link.

One sloppy sentence, one lazy phrase, one cliché, that makes your prospect's eyes glaze over - and you've lost the reader. And, when they walk away from your proposition, they don't come back.

That's why great copywriters - the ones who know how to sell - are obsessive.

We sweat over every word, every comma and every dash. We consider underlined, emboldened and italicised words, very seriously. That's because we know that anything that confuses, bores, or creates even a flicker of doubt in the mind of the reader - is fatal.

So, we go over it - again and again. And then once more.

Out loud. In our heads. At our desks. Walking the dog. Lying awake at three in the morning.

The obsession never leaves us. This is the reality.

Effective copywriters are obsessive by nature. Any copywriters that are not - are not only wasting their time, but everyone else's as well.

They are charlatans. Ineffective wasters. Budget smashers...

And there's a lot of them about right now. So, something needs to be said. So, I'm going to say it. *Exactly* how it is. The only way I know...

As it has been for over 20+ years - it's FREE advice on copy. Something you always get from *Copycat*.

I'll have that beer from you, when I next see you...

The Headline Obsession

Let's start where the fight begins - the headline.

If your headline doesn't grab them, you've already lost. You might as well not bother writing the body copy. David (Ogilvy) nailed it decades ago:

"On average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written your headline, you have spent eighty cents out of your dollar."

Eighty cents out of the dollar. Eighty percent. Gone. if you screw it up.

And lots do...

That's why pros hammer away at headlines for hours.

We don't settle for OK headlines, or clever or lazy headlines. Just headlines that 'grab' the reader. Headlines that 'stop' the reader. Headlines with a *benefit*.

We beat ourselves up for a theme that resonates, a statement that grabs them by the eyeballs - or any other balls for that matter - delivering a promise that forces them to read on.

Because if we can't hook them at the top, we don't even get the chance to sell them anything further down.

And here's something else. Most of today's so-called marketers don't even bother testing headlines anymore. They slap one down, pat themselves on the back and send it out. Then they wonder why their campaign bombed.

Headlines aren't decoration.

They're *weapons*.

And they need to be treated like it.

The Attention Minefield

The headline is just the start. Even if you nail the headline, you're not home free.

Nowhere near it.

Your body copy is a minefield. Every sentence either keeps the reader with you - or blows the potential sale to pieces. And let me remind you of something else very important, that warrants your attention.

Your reader isn't sitting in a quiet room with a cup of tea, hanging on your every word. Far from it.

Just picture this: You are a door-to-door sales person and you have been invited into a house - with a great prospect sitting right in front of you.

You're at the kitchen table, delivering your pitch face-to-face. Sounds good, right? You've got your script honed. Every objection covered. You know, deep down, this person will buy if they just listen.

But the kids are screaming in the next room. The dog's chasing the cat, crashing into the furniture. The phone's ringing off the hook. The neighbour's at the door. The person's partner has just walked in, after a dreadful day - and wants you gone.

That's the reality you're fighting against, when your words land in someone's inbox or through their letterbox. You don't just need to grab attention. You need to chain it down.

Hold it tight. Never let it wander. Because once you lose it - even for a second - you've blown it. Lost the sale.

For good.

And here's the part most forget. Attention is fragile. One weak paragraph and it snaps.

That's why being an obsessed copywriter really matters. Mediocre copy doesn't just fail quietly. It lands in the bin with a thump, or with noisy pressure on the delete button.

You know the sound, because you've heard it many times already this morning.

You only have a small window of opportunity to get the response or make the sale. And it's even smaller than you think.

Back in 1986, Professor Siegfried Vogele ran eye-camera research in Munich. He tracked how people really read direct mail. It was brutal. Seven seconds on the envelope. Eleven seconds on the letter. Two-tenths of a second 'fixations' on key words and subheads. And most of the people scanned the P.S. before they read a single line of body copy.

Think about that. Eleven seconds to decide whether to bin your work or keep reading.

Eleven seconds to live or die.

But that was nearly 40 years ago. It's much worse now. It's less than five seconds now for direct mail. And you can halve that again for email. Because everyone hates it.

If that doesn't convince you that every word, every statement, every layout choice *matter*, then nothing will. Voegle's work proved scientifically what great copywriters always knew - an obsessive approach and attention to detail, is vital.

It is, as I have said so many times - *those that know more, sell more*.

The Five Unforgivable Sins

Most copywriters - especially today's charlatans – commit the same sins, over and over.

I see the results every day. So, do you.

Here are just five. I have *dozens* more.

These are unforgivable sins that kill sales stone dead.

Charlatan copy sins, I call them...

1. *They don't engage.*
2. *They confuse.*
3. *They bore.*
4. *They lack believability.*
5. *They don't SELL.*

And the sad truth? Most copy today commits at least three of these in the first few lines. No wonder response rates have collapsed, compared to the halcyon days when real pros ran the show.

Let's dig deeper into each. You'll recognise every one of them, I'm sure.

They don't engage...

Openings that read like corporate press releases. Boring intros about our 'mission' and 'our values.' Nobody gives a stuff. The reader certainly doesn't.

They confuse...

Copy loaded with jargon, buzzwords and meaningless fluff. If your reader needs a dictionary to understand your message, you've lost.

They bore...

Endless paragraphs of feature-dumping with no spark, no energy. Pedestrian writing that makes the eyes glaze over.

They lack believability...

Wild claims with nothing to back them up. 'World-class.' 'Best in the industry.' 'Innovative.' 'Revolutionary.' All empty noise. The LinkedIn cesspit is polluted with stuff like this.

They don't sell...

This one's the real killer. They forget the point. Copywriting isn't about looking clever. It's about *selling*. If it doesn't move the reader closer to a positive action, it's a total waste of time. And money...

Let's add another sin: **arrogance**. Too many marketers think copy is just "words."

Something you can "knock out over lunch." It's laughable.

Writing copy for response is a technical discipline. One of the hardest to master. Amateur copy doesn't just fail - it poisons the well.

But, the respect for the power of words has completely disappeared now. Gone forever, a lot of my peers think. Hard not to disagree.

Copy is being given to graduates and robots. I don't know which is worse. The former know bugger all about bugger all - and the latter just say nothing and learn nothing from it.

But, still it continues. And, I'm sure it will carry on. Because no one cares anymore.

Marketers have been seduced by AI, just as they were with email all those decades ago. It's the new silver bullet.

To coin one of my favourite lines - it's the partially-sighted leading the blind.

The Golden Rules

So, how do you avoid these sins? How do you ensure your copy gets read - and doesn't go straight in the bin?

Here are a few Golden Rules - the obsessions - that separate the pros from the amateurs:

Golden Rule Number 1:

It must be a structured sell. Copy isn't poetry. It isn't art. It's salesmanship in print.

That means structure and sequence. Point A leads to Point B. Brick on top of brick.

Each one, thought-building logically on top of the last one, until the only possible conclusion is - not buying this product or service, would be stupid.

That's how you generate power.

Think about it. It's like building a wall. Lay the foundation. Cement every brick. Don't leave gaps. One loose brick and the whole thing comes crashing down.

And here's the classic sequence that everyone knows, don't they? (*Muffled laughter.*)

AIDCA. *Attention. Interest. Desire. Conviction. Action.* That is the only sequence that matters. It is proven. It works. And it will continue to work until the world stops turning.

Every great salesman knows it. Every street trader, every door-to-door hustler. And every great copywriter. You mess with it at your peril.

Ignore it or change any part of it - and you'll die. I guarantee it.

Golden Rule Number 2:

Energy and belief are essential. The moment your reader's eyes hit your copy, the stopwatch starts. If they smell doubt, if they get bored, if the pace drops - they're gone.

Energy matters. Belief matters. If you don't believe in what you're selling, why the hell should they? Think of the great street hustlers. They never mumbled. They never looked half-asleep. They went at it like their lives depended on it - because they did.

If they didn't sell, they starved.

Your copy should feel the same.

Urgent.

Alive.

Convincing.

Golden Rule Number 3:

Keep it simple. Complexity kills.

Don't show off with big words. Don't waffle. Don't try to sound clever.

As Ogilvy said, *"If you're trying to persuade people to do something or buy something, it seems to me that you should use their language."*

Their language. Not yours.

One idea per sentence. Clear, simple, conversational. Just like you're talking to a mate in the pub.

And for heaven's sake, stop obsessing about tone and 'on brand' language. Clients drive me mad with this. *"We don't use words like that."* Nonsense. Get a bloody life.

If the words enhance the sell, they're right. End of story.

Golden Rule Number 4:

Edit, edit, edit. Then edit again.

Most copy I see would be twice as strong, if half the words were cut out. Passenger words, I call them. No good to man nor beast.

I review my copy average, **at least ten times** before I'm satisfied. And that will be over several days. (*This article has had 23 edit reviews.*) 'Passengers' kill copy. Extra words clog it up, bog it down and bore the reader.

When in doubt, cut it out. Stick that above your desk. Believe it, because it's true.

And here's another tip you should try. After you've written your copy, read it out loud. If it doesn't sound like a real human being talking to you, do it again. One chance is all you have.

Simple as that.

Golden Rule Number 5:

Keep it believable. Your reader doesn't care about you. Not in the slightest.

They didn't want to hear from you in the first place. They don't want your mission statement. They don't believe your grand claims. They don't care about your brand.

They care only about one thing. *Themselves.*

You must justify every claim you make. You need to back it up. To show evidence. Otherwise you confirm what they already suspected - that you're full of hot air and not worth bothering with.

Tell stories. Share proof. Quote real customers. Without that, you're just noise.

Golden Rule Number 6:

Keep it potent. Keep the pot boiling. Right until the last word. This is the one that many charlatans forget. Your copy isn't about you. It's about 'them'.

The recipients. The readers. Your prime targets.

The most powerful word in copy is "you." Use it. Over and over again. Make it personal. Hit them hard. Tell them what they are going to get.

Tell them the benefits and value they are going to enjoy.

Plus, don't forget to tell them what they will miss if they don't buy.

Let me remind you of something else, while I'm at it.

Copy isn't just about rhythm and flow. It's about *control*. The minute your reader starts to wander, you've lost control. Either you control the reader, or the reader controls you.

There's no middle ground. The professionals know this. That's why they never let the reader go - right from the headline to the P.S.

The Obsession Never Ends

Even after all this - the headlines, the energy, the editing, the structure, the belief - the obsession never ends. It can't. Never let the flame die.

Writing copy that sells isn't easy. It's never been easy. It's very, very hard.

It takes work. It takes discipline. It takes knowledge.

And, yes, it takes **obsession**. Oodles of it...

Every word *matters*. Every phrase *matters*. Every comma, dash or quote, *matters*.

Get it wrong and your copy will be ignored, deleted or tossed aside. And you won't make the sale. Get it right - really right - and you'll have your prospect leaning in, nodding along, convinced.

Hand in pocket. Card on the table. Sale closed.

That's the result of copy obsession.

Mediocre copy doesn't just lose you a sale. It can cost you far more.

Lost revenue. Damaged reputation. Underperforming campaigns. Opportunities gone forever. And perhaps, even worse...

You get a call from the MD, to go and see him. You are given an unexpected job for the afternoon. Clearing your desk and handing in the company car keys on your way out.

So, next time you sit down to write, or send your copy brief out, ask yourself one question: Am I - or my copywriter, obsessive enough? If the answer's no - then don't bother writing anything.

Because average copy is worse than no copy at all. It kills sales, destroys campaigns and wrecks careers. And, of course, it drives us all potty.

Learn from those hustlers on the High Street and in the markets. They know if they don't sell, they don't eat. That's the level of urgency you need to bring to every line you write.

Obsess over it. Sweat over it.

Rewrite it until there's no fat left. Then read it again and cut out some more.

Make it the best you can.

Because this is the truth: great copy comes from obsessive writers.

And the ones who aren't obsessive, don't survive in this game.

Be obsessive. Or find someone who is...

Keep the faith...



ABOUT YOUR AUTHOR

Andy is now recognised as one of the most influential direct marketers of his generation.

He has worked in direct marketing for over 40 years and his renowned speciality is copywriting and creative for direct and digital campaigns.

He was inducted into the [DMA Hall of Fame](#) in February 2015, one of only two copywriters in Europe with that honour.

He writes traditional and digital marketing campaigns, including direct mail, sales letters, emails, SMS's, PPC and FB ads, media ads, websites, landing pages, brochures, radio scripts and much more.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of copywriting and creative for direct marketing, please contact Andy personally at andyowen@aol.com

All Andy's [previous Copycat articles](#) are available to download and enjoy.

What clients have said about Andy...

"Andy, you are an expert in direct marketing copy - a true artisan who understands how to write copy that engages and makes a real customer impact." Russell Morris, Board Marketing and Analytics Director Amazon Prime Video

"I can honestly say I am amazed. You took a promotional approach that was proven and that had been running very successfully for over 8 years and transformed it. Your letter produced our best-ever single performance in 75 years of trading. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it for myself." Scott Mackay, CEO, Richard Mackay & Sons, Edinburgh

"The talent to craft effective persuasive communication is rare and highly valued. Andy Owen is one of those exceptional communicators - and the proof of his skill is demonstrated time and again in measurable results." Glenmore Trenear-Harvey, Writer & Broadcaster

"If you want to ensure your copy grabs and holds attention then elicits a positive response, Andy Owen's your man. His work is consistently of the highest calibre and has made a demonstrable difference to the success of my direct marketing campaigns." Huw Williams, Marketing Director, Leger Holidays, UK

"Andy is a professional wordsmith of the very highest order." Ged Rowbottom, Managing Director, Solarlec, Burnley, UK

"The art of contemporary copywriting, has now got its own Grand Master. Once Andy has written a sales letter for you, you will never consider anyone else." Mohamed Safieddine, Director of Marketing, Effemex, Saudi Arabia

"We have taken regular advantage of Andy Owen's superb copywriting skills during the past year and have been delighted with the results." Ian Fairservice, Group Editor and Managing Partner, Motivate Publishing, Dubai

"Copywriting for response is clearly an art form - and Andy is one of the industry's greatest exponents." Jamie Wren, Circulation and Marketing Director, Prospect Publishing Ltd, London, UK.

Visit www.andyowencopyandcreative.com

Check out Andy's inspirational new business book: [Words That Move Mountains](#)

Enjoy interesting stories and tales on Andy's personal site [Glint of Light](#)

And, if you like a thriller, check out *Dirty Money- Last Man Standing* and *Dirty Money2- The End Game*. Both are currently enjoying excellent reviews. [Read more. Here.](#)