



Focus On Copywriting

In the first of a monthly focus on copywriting, CIM columnist Andy Owen digs deep into his mailbag to bring you reviews of the good, the bad and the downright ugly from a range of direct marketing media.

Copywriting for direct marketing is a very specialist discipline. A lot of people think they can do it. Only a handful can. This is demonstrated graphically and annoyingly every morning when we open our mail, both at home and at work.

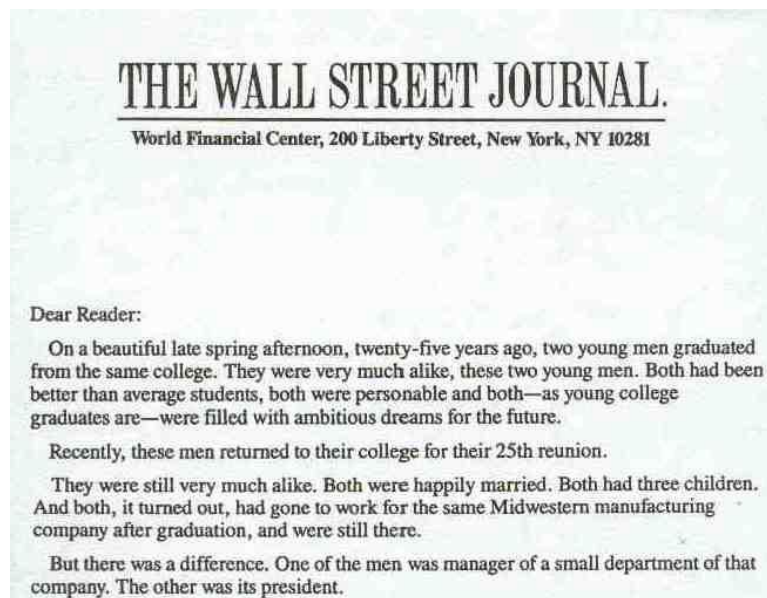
I believe the standard of current dm copywriting is abysmal. It has never been worse. But, ironically enough, the rewards have never been greater.

In contemporary direct marketing, it's all about words. They do the selling job. Not the pictures, the words. Seems to me that this is a secret that very few people recognise, let alone understand.

To start this feature, I would like to share some examples with you that go back a long way. Decades some of them. These have been particular favourites at Conferences and Workshops I have run all over the world.

And we start with the very best. A letter that has no equal...

WALL STREET JOURNAL



Written by Martin Conroy, this letter was described by Dennison Hatch as "the most successful piece of advertising in the history of the world".

It has been responsible for delivering over \$1 billion of sales.

It ran for over 20 years and it's not hard to see why. An absolute classic.

CAMERON HOUSE

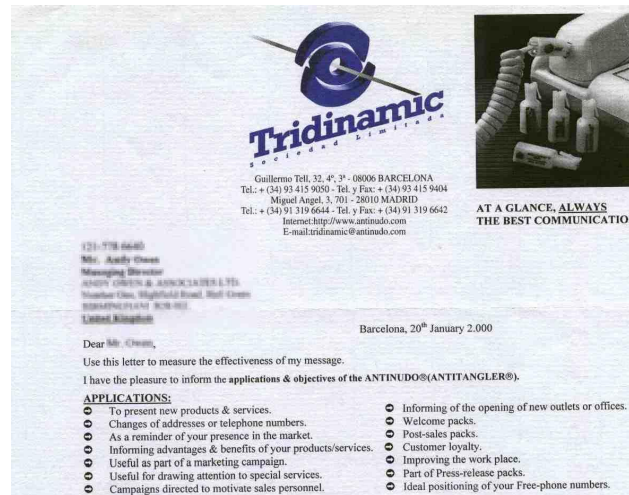


One of my own personal favourites. A superb example of the art of contemporary copywriting, which immediately connects, then inspires, reassures and influences the reader with great skill.

First class layout is inviting and attractive. Absolutely irresistible. A positive response seems almost a formality.

Following those two classics, just to balance things are two right turkeys...

TRIDINAMIC



This is garbage of the first order and hasn't a hope in hell of selling anyone, anywhere. There is so much wrong with this letter it's scary.

I would suspect the writer was left behind by the mother ship.

The funniest thing about it is the opening line of the letter: "Use this letter to measure the effectiveness of my message"

I have. And the needle has just gone off the scale. A complete waste of everyone's time. Makes people howl in Conferences though...

THE LION PRESS



The printers curse strikes again. I've got literally hundreds of slides of 'how not to do it' examples from the print profession.

In the main, they haven't got a clue. They always ramble on and on about what machines they have, how long they've been in business, or other totally irrelevant crap like that.

This is a great example. Not even personalised and doesn't say in the letter anywhere, what they can do for me.

Just to remind any printers out there - people buy benefits, not features.

I believe that central to good letter writing or anything else that needs to sell, is an understanding of people, an insight into them, a sympathy towards them.

This understanding allows the writer to connect to the reader.

Herschell Gordon Lewis refers to it as writing within the 'experiential background of the reader'. Introduce as many facts as you can which are likely to come within that experience. When you do that, you will connect immediately. The reader's reaction is likely to be: "Yes I know that, so it's likely that the other facts are true."

As Professor Poffenberger states, "Belief is a fabric of personal experiences." In the vast majority of the copy I see these days, this is not happening. I believe this to be one of the fundamental flaws of contemporary copywriting in current times. A lot of copywriters are not studying their targets enough. The result is copy that is way off beam and does not connect.

Jerry Della Femina, who wrote an excellent book on advertising, had an interesting view on this.

"Young creative people start out hungry. They're off the street; they know how people think. And their work is great. Then they get successful. They make more and more money, spend their time in restaurants they never dreamed of, fly back and forth between New York and Los Angeles. Pretty soon, the real world isn't people. It's just a bunch of lights off the right side of the plane. You have to stay in touch if you're going to write advertising that works".

Connecting is vital. The longer you hold your reader, the better chance you have of getting them to do what you want them to do. Shrewd retailers have known this principle for years. The longer customers stay in their store, the more likely they are to make a purchase.

Only a percentage of the recipients are going to read what you've written. No matter how good your targeting is. And, the ones who do, you want. They're interested. They're looking in your shop window.

To write effective sales copy you need to write like you talk. Let your words flow easily and have a natural rhythm.

Remember that your readers will not remain with you unless your first paragraph holds the attention and interest your headline and layout have aroused.

The longer your copy can hold the interest of the greatest number of readers, the likelier you are to induce more of them to act.

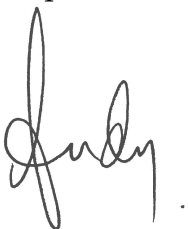
Always remember that simple words are the most powerful in selling copy. Even the best educated people don't resent simple words. If your readers can't understand your copy, because it contains 'clever' words, because you were trying to show off, then you'll lose them right there.

Every single word in selling copy is important. Many times in test activity, the change of one word has dramatically increased the response levels of a letter or ad. For example, the headline of an ad for an automobile repair kit was "How To Repair Cars." The headline was changed to "How To Fix Cars." The ad pulled twenty per cent more.

See you next month, when I'll look at how to and how not to deliver an effective OFFER

If you have any good, bad or indifferent examples of copywriting that you would like Andy to comment on, please send them to: CIM etc etc

Keep the faith...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy', with a small dot at the end.

See you next month.

If anyone would like complete copies of any letters reviewed here, please contact Andy direct at andyowen@aol.com or copydeskUK@aol.com

About the Author

Andy Owen is Managing Director of Andy Owen & Associates, a leading International Strategic Marketing Consultancy specialising in all aspects of contemporary direct

marketing. The company has offices in UK, Middle East & North Africa, with Associate Offices in Europe & The USA.

The company's corporate website is www.andyowen.co.uk The specialist copy division has its own site at www.copywritingthatsells.com

As well as his International speaking engagements, Andy runs in-house copywriting and direct marketing sessions and workshops for companies and organisations all over the world. If you feel your company could benefit from one of these, please contact Andy for details.

If you would like further information on any aspect of copywriting for direct marketing, please contact Andy direct at andyowen@aol.com or copydeskUK@aol.com

Don't forget to check out Andy's superb new DVD on Copywriting called "*How To Write Copy That Really Sells.*" To find out more and see excerpts from the DVD, visit <http://www.andyowen.co.uk/buy-online.html>