## How To Communicate More Effectively
### *(Part One of a two part article…)*

Here's a statistic I spotted recently, that all of you out there involved in contemporary communication may want to think about…

*"Over 72% of business and professional people spend 15 minutes or less, reading daily newspapers and business magazines…."*

Scary stuff.  Especially when you know your expensively produced, wittily written ad is in there somewhere…

What's even scarier, is the fact that this trend or, let's call it *'reading discipline'*, will also be true for most consumer magazines, weekend newspapers, direct mail, inserts and door drop leaflets.

They will pretty much all get the same treatment.  And some, even more so – take direct mail for example…

It is said you only have <u>2.8 seconds</u> to interest the reader when that reader first looks at your sales letter…

Frightening stuff.  It's true as well, just in case you were wondering…

This represents one hell of a difficult challenge, even for the most accomplished and knowledgeable writers.  But, it's the way it's going.  What's more, you can bet your sweet life that this will be down to under 2.5 seconds in the next couple of years…

## Learn What Works And What Doesn't

Let's face facts. Your promotional message - in whatever medium you choose, cannot stimulate sales if it is not read. And, it will not be read if it doesn't get the reader's attention.

As I have mentioned many times before in these articles - the message must have relevance to the reader. It must also offer a real benefit. And it must be simple and easy to understand.

The master, John Caples, explained this superbly many years ago…

*"Don't make ads simple because you think people are low in intelligence. Some are smart and some are not smart. The point is that people are thinking about other things when they see your ad. Your ad does not get their full attention or intelligence. Your ad only gets a fraction of their intelligence… people won't study your ad carefully. They can't be bothered. And so you have to make your ads simple."*

But, even if your message has relevance, benefit and simplicity in spades – and it should - it can still fail…

*…because, it has to attract in visual and layout terms as well.*

And this is where a huge proportion of budget and time is wasted. Due entirely to lack of knowledge and understanding of what works and what doesn't…

## Does It Look Good?

As everyone should realise by now – it's easier to get attention and interest than it is to hold it…

In 1994, David Ogilvy wrote that an average ad is only read by 4% of the people. Nearly 12 years on, I would suggest that this is now down to 3% or perhaps even less…

So, my dear friends, 97 out of 100 people you are paying a lot of money to reach – aren't even hearing you…

Yes, they miss your message completely. It's invisible to them…

Not the fault of the publication either. It's almost certainly down to <u>you</u>.

Or let's say the responsibility is shared by whoever created your message in the first place (shared of course, because you will probably have signed it off…)

If it's a creative person or art director who hasn't studied the creative process relating to contemporary communication (*the vast majority these days fall under this heading*), then all that person is interested in, is how the creative looks.

*"Does it look good? Yes, it looks fantastic.  OK then, let's run it …"*

They are all aethetics.  Which means that they regard copy as a mere element in the design.  The decision about the font is relatively unimportant to them and the overall layout is nothing more than an aesthetic decision.

David Ogilvy once said that people like this should all be *"boiled in oil"*

I agree.  I'll get the fire going, David….

<p style="text-align:center"><strong>Choose The Wrong Font Type And You Can<br>Lose –In An Instant – 3 Out Of 4 Of Your Readers.</strong></p>

Unbelievable I know.  But believe it.  Because it's true.

Design is a vital part of the business of communication.  And typography - the art of designing a communication by using the printed word – is equally so, though you wouldn't think it, looking at some of the garbage out there…

Here's something you can take to the bank.  Tell them I sent you.

Always use a serif font for your body text if you want your message to be read.  It will <u>always</u> outperform sans serif.

Always…always…always…

*Garamond, Franklin, Courier, Galliard, Corona Light Roman, Book Antiqua, Times Roman, Corvette, Georgia, Palatino* are always good choices…and some are much better than others, as you will see later…

A visionary guy called Colin Wheildon ran a number of fascinating tests on fonts many years ago, which formed the basis of an extraordinary book called *"Are you communicating or just making pretty shapes?*

It's probably the most meaningful work on the subject I have ever seen.

Here's one test that showed quite clearly, that an ad written in serif (Garamond) was read and comprehended by 670,000 people (66% of the test).

The same ad, written in sans serif (Helvetica) was only comprehended by 120,000 readers (12.5% of the test)

The same ad, incidentally, written in Times Roman – probably most people's favourite font - achieved 320,000 comprehension, just less than 50% of that achieved in Garamond.

These are very serious numbers indeed…

### Exaggerated Spacing & Reversed Out Text

Colin did a lot more testing in this area and unearthed a few other nuggets too.

He identified that exaggerated leading (spacing) is also <u>a further hurdle to reading, comprehension and ultimate success</u>. And the reasons for this are surprisingly simple. Our normal reading habits show that we are happy with what is known as "reading gravity"

We have been brought up on standard spacing. Play around with it and the eye becomes uncomfortable. Once this happens, the brain steps in and says – " *not happy with this*" – and influences you to move on to something else…

Another one bites the dust. A bit more valuable marketing budget down the pan…

To communicate effectively, we must always use typefaces that are proven to be no hurdle against comprehension. Because it "looks good" or is your favourite font should not come into it.

Here's another bit of gold dust, in the form of a head to head test...

It was a straight serif type against sans serif. Same ad, same copy, same everything – just the font type was different.

The results were staggering…

|  | Comprehension Good | Comprehension Fair | Comprehension Poor |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Serif** | **67%** | **19%** | **14%** |
| **Sans Serif** | **12%** | **23%** | **65%** |

In summary, <u>more than 5 times as many readers read the serif copy as read the sans serif copy in the same ad layout</u>.

By the way, while he was doing all these tests, Colin also despatched another old wives tale to the waste basket…

# The Truth About Italicised Copy.

An opinion that's long been held in certain circles - is that italicised text is very hard to read. Actually, this has been shown to be absolute tosh.

Italicised copy when researched in a disciplined test, suffered from no lack of comprehension at all.

Obviously, I am not suggesting your next letter is a full page of italicised copy, but this controlled test data proves without doubt that italicised text can be used with <u>total confidence</u> in your promotional messages…

Now on to reversed-out text.  Professional communicators have known for generations that reversed-out text is a massive hurdle to reading.  Yet, these days it seems to be appearing more and more.

I cannot believe that people waste money like this.  There is absolutely no excuse.

I heard a creative say the other day that reversed-out text is great for getting people's attention.  Yes, you bozo, that might be the case, but if it then stops them reading any further, you have wasted your client's money.

And it does.

Here's what Colin's research showed on this subject.  By the way, we are not talking about a few words or a headline here - we are talking about a whole block of copy.

| Comprehension Level | Good | Fair | Poor |
|---|---|---|---|
| *(a)    Serif font* | | | |
| Normal text – black on white | 70% | 19% | 11% |
| Reversed text – white on black | 0% | 12% | 88% |
| Reversed text – white on purple | 2% | 16% | 82% |
| Reversed text – white on blue | 0% | 4% | 96% |
| *(b)    Sans Serif font* | | | |
| Normal text – black on white | 14% | 25% | 61% |
| Reversed text – white on black | 4% | 13% | 83% |

### The Facts Are Very Clear.  So, Don't Wait - Act On Them NOW And You Will See An Immediate Benefit.

These days, it's getting tougher by the day to get those elusive response levels up, whatever media route is chosen.  I am hearing this from all markets and all sectors and we are seeing it ourselves in our own client activity.

The good old days are gone.  I suspect they will never return.  So we all better get used to it.

However, there are disciplines you can adopt and knowledge that you can use that at least might give you a fighting chance.

The examples and test results I have shared with you here are crystal clear.  Use the right font type, stay away from exaggerated spacing and recognise that reversed-out text is the enemy of reader comprehension.
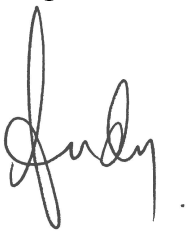
Next month, Part Two carries on with this theme and includes:

- Fascinating stuff from eye-tracking cameras about how people read your messages
- Why you should always use photographs instead of illustrations
- The optimum size for type
- The reasons why cleverness or intrigue rarely work
- And lot's lots more…*plus*

The usual mix of good and bad examples.  I'll try very hard to find some good ones for you, as I'm overflowing with the other sort.  It's been another one of those months somehow…

Anyway, 'til then…have a truly great Christmas and New Year break and, as usual…

Keep the faith…

### About the Author

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