



## Understanding people and human nature are essential skills for a copywriter

The best marketers are those who understand people.

The reason is simple. Marketing is a people business. People make things happen.

But, it seems to me, that a lot of people in marketing these days, struggle quite a bit in this area. In my view, it's a sad trend that has developed over the last 15 years.

I have no idea why...

In the main, an awful lot of marketing people around now have little experience in the wider picture and do not appear well read. They are incredibly blinkered.

They have narrow minds.

They know everything about their business, but nothing about anything else. They spend their lives talking to marketing people about marketing.

The rest of the world out there – and the people in it - are unknown to them.

This is a major problem of course, because, it can be rather helpful if you understand people, before you try to market to them.

There are exceptions. There are some smart cookies out there. I have a few as clients, I'm pleased to say.

But, in the main, the majority of marketers disappoint me.

Previous generations of marketers had much more knowledge and understanding of the big old world out there – and were much more successful as a result.

I recall something else about them. They were civil, pleasant and, bar for a few dumbos, were fun to deal with. Relationships were created – and lasted for years.

Sometimes decades.

Sometimes, forever.

Not so, today. Promiscuity rules...

How can that benefit anybody?

I have to say, that I find the communication skills of a lot of current marketers to be extremely poor. What's more, it is my opinion, that an awful lot of them are basically ignorant.

And, on that subject, I'm going to have a little rant for a minute...

This ignorance rears its ugly head a lot of times during attempted email communications.

And I'm not talking about cold prospecting. I'm talking about a simple conversation between two people who know each other – and have an existing business relationship.

Replies to emails can sometimes take weeks to come back. A lot just get totally ignored. I find it extremely odd, to be honest.

Whatever way you look at it, it's easier and much more efficient to reply to an email, rather than hold on to it for weeks.

I used to get really annoyed about receiving a reply, weeks after I had sent the original note.

It made no sense to me. Still doesn't.

But now I just accept it as being the norm. Because, unfortunately, that's what it is. Together with the spelling, punctuation and grammar errors that are evident when the email eventually arrives.

All this clearly shows that there has been, without doubt, a gradual lowering of standards across the board in our business.

And I have to tell you, I dislike it intensely.

Over the eternity I've been in this crazy business, I've watched, listened, worked with, talked to - and been a part of a number of people groups.

I have also devoured knowledge like a starving man. This continues...

I have enjoyed over two decades of presenting seminars, workshops and Masterclasses all over the globe. I have met - and continue to meet - some very smart people. I learn something from all of them.

All of this has taught me a hell of a lot. And it has made me better at what I do. The biggest thing by far, is my understanding of people and human nature.

This I am able to call on when I am writing campaigns. It enables me to have a pen-picture of the individuals in any target group I am writing to.

And, as a writer, this is invaluable, as it allows me to write copy that gets closer to them. This disarms them without them knowing it - allowing the copy to connect, reassure, persuade and work effectively.

I learnt this from the great Bill Bernbach a long time ago, when he said:

*"It is insight into human nature that is the key to the communicator's skill. For whereas the writer is concerned with what he puts into his writings, the communicator is concerned with what the reader gets out of it. He therefore becomes a student of how people read or listen."*

Anyway, as understanding people is clearly vital in marketing, yet almost totally misunderstood, especially with regards to copy, I thought it might be a nice topic for *Copycat* this month.

So, here are a few things about people that you might want to consider when you are preparing to write your new communication campaign. There are many more. I have just selected a few for you.

As you go through this list you'll see that all of these obviously don't apply to any one person. Each is individual to the individual. However, most people have a lot of these traits in their make-up.

And these things do affect how they make buying decisions.

If you are aware of the most powerful human behaviour sequences and understand the thing that triggers them, you can lead people to say "yes" to your requests more often.

So, if you want your campaign to perform to the maximum, you might want to think about some of these and address them within your copy and creative.

Here they are. In no particular order:

## **1. People like to get exclusive offers**

Exclusivity is a very powerful motivator. "Only you, only from us"

If used correctly, it can be enormously successful, as it is based on a simple idea:

Everyone wants it, nobody can get it - only you.

One thing to remember, though. Exclusivity demands an expiration date. Never use exclusivity without one.

## **2. People struggle to make a decision**

Most people are bumblers. That's why you should give them a reason to respond NOW.

It's not hard. Give them a chance to enjoy a major benefit by responding quickly. Tell them how they could earn, make, save or enjoy today, rather than tomorrow. And tell them what they will lose, if they don't respond.

The fear of loss is always greater than the promise of gain.

## **3. People are suspicious of anything new**

And this could mean *anything*. A new company. New people. New products. New services. A new offer.

Even a new way to do something.

If you are a new company to someone, you have a number of major hurdles to overcome. The biggest is credibility.

If they don't know you, your campaign copy has to work tremendously hard to convince them you are the real deal - and you offer something better or different to that which they already have.

## **4. People follow leaders**

People like to be associated with the best. It gives them confidence.

We are programmed that way. Right from the school playground to the corporate boardroom.

When you position yourself or your company and the products or services you sell, as a leader, you are on the right road.

But, you have to prove it - not just say it. If you do, you will enjoy success and give your competitors loads of problems.

## **5. People like facts, figures and formulas**

Facts. Figures. Formulas. Use them to substantiate your selling proposition and you will sell more.

Humans are interesting. We seemingly are drawn to numbers.

I have found this out when I return home after seminars and workshops. The most requested slides are always the lists of things to do or know or that work well in copy and creative.

Give people a list and the directions to follow – and there's a good chance your responses will go up.

## **6. People like to have a reason to buy**

The reader *wants* to believe an ad if the appeal sounds good.

The more effectively you present and elevate the emotional factors, the more likely the reader will believe what you are saying.

You must be crystal clear with your words. What's more, your graphics must complement the copy. Everything should make sense and be totally believable. If it is, there's a good chance they will buy.

## **7. People do not pay attention**

These days, a lot of people only have a short attention span.

That's why, in a sales letter, the offer and main benefit should be delivered 3 times at least. In the headline, the body copy and the P.S.

## **8. People want to see the benefits**

People buy benefits not features. Your prospects will be asking "What am I going to gain from buying this from you"?

If you don't tell them, you will lose them. Simple as that. It's imperative you show quite clearly what the benefits are. Talk about what they will earn, save, make, enjoy and learn.

Always talk benefits.

## **9. People like Guarantees**

These days, a Guarantee of Satisfaction is mandatory. It should underline the power of your offer.

Victor Kiam was one of the most famous men to do very well with a guarantee. He promised purchasers of his electric shavers that his products would "*shave as close as a blade, or I'll give you your money back*". People still remember that line today.

It was a clever guarantee as well. Because even if the product didn't really shave that close, it positively addressed what was considered to be the main objection to buying an electric shaver.

## **10. People like the personal touch**

DM legend Ray Jutkins had a lovely way of explaining this. He said:

"Reach out and touch your marketplace. Let them know you care. Be personal. Communicate. And do it often. Hold their hand. Be their teddy bear. Be their security blanket.

People want to be with people. Things are nice. People are better.

Touch your customers"

Wonderful stuff.

The way to touch them, is to do it with emotional copy. Replace intellectual words with emotional ones and watch the sales soar.

The list above, is pretty much timeless, as it deals with basic human behaviour. This list would have been the same 50 years ago.

And it will be the same 50 years from now.

The reason is simple. When it comes to the buying process, times change, but people don't.

That's why I passionately believe that at the heart of good writing is an understanding of people, an insight into them, a sympathy towards them.

If you recognise what compulsions drive people, what instincts dominate their actions - and you use that knowledge in your copy - you will make a ton of money.

The best writers are writers that seek knowledge. Writers who study. Writers that have broad minds, not narrow ones. Writers that think beyond the words. And writers that pay enormous attention to detail.

So, my friends, go out there and acquire knowledge. Of life and people.

This is how an ordinary person can become a titan.

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 marketing.

The company's corporate website is [www.andyowen.co.uk](http://www.andyowen.co.uk) The specialist copy division has its own site at [www.copywritingthatsells.com](http://www.copywritingthatsells.com) 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 on the website.

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