

Welcome to the ninth edition of AdBriefing - the monthly newsletter designed for those who have a very real interest in producing good advertising.

As always, we would be delighted to hear your views and ideas.

Good Copy Reads Itself

Last month, I went on at some length about web site copy and how certain people on the Internet are laying down rules for writing same that are too ridiculous for words. A somewhat similar preoccupation is exercising my mind this month: and it concerns all those so-called copywriters and tutors of copywriting who boldly claim to provide x number of ways of doing a certain thing.

In other words, they have, for example, 15 ways of producing a 'killer' headline, or 20 ways to write a 'stunning' copy opener, or 30 ways to pen an 'unforgettable' postscript and, for all I know, 300 ways to skin a cat.

I find all of this quite laughable. If there were, indeed, 15 ways of producing a headline, or anything else pertaining to copy, I would long ago have programmed a computer to do just that. Then I would have retired to Rio on the proceeds, where you would find me propping up an Epenema bar regaling the patrons with the exquisite moneymaking wonders of my 15 ways.

Some forty years ago, I learned the first rule of advertising, which is: there are no rules. Copywriting is an instinctive business, an improvisational business, a business in which you do what your past experience, combined with your creativity, tells you to be right. You cannot write copy to a formula; especially a formula devised by someone whom I, frankly, would not allow to write a beer mat.

Putting my money where my mouth is, I am now going to attempt to prove my point via practical illustration. A few dozen years ago, I wrote a stick of copy for a company called Old Hall Tableware. This company manufactured (and still does, by the way) a whole range of stainless steel pots pans and teapots; and it was for the latter that I produced the following:

In our canteen here at Bloxwich, we are still using tea sets we made back in the thirties. Every year, we look at the stylish new models we're producing now and think about a change. But, well, you know how it is.

We think our teapots are well made. They ought to be. Our craftsmen have been smoothing tableware out of stainless steel longer than anyone else in the world. They fuss over spouts that don't drip, and lids that are double-channelled, and handles that stay cool. What's more, an Old Hall teapot somehow seems better balanced when you lift it.

You should just see those teapots in our canteen. The thirty-year-old ones. All they ever need is a quick wipe over to stay clean and handsome.

For the record, this ad sold a lot of Old Hall teapots; it also won an award from the now-



defunct AdWeekly magazine. But the question is: could this stick of copy have been written to a formula? Absolutely not. That kind of material comes straight from the heart.

In order to prove the point even further, let me run another ad past you. This one was produced, again a long time ago, by the London division of the Doyle, Dane Bernbach ad agency. Its purpose was to make American showbiz stars aware of a particular British television chat show; and it invited them to put their names down to appear.

The agency tackled the problem of approaching these American all-stars by naming one of them – the remarkable actor/comedian Jack Benny. For the benefit of our younger readers, Jack Benny was not only one of the funniest men on two legs, he was also allegedly very mean. Doyle, Dane latched on to the latter trait, making Benny an offer of a free airline ticket, a hotel booking, £20 mad money and a tip allowance (10p). They even put a coupon in the ad for his reply.

The headline to the ad ran, simply: **FREE OFFER TO JACK BENNY**

And the body copy kicked off along the lines of: **You see, Jack, as the UK's leading late night show, we can afford to be generous. But we got to number one only by attracting guys like you....**

Well, not only did Jack accept the invitation, but so did hundreds of other US celebs; and the show went from strength to strength.

Given the above, do you think it even mildly probable that you could come up with a concept this good via the proverbial '45 ways to make a good ad' principle? Of course not. Ads of this calibre come about from a spark of extemporaneous genius.

Oh, one last thing. Have you yet read my '168 ways to ignore people who offer 168 ways? You should, you know.

CUFF NOTE 16: Who says so....apart from you?

Are you believable in your website, brochures, and direct mail copy?

When you write about your products and services and tell your prospects what benefits they'll gain by dealing with you, how do they know you're telling the truth? How can they be confident that what you say will happen, *will happen*? How do they know you really will back your claims with a second-to-none service?

Testimonials, that's how. Testimonials make you believable.

One of the most powerful ways to make people act is by proving that what you've promised will happen; and letters and statements from previous satisfied customers will do just that.

So how do you collate testimonials? It's a fact that most happy customers won't take the time to write and let you know; so you have to ask. And if you write to them, they are very likely to reply.

A simple written request asking them for a small favour and explaining that you're updating your website or literature and that you'd love to include a testimonial or quote from them, should do the trick. Most people are happy to help, but make it as simple for them to do so



as possible.

For example, tell them they don't need to bother to have a letter typed up, they can just jot their comments down in a note and send it back in the stamped addressed envelope you have enclosed.

Simple.

Quote of the month.

One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree.

"Which road do I take?" She asked.

"Where do you want to go?" He questioned.

"I don't know", Alice replied.

"Then," said the cat, "it doesn't matter."

Lewis Carroll.

A Blast From The Past.

Many years ago Ben Feldman, one of the world's most successful insurance salesmen (who on his own outsold many insurance companies), used mail to achieve much of his success. He kept a birthday book of all his customers, and he wrote to those with upcoming birthdays. His simple note read:

Dear...

Will you trade one hour of your time for \$1 a day for the rest of your life?

On (birthday date) your insurance rates go up \$1 a day, forever.

Best wishes,

Ben Feldman.

Another exponent of mail was Joe Girand; at the time, he was America's number one car salesman, (one-on-one, that is, no fleet sales.). He sent postcards to every one of his customers on every celebration date. Christmas, New Year, Valentines etcetera.

His simple message was. "Happy New Year. I like you. Joe Girand.

Short personal messages worked miracles for those two, and since it costs around 7 times more to find new customers than it does to sell something new to existing ones, you can see why it's profitable.

These days, with email, the cost of keeping in touch with customers is negligible, so perhaps we ought to.

Smart Translations.

The Internet opens up a world wide market, which also means a lot of languages. So if you want to translate your web pages or produce your off-line brochure, here's a little tip you might want to consider.

There are, of course, loads of translation agencies and services around. Some are good, some not quite so good. So you should choose wherever possible by recommendation; and



choose an agency which has ready-to-hand translators whom you can meet.

But whatever you do, insist that your words are translated by a native speaker of the language you're converting to; and be sure that that person is fluent in English. Here's why.

A German, say, who is fluent in English will understand your text and be able to translate it into flowing German, but the other way round doesn't work nearly as well. Nine times out of ten, the same person writing in English will write it correctly, sometimes too correctly for

easy flow. And even if his English is brilliant, he will at times need to compromise. This might not be noticeable in speech, but it will be in print.

Just last week, a German friend of mine who has a reasonable command of English, showed me his new property brochure. It was in German, Spanish and English. I can't comment on the first two languages, but the English section just wasn't right. It was stilted and so grammatically clumsy that any English reader would have quickly concluded that it was written by a foreigner. Of course, that wouldn't offend anyone, but if people don't get the message, features and benefits straight off the bat, they will swiftly go elsewhere.

Thought for the month.

If you want to soar with the eagles, don't mix with the turkeys.



Word Power III.

If you're stuck with copywriting problems, or suffering from writers block or can't quite come up with that elusive headline may I recommend our own sales writers' resource e-book [Word Power III](#).

You'll find ready-made copy such as headlines, tag lines, link lines, calls to action, price defenders, guarantees and more, which you can lift straight from the page and adopt or adapt.

You'll also discover a sales writers' thesaurus in the form of a theme finder, which will cure writers block forever. You can see it at: <http://www.wordpower3.com>