

Welcome to the eighth 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.

Sales Letters. Some do's and don'ts.

By following a few guide lines you can get more of your letters read.

Many people adopt a formal and impersonal style when they write sales letters. Well, if you're writing a letter to persuade someone to buy something, formal and impersonal is the last thing you ought to be. In fact, you should always strive to sound natural and relaxed.

Keep letters conversational. Don't let them sound like announcements. Make them sound as if you're talking to your audience one-to-one; sound like a friend.

Try recording your letter and listen to the playback. Does it sound conversational now? If it doesn't, then you should return to the old drawing board.

Something else to bear in mind. It is unlikely that your reader will be giving the same concentration to reading your letter as you gave to writing it. So always place the most important sales point, the one that offers the biggest benefit to your reader, right up front. You never know, it might just make them try and concentrate.

Also, don't show off your vocabulary or your knowledge of jargon. You may impress your reader with your superior IQ, but they won't like you for it.

Don't be obsessed with grammar, just make your letter flow. And despite what your English teacher said, you are allowed to start sentences with 'and' and 'but'. You do so all the time when you're in conversation. If you're really worried about it, just pick up one of the up-market newspapers and see what the journalists do.

Involve your reader by asking questions and making them read on to find the answers.

Don't make your letter look like it's going to be a hard read. If you need to write a long letter spread it over enough pages so that you don't need to cram it full. Use short sentences and short paragraphs, it's far less daunting.

And once you've done all that, you'll have more than an average chance of a decent response.

Quote of the month.

It doesn't count how many times you're knocked down.

It only counts how many times you get up.

Rocky Marciano.

Entertainment is for entertainers, not web site copy

A lot of people are making a great deal of money from showing others how to write copy for web sites. Some of this instruction is first-rate and is based on solid experience. A great deal of it, however, is eye-shine; and the perpetrators of it seem to be trying to outdo each other in producing ever more outlandish and impossible rules.

I recently ran a check on a guy who promised, at the cost of several hundred pounds, to teach all and sundry to write 'killer' web copy. (The misused noun is his.) It turned out that this bloke had written only one web site – the one that was trying to sell me a course in writing web site copy!

The latter tutor offers a long list of attributes that every web site must, according to him, contain. Most were fairly unexceptionable, but one stood out in its crassness like a large Scotch on a Temperance Hall tea trolley.

The rule in question confidently assured me that a web site must 'entertain'. What does this mean? If it means what I think it means, then he is expounding one of the biggest fallacies the advertising industry has ever witnessed, and one that was very quickly recognised almost at the dawn of advertising.

Entertainment is for conjurors and novelty dance acts. Sure, if you are a stand-up comedian and your web site is designed to promote your skills and availability, it might be a good idea to employ a few one-liners in order to demonstrate your originality. But if you are selling insurance, or legal services, or even tie-dyed t-shirts, the last thing you want to do is distract potential customers from your sales message by offering an entertaining diversion.

In the first instance, you need to tell people that you can provide the most comprehensive insurance cover that very little money can buy – with no hassles when they make a claim. In the second instance, you have to say that you know the law well enough to be able to solve legal problems in no time flat at the minimum cost. And, in the third place, your message is that each t-shirt is unique, one-of-a-kind, and made individually for each customer. Then you go on to expound the benefits of such claims just as clearly.

Do you really, honestly need to set up an entertainment for those who have visited your site only to find out about insurance, legal services or t-shirts? I don't think so.

This is why great copywriters like Rosser Reeves in the 50s and Raymond Rubicam 20 years earlier never tired of denouncing ad campaigns that majored on things that had absolutely nothing to do with the product or service. They were so certain of their aversion to it that they published books on the subject. It is also why very few surfers hang around to watch a flash presentation or wait while that brilliant animated gif decides to open.

I'll agree that many copywriters still hold the misguided view that entertainment is a good thing; and you only have to view a few of the ridiculous car commercials on UK television to prove the point. But an ad, a commercial or a web site is doomed if its foremost objective is to entertain. The punters will no doubt be highly amused, but it is unlikely that they will buy on the strength of that amusement alone. Many (and research backs this statement to the hilt) will be so impressed by the humour or the slickness that they will fail even to remember the name of your product.

I am all in favour of humour and cleverness in advertising, but only if those attributes are directly related to the unique selling proposition of the product or service. And I mean directly related.



If you were to ask me what is the single most important ingredient in web site copy, I would respond with a single word: clarity. Clarity of sales message and clarity of copy layout.

If your product or service is as good as you suppose it is, then tell your potential customers why this is so. Why on earth would you want to talk about something else?

CUFF NOTE 15: Getting your mail shots opened.

By John Powell

If you're doing a mail shot, be careful of the words you use if you overprint the envelope.

There are only two reasons to overprint an envelope. (1) To include a return address so that you can clean your database of undeliverable addresses and not waste money mailing them again. (2) To increase the chance of the envelope being opened and the contents read.

Surveys have shown that more than 50% of recipients of unsolicited mail perceived the word **URGENT** as junk mail. Likewise **OPEN IMMEDIATELY!** and **GREAT NEWS INSIDE!** Overprints of this type turn off more potential customers than they ever turn on.

One message that does seem to work, though, and without alienating recipients is: **PLEASE DO NOT BEND OR FOLD.**

It sends a signal that the contents are photographs or something fragile, which naturally increases curiosity. And there's no reason for the recipient to be offended when it turns out you only wanted to ensure your literature arrive in pristine condition.

With tongue in cheek, Pat Quinn came up with a humdinger for a message. He reckoned the way to get an envelope opened was to overprint with this.

WARNING.

**THIS ENVELOPE CONTAINS
MATERIAL OF AN EXPLICIT NATURE.**

Well if it's a sales message it does, doesn't it?

Thought of the month.

Success is just a matter of luck, ask any failure.

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>

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