

STEP 3 — WORDING

Make conversation with your customer

I spent over two years in charge of a team of five salesmen covering much of Scotland. Part of my job was to accompany my reps, in order to appraise their performances and develop training programs. I recall one trip (with George, a long-established salesman from Inverness) that lasted three days, when we did calls in Wick, Thurso, and the island capitals of Kirkwall, Lerwick, and Stornoway – primarily visiting the major wholesalers in each area. Though my grasp of Scottish dialects had improved, I have to confess that I missed much of what went on. Whatever it was, however, did the trick, because George took orders that I could only describe as astronomical. He sold so much that not only was he the top salesman in my area, but we won the top area prize too. Thanks to George, we both went on that year’s incentive holiday to Hong Kong.

George knew his customers and could slip effortlessly into their idiom, whether it be that of the isolated north coast or the differing micro-nations that make up the northern and western isles. Obviously there was a bit more to it than a superficial switch of dialect – George had worked hard on building a deeper empathy and mutual respect with his customers – but it began with tuning in at the first level of contact, a common language.

All good salespeople are taught to speak the language of their customers. This metaphor is an old principle and a fundamental driving force behind the new “science” and growing business practice of NLP (neurolinguistic programming). In NLP it’s referred to as *matching*. Matching is used to build pace and rapport, by mirroring and complementing aspects of the other person. When you match, you show that you are willing to enter the other person’s model of the world – intuitively, they feel more at ease with you.¹

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

It's such an important principle because it works. And we all use it in our daily lives – not just with customers, but with colleagues, friends, relatives, children, and even pets.

Reach the crowd, address the individual

Stop for a moment and consider this question: Why do we have advertising and its many cousins? One answer, when you think about it, is because it simply isn't feasible to speak to all your customers personally. If you could – if it were cost-effective and practical – you would. (Or you'd employ a talented advocate like George to do it for you.)

Instead, you have to resort to the intermediary of the mass media: which, depending on the scale of your business, may range from a postcard in your local newsagent's window to a full-blown national television advertising campaign.

But that doesn't mean that you have to start acting daft. (And I use this expression because that's what it seems like to me.) The inability to speak in person to your customer isn't a reason to adopt the manner of a traveling player. I call it "playing to the world." Using the mass media doesn't mean that you can't be yourself.

When I moved from sales into marketing, I remember that one of my first jobs was to organize some trade press advertising, to be placed in magazines like *The Grocer* and *Super Marketing*. I soon made myself unpopular with my agency. Having spent most days for the previous six years in the company of our customers, I just couldn't come to terms with the self-important oratory that I was expected blithely to approve. No one likes a show-off, especially one who's selling to you. It was the sort of speak that would get you thrown straight out of the buyer's office.

Trade press advertising is viewed as rather unglamorous, and I assume that it was assigned to the agency's most junior and inexperienced copywriters. Maybe these guys had never done a sales call in a corner shop, or been to a presentation at the likes of Asda head office. Whatever their excuse, it showed in their soapbox style presumptuously aimed at some great unseen yet miraculously enthralled crowd.

And it still happens. Trade magazines, in particular, are littered with ads that play to the world. My latest copy of *The Grocer* sports headlines like “Grab some mighty tasty profits!” and “The sky’s the limit!” You just wouldn’t say this sort of thing.

Just because in marketing you’re trained to *think* audience, that doesn’t mean that you should *speak* audience.

Almost invariably, your marketing communication will be consumed by one customer at a time.² As far as I know, my thoughts only happen in my head; I’m sure it’s the same for you. If you’ve ever sat beside a friend and tried to “share read” the same newspaper or magazine, you’ll know that it’s impossible to move at the same pace. Thoughts are as individual as it gets.

I have always found it a valuable discipline to think “one customer” in this way. You may have noticed in this book that wherever it makes sense, I have referred to “your customer” in the singular, not to “your audience.”

This one-to-one approach helps stave off the temptation to lapse into ad speak. As one writer put it:

“If your sales talk sounds like the public’s conception of a ‘sales talk’, it needs revision.”³

Which customer?

But what should you do when you are using a mass medium to talk to many *different* customers at once?

For example, if you sell tires in the UK, your audience is made up of almost 30 million vehicle owners. Something a bit more specific like diapers still gives you a potential market of around two million households at any one time. Even in a business-to-business context (say copiers, printing, or stationery), you’re quite likely to have a diverse customer base numbering in the hundreds or thousands.

If you are unable to adapt or personalize your message, even two customers are more than enough to give you a problem.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

Our own mailings were regularly sent to staff at all levels in our client companies, ranging from secretaries with very little marketing experience to managing directors with, er, very little marketing experience. In between were folk of all disciplines – marketing, sales, computing, underwriting, production, distribution, finance, personnel, and so on.

But for any given mailing – which may have reached 1,000 customers – when I wrote the copy I had *one person* in mind. This was a real person, and usually it was Mr A, the managing director of a multinational insurance company for which we worked.

I knew Mr A quite well and had a good business relationship with him. He was not from a marketing background, though he was making great strides in fostering marketing in a culture where historically it had been the poor relation.

By writing my advertisement as though to Mr A personally, I knew that I would benefit from a range of built-in safeguards. First, I would use a minimum of marketing speak. Second, I would adopt a businesslike yet friendly tone. Third, I would keep to the point (he was as busy as they got). And fourth, there would be nothing embarrassing at any level (since it was fit for consumption by an important managing director).

Most importantly, though, it was real speak to a real person – if you'll excuse my wording. I would write a letter just as though I were sitting in his office having a businesslike conversation with him.

It might have been coincidence, but over a 10-year period Mr A was our best responder. (I can't believe it was coincidence.) And overall – as I have said – we regularly got responses in excess of 50 percent across the entire database, so our mailings were clearly well received.

So what's my answer to the "which customer" dilemma? Certainly it's find your Mr A, because I do know that you can't write well to more than one person at a time. If you've ever sent an email to a group of friends (perhaps trying to arrange a trip), or led a three- or four-way conference call, you'll know how tricky it is to get the right tone.

Logically, it would seem sensible to write to the most numerous type of person in your audience – Mr Average. But I would counsel against this as a starting point. Our Mr A was far from Mr Average. In fact, there were

probably no more than a dozen like him (of his status) on our database. And he was certainly not our bull's-eye target – that honor went to more lowly minions who were custodians of marketing communications budgets.

So there's no hard-and-fast rule here. You must use your judgment and then get whatever feedback you can. But *do* write to a person and not to a crowd.

In praise of wing nuts

At one time there was a marketing trainee in my department who made himself unpopular around the building owing to his love of the sound of his own voice. When the day came for him to depart for his six-month stint in the salesforce, somewhat concerned for his chances, I rather unsubtly presented him with a giant pair of false ears and the following blunt maxim, known to many a salesperson:

“God gave us two ears and one mouth. Use them in that proportion.”⁴

Pick up any decent book on modern sales techniques and you'll find a section on listening. It might even be the more adventurous-sounding active listening. However, there's nothing new under the sun. This quote is from a text on commercial traveling written over half a century ago:

“Determine to listen to buyers. Talk far less and listen much more.”⁵

In my experience, the best salespeople are nothing like the talkative stereotypes that verbally batter their victims into submission. In fact, they are often quietly spoken people who ask questions and pay attention to the answers. (And they invariably have a good sense of both humor and humility.) Listening is probably the single most important skill a salesperson can possess.

But if advertising and marketing really are just the same as selling, surely there is a great paradox: How on earth does an ad or a mailing *listen*?

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

I can't answer that, but here's a thought: If you can't actually listen to your customer, you can at least avoid the habits of a bad listener. One of my little training rules, for instance, concerns "you"s and "we"s.

When you write copy for an ad or a mailing, try to make sure that it contains at least two "you"s for every "we." It's not always easy to do this while you're writing, but you can certainly check afterwards and make any necessary adjustments. For example, compare these two sentences:

☆ "We have more branches than all our competitors put together."

☆ "You're never more than half a mile from your nearest Post Office."

It's not difficult to tell which one sounds like it's operating in listening mode. In the first sentence the advertiser lectures its reader, with two "we"s to boot (actually a "we" and an "our"). In the second the advertiser looks at the matter entirely from its customer's perspective (and two "you"s).

This approach also has the advantage of magically converting features into benefits. (More about this in Step 4, Attention.)

The granny test

When I was learning to write direct-mail copy, I was amused by a frequent piece of advice: Get your granny to read your work before you inflict it on your customers. It still crops up in handbooks on copywriting today. (David Ogilvy's version is that you should talk to a farmer in Iowa.⁷)

The idea behind this is that it provides a screening process to ensure you write in plain English. If your granny (or the farmer from Iowa) can understand it, then so will your customer.

I disagree. I think the granny test is a bit of a red herring. (I can't speak for the farmer.) Most grannies I've met seem pretty literate, have accumulated huge vocabularies during their long lives, and leave me standing when it comes to crosswords.

"The reading age of the average supermarket shopper is 11."

STEP 3: WORDING

A Safeway buyer told me this, following some research she had conducted. A reading age of 11 is not as bad as it might sound (for instance, you would be able to read though not necessarily understand words such as atmosphere, binocular, and circumstances⁸), but it should make you stop and think about the words you use in your marketing communications.

You may have heard David Ogilvy's anecdote about the choice of words, but it's worth repeating. Having researched a particular ad he discovered that most housewives did not understand the phrase "Dove made soap obsolete." He changed obsolete to "old-fashioned." On another occasion, a journalist rang him to ask what the word "ineffable" meant in an ad he had written for Hathaway shirts. Ogilvy was forced to admit that he hadn't the faintest idea.⁹

Marketers sometimes use the word *complimentary*, when they are giving away something free. They also use the word *complementary*, when they are selling two things that go together. (You can even imagine an offer using both words, though it would be a devil of a job to get it to fit on the packaging.)

While I was writing this chapter I ran a simple test on a group of bright 12-year-olds. I showed a card with the two words in question written on it, just like this:



I asked if they knew what the words meant, and what the difference was between them. I got blank looks, apart from one youngster, who said: "Angles that add up to 90 degrees." Nice answer, but not what I was after.

If intelligent 12-year-olds don't know what these words mean, what about the average supermarket customer with a reading age of 11? To confuse them further, marketers often get the spellings of complimentary and complementary mixed up. Is this bottle of tonic free, or does it just go well with this particular brand of gin?

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

Copy checking? I'd say it's a P45 for the granny, and a quiet word with your local primary-school teacher.

Don't blame the English

When the English landed in Britain some 1,500 years ago, little did they guess what impact their language would have on the world. (Linguists call it Ingvaeonic – the Angles and Saxons left us no name for it, and it evolved into separate branches of Frisian, Dutch, Afrikaans, Low German, and modern English.¹⁰)

English is now the most influential and widely used language on the planet and has more words than any other (numbering in the hundreds of thousands – over 615,000 in the revised *Oxford English Dictionary*). Only in English are there proper thesauri – or is it thesauruses? (Guess what? It can be either.)

In fact, it's the French we marketers have to blame for our problems. (Strictly, the French-speaking Vikings who ruled England after 1066.) Norman French became the lingua franca of the Court, thus carrying great prestige among higher society. It was a good 300-odd years before we had the blighters back speaking decent English, and by then the language too had been well and truly invaded.

Today, borrowing from French poses an interesting dilemma for the copywriter. There are two ways to express many sentiments: in "Saxon" or in "Latin."

Saxon words tend to be short and their Latin synonyms long. (For writing purposes this doesn't mean that their origins are strictly Saxon or Latin, but it is a useful shorthand for the two families of words.) For example, you could mean the same thing and yet use either of these phrases:

☆ In Saxon: "great buy"

☆ In Latin: "excellent purchase"

Old English versus a mixture of Latin and Old French. Two syllables play five. Who wins?

The answer is that common currency wins. Time and again. It's reckoned that of the 100 most common words in English today, every one is Anglo-Saxon in origin.¹¹

It doesn't stop there. One study found that 43 words account for half of all those in common use, and just 9 for a quarter of *all* the words in any sample of written English. Here they are, monosyllabic and Anglo-Saxon to the letter: and, be, have, it, of, the, to, will, you.¹²

I've occasionally been told by clients: "We say *complimentary* – we don't use the word *free* here, it degrades our brand image, we're far too *premium* for that." (I think: then why are you giving away free gizmos?)

I'm with American copywriting guru Herschell Gordon Lewis. He puts it simply: "use demotic language."¹³ (Demotic, of course, means "of the people," democracy and all that. Ironically, it's a Greek word.)

"Complimentary" is a word from Old French, based on a Latin root. "Free" – as you'll no doubt have guessed – comes from an Old English word: *fréo*. When it comes to selling, my money's on *fréo*.

Jargon buster

Another common pitfall is the ill-considered use of jargon. For one insurance client, I spent years trying to avoid words like endorsement, indemnity, premium, sum insured, and warranty. It's all very well to use these terms in the office, but you may as well speak in a foreign language as put them in your consumer communications. Even on a business-to-business basis it's a risk: How can you be sure that the person reading your ad or mailing isn't a trainee?

Many people who run their own businesses come from a technical background. (And even in large firms, it's common for marketing staff to have trained initially in technical areas.) So it's not surprising that jargon creeps in unnoticed.

Look in your local paper and you can find people offering to supply you with rebate. They mean wood.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

Grammar rules, not

There is a world of difference between grammatical rules (which you can't break) and opinions about grammar (which you can chose to ignore). For instance, here's a rule you know:

- a Before Harry went shopping, he went to the bank.
- b He went to the bank before Harry went shopping.

Both sentences contain an identical set of words. Yet only in the first sentence could Harry have gone to the bank. You automatically use this rule about word order every day without so much as a moment's hesitation. In fact, I don't even need to explain what it is (which is a relief).

Now here's an opinion about grammar, which you also probably know:

- a When you need to really think...
- b When you need really to think...

Of course, it's a split infinitive. Sentence a) is what most people would say. Sentence b) is what some "experts" think people should say. (Even though the phrase loses some of its meaning and intensity of expression.)

Thankfully, modern-day linguists are championing a far more enlightened approach. To paraphrase Professor R L Trask of the University of Sussex, writing about the dogmatic insistence on not splitting infinitives, it's astounding, bizarre, curious, insane, nonsense.¹⁴

Professor Steven Pinker of MIT says of such prescriptive opinions:

"They have no more to do with human language than the criteria for judging cats at a cat show have to do with mammalian biology."¹⁵

His fellow American Bill Bryson gets to the root of the problem. He points out that the early authorities decided that the rules of English grammar should be based on Latin — a language with which it has little in common. It's akin, Bryson says, to making a baseball team play to the rules of football.¹⁶

But what should you do when you are writing copy to sell with? You may have been taught never to start a sentence with a conjunction, like *but*. Or to end one using a preposition, like *with*. Yet this is just how people speak.

In 1995 I was the copywriter on a year-long campaign for Scottish & Newcastle that achieved a 72 percent response (and subsequently won three Gold Awards). I began to think that I must be getting something right. So my humble advice is: Write what you would say.

And if your boss or colleague or customer or client finds fault, here's a further, more profound reason.

The sound of words

Poet and essayist Alexander Pope wrote about writing:

"The sound must seem an echo to the sense."¹⁷

There is a school of study within psychology that says that readers are actually *listeners*.¹⁸ Experiments monitoring brain activity have established that when people read, they hear the words in their minds. (Put crudely, the same parts of the monitored brain light up as when the subject is listening to spoken words.¹⁹)

This doesn't surprise me at all. I don't know about you, but hearing is how it feels to me. A word doesn't really come to life until I've heard it spoken – think of tricky gaelic names like Sean and Siobhan. (How are you pronouncing AIDA in your head? Aider? Aye-ee-dah?)

A while back Lever relaunched good old Jif cleaner as Cif (presumably for the purposes of pan-European packaging, with English Jif losing out in the average-difficulty-of-pronunciation stakes). Personally, though I'm in a minority, I struggle with this: I see Cif and hear *kiff*. But phone the number on the pack and a voice says: "Thank you for calling the *siff* careline."

I know that in English we've got circle and city and cider (and virtually every other word beginning "ci" starts with a "s" sound), but my brain pronounces Cif like café and coffee and cuff. There are no words in everyday

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

English that begin with the letters “cif,” so my processing system opts for the next most familiar sound pattern.

Now consider these points²⁰:

- ☆ Spoken language is believed to have developed more than 100,000 years ago.
- ☆ Since the spread of agriculture 10,000 years ago, there has probably been little biological human evolution (nor much time for it, anyway).
- ☆ The first records of true writing date back less than 6,000 years.
- ☆ Little more than a century ago, the world’s population was, to all intents and purposes, illiterate.
- ☆ The majority of the world’s 6,000 languages still have no written form.

Put these “facts” together and what do you get? What they tell me is that human brains are designed to *hear* language. We’ve been listening a thousand times longer than we’ve been reading. Writing is just a convenient, if clumsy, means of conveying language in a complex modern society. We train our brains to convert it back into sounds when we read. To paraphrase the great lexicographer Samuel Johnson, written words are but the daughters of Earth.

So for marketing communication purposes, writing should be treated not as the written word, but as the *spoken* word. And surely this means a simple, conversational style.

After all, you want your messages to be most acceptable to your customer and easily understood by them. So why be hamstrung by some rigid, pompous system, or equally the notion that writing is an art form demanding highfalutin execution? Write what you would say.

Grammatical preferences

Having implied that you can more or less break the rules (opinions) as you wish, I’m now going to backtrack a little. If you break rules, you

may irritate your customer. If I were to write an ad or mailing aimed at professors of English, I certainly wouldn't split my infinitives. (In fact, I'd find a friendly professor and ask him to thoroughly vet my copy first.)

It's so easy to distract your customer away from the delicate stream of buying thought into which you have carefully drawn them. Just make what they consider to be an error. If, like me, you're fussy about getting its/it's right, you're probably already distracted by the error that opens this paragraph.

(There's a simple rule: Only if you mean "it is" should you insert an apostrophe in "its." Remember: "It is an apostrophe.")

Hyphens (or, rather, the lack of them) also drive me bonkers. Without them, it's harder to create an easy-to-read effect. (Try an easy-to-read effect. Much better.) Sometimes, their absence can even affect the meaning of a phrase. Earlier in this chapter I wrote about a growing business practice. Is that a practice to do with growing businesses, or a business practice that is growing? (Only a hyphen could remove the confusion.)



Dispense with full stops – at least the ones at the ends of your headlines. The only possible effect a full stop can have is just that: to stop your customer from reading on. (Figure 27 shows a rather ironic example based on a real ad.) Next time you buy a newspaper or magazine, see how many of the headlines end with a full stop – excluding the ads, of course.

Figure 27 Unless your headline contains two sentences, the only effect a full stop can have is to deter your customer from reading on.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

A while ago I noticed a card on the message board in my local Sainsbury's. It was like this:

want to earn some
extra cash
tel: 123-123123

I wouldn't fancy phoning this number. Is the person at the other end of the line a potential employer or employee? You would normally expect a question mark to create ambiguity, but in this case it's the opposite.

Marketing myopia

At any time in a typical supermarket, 17 percent of customers can't read the signs above the aisles. A similar number can't read the labels on the goods.

This is not about illiteracy (in fact, I'm not even counting illiteracy) but eyesight: 60 percent of the population need specs.²¹ And in a recent survey by the AA, 17 percent of people were found to be motoring about in a state of significant uncorrected short-sightedness (for instance, they would fail the requirements of the driving test).²² Meanwhile, since many of the over-40s don't bother to take their reading glasses shopping, there's another sizeable chunk of customers on whom your brilliant words could be wasted.

If you don't need specs, it's perhaps easy to overlook the significance of this issue. I'm slightly short-sighted. As I write I can see a bird on a wire about 25 meters away, and though it's blurred I can tell it's a woodpigeon. But I can't read the type on the spines of books six feet away. It's the words that go first! It's no coincidence that opticians do eye tests with rows of letters rather than pictures of our feathered friends.

Received wisdom has it that 11-point type is about optimum for most people to read "in the hand." This book is set in 11-point type. So why do editors insist on draft manuscripts set in 14.5-point type *and* with double line spacing? (Because it's easier to read like that.)

I think the most important thing you can do is to test, and watch and listen to your customer. If your product is bought by the elderly and mainly stocked in supermarkets, you need to decide what information takes priority. If you're thinking of placing poster ads inside the local leisure center and pool, remember that there'll be a bunch of short-sighted people wandering about without their specs. (And long-sighted ones who won't be able to read your hand-held leaflets.)

In a drugstore study, Paco Underhill found that 91 percent of all customers read the front of the pack before buying a product. And 42 percent of them also read the back. The average reading time, even for something as innocuous as a moisturizer, was 16 seconds – during which interval most people can comfortably deal with 100 words, provided that they can read them.

A friend recently passed me a small ad from a newspaper that had amused him. I measured it and found that it was set in 6-point type. Here is a section of the text, at that size:

If you have difficulty reading the printed word, the *Daily Blah* can still be enjoyed on both audio and electronic format. A taped digest of the publication is available every week on subscription, while each day's edition is available through e-text.

It's hard to believe that somebody actually produced this ad. But I can imagine the process: It's your job to manage the talking newspaper, you get allocated a small area of free space by the editor, so you fit the message to the space. (No guardian salesman, you see.)

Pictures and recognition

Back to the woodpigeon (now flown). I recognized it by a combination of its size, shape, gray plumage, blurred but distinct white collar, and the likelihood of its being in the area. It puts an interesting slant on the subject of wording: Use pictures instead.

I was in a McDonald's recently when a small boy in our party pointed over my shoulder and said: "I want one of those." After replying "Is that: I

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

want one of those, *please?*”, I looked round to see that the item in question was a giant-size chocolate-covered doughnut, on a window poster. At the age of three-and-three-quarters, any words would have been wasted on the wee chap. McDonald’s knows this.

Many print ads have images or graphics that seem to serve little purpose. It’s as though the marketers concerned have thought: “It’s an ad, so it must have a picture in it.” (This is showmanship making an unwelcome appearance.) Look through a few magazines — especially trade journals — and see how often you could take away the picture with no detriment to the message.

If you find yourself with this feeling about one of your own ads, think woodpigeon (or doughnut). Let the visual part of the ad do something useful: to enhance and dramatize recognition for your customer — of their need, or the category, or your product. (See Figure 28 for an excellent example.)

Research in the bread market has confirmed the importance of visual cues in the buying process. A supermarket’s bread fixture is one of the most dynamic and heavily shopped in the entire store. There is a vast range of different brands and varieties (perhaps 100 or more in a large supermarket) and products can change places by the hour, never mind from week to week. For the busy shopper wishing to find their normal loaf, visual cues (color and graphics) are essential. Indeed, there’s anecdotal evidence to suggest that some customers will stick to a particular brand simply because it’s easy to find.

Much of what you sell will be to a customer who already buys from you. They know a lot about you and understand the buying context (like they’re in your restaurant and they’re hungry). Thinking about wording — at the outset as you develop your communications — will help your messages work harder, even if it means taking away words and using pictures instead.

Wording equals conversation

Edward de Bono says that 90 percent of errors in thinking are in fact errors in perception.²³ If he’s right (and I’m not going to argue), it only emphasizes the challenge faced by the marketer.



**PARIS GOT FASHION.
WE GOT WHISKEY.**
(SORRY, PARIS.)

JACK DANIEL'S  TENNESSEE WHISKEY

Your friends at Jack Daniel's remind you to drink responsibly.
www.jackdaniels.com
JACK DANIEL'S and GREAT DRINK are registered trademarks of Jack Daniel's Co. © 2007



Figure 28 An ad in which the headline would work fine on its own, but with a visual that engages the reader through humor, and thus quickly clarifies and dramatizes the proposition. Reproduced by kind permission of Brown-Forman.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

Poor wording is to communication what lazy clutch control is to driving. Your marketing efforts can stall before your customer moves even an inch in your direction. And the journey – if it happens at all – will be a bumpy ride. The message just doesn't get home.

But good wording is your secret synchronomesh system. With it you can match your revs to those of your customer's mind. In harmony together, you'll get on just fine.

And good wording is based on a simple principle employed by every competent salesperson. Write what you would say, to a person you know: the everyday art of conversation.

Steps you can take

Avoid the seven wordly sins

I've already touched on some tips that I have found useful in creating effective headlines and copy (for instance two "you"s per "we" and my remarks on grammar and punctuation). In this section are "seven wordly sins" – seven common pitfalls that litter the marketing communications motorway, but that you can ready yourself to steer around.

The seven wordly sins:

- 1 Hyperbole
- 2 Clichés
- 3 Platitudes
- 4 Plays on words
- 5 Riddles
- 6 Writer's fog
- 7 Designeritis

I have witnessed many (probably hundreds) of marketers trying to come up with ideas for ads. And I believe that most people can write perfectly good ads. But for some reason, common sense often gets left at home.

Consider these two statements:

- ☆ Because it's an ad, people will take notice of it.
- ☆ Because it's an ad, it needs to be clever, or grand.

You know what I'm going to tell you. These assumptions are incorrect; they are fallacies. Quite right. But give me two minutes at a magazine rack and I will find you a marketing communication that treats them as tenets of advertising.

You should not be afraid of writing ads, whatever your job or level of experience. But do think about it as a process of personal communication. Get feedback. Find out if you are being ignored or disbelieved. And watch out for the following pitfalls.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is "the use of an overstatement or exaggeration for effect."²⁴ It's the long version of the much maligned expression "hype," and is generally less blatant.

Here's an example that happened to me. A short while ago I heard a radio ad for Edinburgh Zoo. The endline of the commercial exclaimed: "Edinburgh Zoo... wild about animals... wild about you!"

This was news to me. Next morning I grabbed one of my kids and set off. What did they mean, wild about you? Not a lot, as it turned out.

At first, I thought something promising was afoot. On arrival in the foyer, we were intercepted by a girl with a clipboard. Maybe she was going to find out what we're interested in and give us some advice? But no. It was to persuade me to sign a covenant form, so that the zoo could reclaim the tax on the entry fee. (Can't argue with that, but not what I'd hoped for.)

So we passed unadvertised-to into the grounds, in our ignorance missing the half-hourly open trailer that would have conveyed us painlessly to the top of the steep hillside on which the zoo resides. Still, it was a bracing autumn day, perfect for hauling a wobbling kid on your shoulders.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

There were lots of staff about, clearing up and tending to the animals. On two occasions we stood right at the door of a pen and actually had to move aside to let a mute keeper enter. At the Harry Potter Snowy Owl enclosure, I think we must have been wearing our invisibility cloaks. Not one zoo-person spoke to us, in spite of our vocal dialog with the animals, which was a source of continual amusement to other visitors.

And maybe it was the time of year, but about half of the pens seemed to be empty (unless you counted the jackdaws). All of the refreshment kiosks were closed, and the output of the main cafeteria was reminiscent of a 1970s motorway service station. The education center had a sign up saying “Not open to the general public.”

Wild about *who*?

At Disney they *are* wild about you. Giant cartoon characters constantly approach your kids. There are friendly helpers at every turn. There’s more to do than you can shake a stick at, and you’re never further than a scone’s throw from the nearest snack stop.

Don’t get me wrong – we had an OK time at the zoo. Rights and wrongs of zoos aside, they are amazing places to take small children. And I really do believe that Edinburgh Zoo is wild about animals. But why did they have to spoil it with the hyperbole?

I’m sure that a significant proportion of their visitors are, like me, repeat buyers. Previously, I was happy to find my own way around and accept a fairly passive experience. But now they’ve highlighted a missing aspect of their offering that I’d never considered before.

Sadly, hyped headlines are all too common. Think how often you’ve seen: “Win a fantastic holiday!” I reckon that in the customer’s mind the code word “fantastic” is subconsciously translated as “not fantastic” and “probably a bit of a con.”

You’ll never read: “Win a fantastic Ferarri!” Why? Because plain “Win a Ferarri” does the job. (It doesn’t even need an exclamation mark.) If something’s fabulous, great, or superb, then it should either be self-evident, or the copywriter’s job is to explain why, without recourse to showmanship.

So think twice before you use hyperbole. Ask: Will your customer notice a reality gap? Will they even believe you in the first place?

**20 TIMES
MORE INTEREST
on your current
account than most
other banks**

Figure 29 Hyperbole: A customer can spot it a mile off and will immediately adopt a cynical stance.

Clichés

Here's the dictionary definition of a cliché: "A once striking and effective phrase which has become stale through overuse."²⁵

In English, apparently one of the oldest known clichés is the expression "hither and thither," which is believed to date from about 725 AD.²⁶ In fact it's so old and out of use that I'm not even sure if it's still a cliché. (On a similar note, Sam Goldwyn said: "Let's have some new clichés."²⁷ Nice one.) However, for marketing purposes, I prefer this version, from Bernard Taper:

"A cliché is a truth one doesn't believe."²⁸

Ever seen an ad with the headline "We mean business"? How about "We deliver"? (Of course you have.) So overused are these phrases that they've become marketing clichés in their own right.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

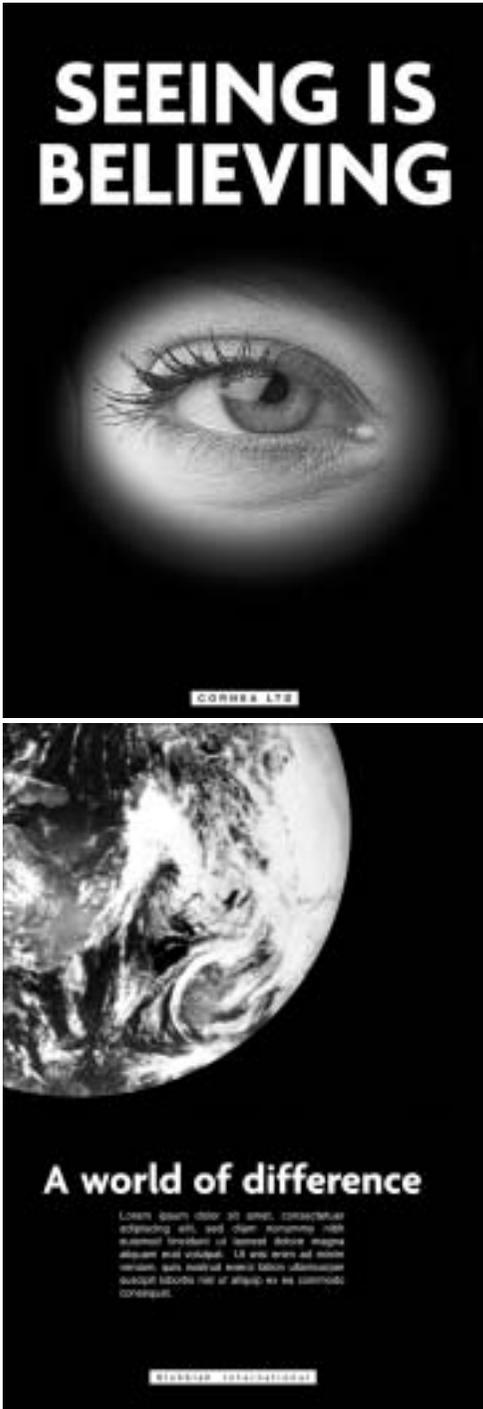
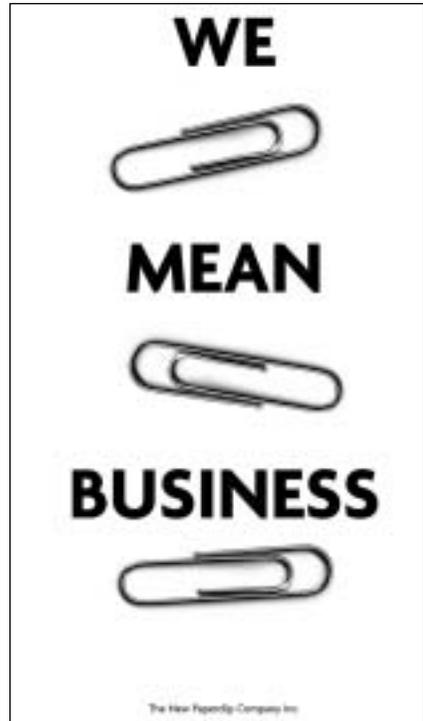


Figure 30 Print advertising abounds with clichés. These are some disguised examples from recent ads.



My observation as to why clichés are so prevalent in advertising comes back to the dangerous word “creative.” When people sit down to write an ad or get round the table to generate some ideas, they feel that they must be creative.

This is a big mistake. The word they are looking for is “interesting.” (That may have a creative outcome, but it will start by being relevant to the customer.)

Most basic brainstorming techniques are based on association. Typically, people begin with the product, its name, what it does, whom it's aimed at, and so on. This approach can be fine, but it's also a great source of clichés.

Call the tune. Put yourself in the driving seat. Pocket the difference. Make waves. Cash in. Peace of mind. Quality of life. Seeing is believing. A world of difference.

The marketing communications ether positively hums with tired exhortations like these.

A good cure for cliché creation is to use Edward de Bono's *random input* technique.²⁹ Quite simply, you attach a randomly selected noun to your subject and see what ideas it provokes. For instance, if you are searching for a way of promoting your brand of candles, you go: "candles + (let's say) sausages" and see what happens. As I'm writing I'm making this up (i.e. both candles and sausages), but immediately the idea has popped into my head to create special outdoor candles and lanterns for Halloween, or perhaps a campaign in supermarkets to promote sales for Bonfire Night. Surely a better approach?

If you recall what I said about readers as listeners, it's easy to understand why hackneyed phrases don't work. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that clichés fall on deaf ears.

Platitudes

Chambers describes a platitude as: "an empty, unoriginal or redundant comment, especially one made as though it were important."

While hyperbole breeds cynicism and disappointment, and clichés just don't get through, platitudes bore your customer into not buying. ("We deliver" and "We mean business" started as platitudes and have also become clichés.)

A good place to spot platitudes is underneath company logos at the foot (or end) of their ads. These so-called corporate straplines are meant to summarize what the organization or product stands for. Usually they are dull, self-centered generalizations with little reference to the customer.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

I'm not against straplines, and have been charged to come up with a few in my time ("Soften the blow" for Kleenex tissues, "Play on" for Pro-Sport's athletic bandages, and for OVD Rum's soccer campaign: "They think it's all OVD!"). But straplines can have two detrimental effects.

The first is where they conflict with, or distract from, the main message of the ad. For instance, you watch a thought-provoking automobile commercial about an attractive couple getting it together, only to be told at the end that the lion goes from strength to strength. Lion? What lion?

The second is a more dangerous creature still. It's the strapline that usurps the headline. I'll give you an example:

"Release the power"

A well-known investment company has been using this headline across a series of ads for some time. But it's not a headline, is it? At best, it's a strapline.

How do you know it's not a headline? Well, you just wouldn't say it. It's a platitude.

Picture yourself handing out leaflets in the street, or even at a financial services exhibition. If you invited passers-by to "Release the power," what sort of reaction would you expect? They'd either look at you blankly or pretend they hadn't heard and scarpers.

Yet this ad regularly competes with 60 others, in magazines packed with paid-for information. Does it cut through? I doubt it.

Surely what you would say to your passer-by is something more like: "Sir, 16.35 percent return from Brand X investment." (A more persuasive fact, currently tucked away in the body copy.)

Platitudes seem to invade headlines and body copy in equal measure. Once you're alert to their existence, you'll find them by the score: ads offering you reduced costs, greater efficiency, more flexibility; ads promising they listen to their customers, they understand your needs, they'll be your partner. These are ads that should make you want to pick up a loudhailer and shout: "Prove it to me then!"

If you can't find interesting specifics, you should really question why you are advertising at all. And if you still must, then perhaps it's best to stick to some simple, strong branding.

Plays on words

I love plays on words – especially in the sports pages of the tabloids. In Scotland we had the infamous (and now clichéd) soccer headline “Super-CaleyGoBallisticCelticAreAtrocious,” when then-minnows Inverness Caley (north of the border conveniently pronounced Kally) disposed of Glasgow Celtic in a Scottish Cup tie.

Indeed, writing subheads for the tabloid sports pages has become a minor art form. And plays on words work well in this context. I've paid for the newspaper and it's part of the entertainment.

Not so in advertising.

If you're thinking of using a play on words in any of your marketing communications, you must ask a key question. Will my customer be ready for it? If not, they probably won't get it. (The joke, or the twist, that is.)

Busy readers of financial or business publications strike me as bad targets for plays on words. In this environment ads are intrusions into a sober and efficient news-gathering exercise. I doubt if you'd tell even your mate in the pub a joke without first warning them.

And what's the big risk of telling a joke? That your mate's heard it. Plays on words have nearly always been done before.

Much of my work has been in fast-moving consumer goods. I've read *The Grocer* for 25 years. I can't tell you the number of times I've seen the headline “Christmas Presence” as seasonal suppliers brag about their “heavyweight” (hyperbole, platitude, cliché) support campaigns. Then there's always “Get your Stockin'.” Last year I saw “Season's Eatings,” which did make me laugh (albeit used by both McDonald's and Pringles).

Seriously, though, it's a risk. When a good proportion of your target audience doesn't have English as a first language (I'm thinking of independent retailers here), why would you advertise to them in

**Decreased Complexity.
Lowered Expenses.
Enhanced Service.
Better Quality.**

By listening to our customers we're able to provide solutions tailor-made for their needs. So we can contribute to the smooth running of your business, while you concentrate on what you're good at. With a sharpened competitive edge, your customer satisfaction scores will increase, and your sales will soon follow.

ANYCO
we deliver

Figure 31 Four platitudes in one headline. Phrases like this dull the reader's mind. Add a bland visual and weak branding, and it's the perfect recipe for an invisible message. Sadly, many trade ads serve up this menu.

gobbledegook? I think it's even slightly naive to assume that native speakers know the correct plural of the word present.

Imagine a salesperson walking into a call and speaking in some unintelligible tongue. In this context it seems so ridiculous as to be unimaginable... yet "printed" salespeople do it every day of the week.

Herschell Gordon Lewis told me that, in the US, the equivalent is the ad saying: "You know it makes cents." He said that the great danger of plays on words is that your customer will simply take you literally, and miss the point of your ad.³⁰

He's right. Plays on words almost always require a second, subheadline to explain the message. This is your real headline.

Psychologists have long known that people have a strong tendency to organize their perceptions into elementary patterns. They will opt for the simple view, even when a more complex insight can be derived from a stimulus.³¹

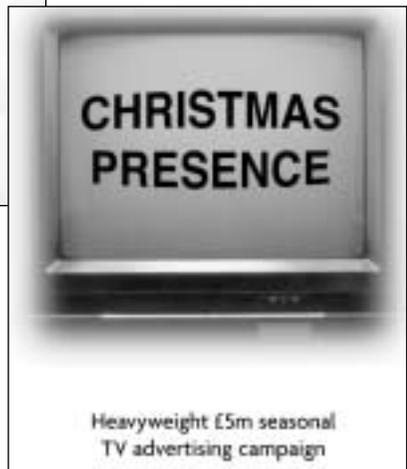
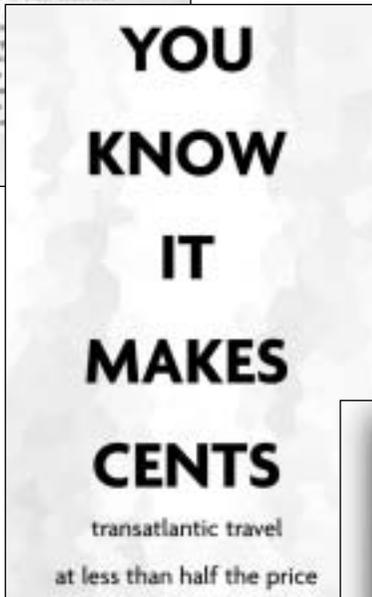


Figure 32 Plays on words. Note how you have to read the subheading to understand the proposition. Readers are very literal in their take-out, especially in a serious medium where humor may be unexpected.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

Where plays on words could succeed is in ads placed in, or mailings or promotions for, the tabloids. Say that you're advertising your baldness cure in the sports pages. You're just as likely to connect with your customer using a headline like "Here Wig-Go, Here Wig-Go" (get it?) as with a serious approach. To boot, humor creates a sense of peer-group acceptability for the product being marketed.

Riddles

A common technique used by advertisers is to set up a problem and then show how their product solves it. There is nothing wrong with this. As already mentioned, virtually all Procter & Gamble commercials open in this fashion.³²

What P&G doesn't do, though, is dwell on the problem any longer than necessary. As soon as it can (usually within eight seconds), it moves to the solution and emphasizes its benefits.

However, most of the time, most marketers don't have the luxury of television advertising (i.e. where the viewer gets to see the solution simply by sitting still). In most other media, you have to manhandle your customer through your communication.

Armed with this knowledge, it's obvious that riddles are not a good idea.

By all means in your headline ask a question or make a provocative statement – but make certain that it's not in riddle form. A riddle is basically anything that doesn't make sense. Your customer won't bother to decipher it just because you've put it there.

Figures 33 and 34 show two long-headline ads that fall into this general category. Figure 33, from a business magazine, still leaves me baffled, while Figure 34 – for the Royal National Institute for the Blind, placed in women's press – makes perfect sense, even though the provocative conundrum in the headline remains unresolved (until you read the body copy). Indeed, this is a great example of the use of a storytelling technique, demanding that you read on. But for this to work, your customer has to be able to understand the headline in the first place.

**EVERY MORNING
YOUR MOST
IMPORTANT
ASSETS COME
THROUGH YOUR
FRONT DOOR,
EVERY EVENING
THEY LEAVE BY
THE SAME ROUTE...**

so do ours!!

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

ACME PERSONNEL INC.

Figure 33 An ad with a riddle in its headline – this one is disguised to avoid embarrassment and I’m still trying to work it out.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?



Claire hasn't seen her son in six years.
It doesn't make her a bad mother.

Claire reads her son his bedtime story. She takes him to school. She's everything you'd expect of a doting mum. She's also blind – one of around two million people in the UK with serious sight problems. RNIB's pioneering work is dedicated to help people like Claire and her family. Not just with braille, Talking Books and computer training but with imaginative and practical solutions to everyday challenges. If someone you know has a sight problem – or to make a donation – call the RNIB Helpline on 0845 766 99 99 or visit www.rnib.org.uk



RNIB

ROYAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND

REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 216221

Figure 34 An ad with a riddle in its headline that provokes my curiosity. Reproduced by kind permission of RNIB.

Writer's fog

Most copywriters develop their own *structural* style through a mixture of trial and error, observation, imitation, and coaching. A simple method is to limit yourself to one thought per paragraph, broken into three short sentences. Use brackets for interjections, Saxon wording, and edit out disruptive "thats."

It seems to work.

And don't be afraid of really short paragraphs to make points of strong emphasis or contrast.

(The word *that*, by the way, can often be excised from copy without anybody noticing. For example, "It was news to me we'd won the contract" has a *that* removed, with the positive effect of jamming the two clauses more actively together.)

One thing's for sure: Long sentences and long words make text more difficult to understand. And that means fewer sales.

There's a well-established way of measuring the clarity of writing, called the Fog Index.³³ The higher you score, the cloudier your message.

Here's how to work it out:

- 1 Take a section of your text and count 100 words (exclude proper names, and treat hyphenated words as one word).
- 2 Count the number of sentences in this 100-word block.
- 3 Divide 100 by the number of sentences. Call the answer X.
- 4 Count the number of words with three or more syllables. Call the answer Y. (Exclude words that reach three or more syllables by a part of speech, e.g. plurals: message → messages = two not three; or verb tenses: listen → listening = two not three).
- 5 Fog Index = $(X + Y) \times 0.4$.

Clear writing has a Fog Index of between 9 and 12. For some tabloids it can be as low as 5. Certainly, for most advertising copy you should aim for less than 10.

The excerpts from ads shown in Figure 35 overleaf have respective Fog Indices of 9 and 16. These were real ads, placed in the same publication. See if you can tell which is which.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

**A RETURN OF
120%
ON YOUR SAVINGS
COULD HAVE BEEN YOURS**

For example, if you'd invested just £20 a month over the last 15 years, it would be worth £23,829 today. That's nearly £20,000 more than a building society would have paid. So you can see, investing in a with-profits savings policy could make your savings really grow. That's in addition to built-in life cover and protection from the ups and downs of the stock market.

Simply pay in as little as £20 a month, or invest a lump sum of at least £1,000. Either way, you'll boost your savings with the company that one million investors already rely on.

Figure 35 Excerpts from two ads placed in the same busy magazine. One has a Fog Index of 9, the other 16. Read the copy and it should be easy to tell which is which.

DECISIONS...DECISIONS...

Investors have an overwhelming level of choice and information to consider when constructing their portfolios, that is where the premier funds service may help. Instead of looking at the entire fund universe an option is to simply choose from one of the five strategies we offer, therefore leaving the hard work to us.

The premier funds service is designed to provide investors with the benefits that a diverse and flexible range of investments should offer, along with access to the expertise and experience of an international fund management company. Along with your IFA, the only thing you would need to do is decide which strategy fits your requirements best.

This book, on a random 10-section sample, just scored 9.3 – which I hope is not bad, as it's saddled with phrases like “marketing communications.”

Certainly, if you can, keep your sentences short. One Australian study concluded that learning declines as the number of words in a sentence increases beyond seven.³⁴ (And this correlates to George A Miller's famous paper entitled “The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information.”³⁵)

Designeritis

As Oscar Wilde said, “No great artist ever sees things as they really are; if he did, he would cease to be an artist.”

Many small firms use design agencies to produce their ads, brochures, and mailings. Designers are very skilled at making things look nice – awesome, even – but sometimes less skilled at *selling*. And boy can they mangle text!

If you treat text as a graphic device of course it can appear more pleasing when set, for instance, in fully justified blocks of reversed-out sans-serif upper-case type. But wait until your customer tries to decipher it.

If you've ever read bedtime stories to a small child, you'll know there's a moment when they start identifying words. "Look!" they exclaim, pointing excitedly, ahead of where you're up to. When you do look, you find it's the word "look" – one of the first they learn to recognize by its shape.

That's how we read. We learn the shapes of words. But not words set in upper case (i.e. CAPITALS).

I'm not sure anyone knows which is the chicken and which the egg here. Do our brains prefer words set primarily in lower case and so we have surrounded ourselves with them? Or do we grow up to prefer words set in lower case *because* we are surrounded by them?

Intuitively, and I think logically, the former seems to make more sense. A word has a more distinct visual identity set in lower case. Typographers (a rare breed nowadays) believe that serif typefaces enhance this effect.

INTUITIVELY, AND I THINK LOGICALLY, THE FORMER SEEMS TO MAKE MORE SENSE. A WORD HAS A MORE DISTINCT VISUAL IDENTITY SET IN LOWER CASE. TYPOGRAPHERS (A RARE BREED NOWADAYS) BELIEVE THAT SERIF TYPEFACES ENHANCE THIS EFFECT.

As you can see, I just repeated the last paragraph using capitals and a sans-serif typeface. (Serifs are the little curly bits that help letters glide into one another. Sans serif means without serifs.) I could go one step further and reverse out the text, i.e. use white lettering on a black background. But in the easy-to-read stakes, it's already no contest.

So don't let your precious words be press-ganged into service as reluctant graphics. If we were meant to communicate with pictures we'd all carry sketch pads. Deaf people use sign languages that are every bit as rich, complex, and structured as spoken languages.³⁶

Twelve typographical tips

Much has been learned about the presentation of words to make them sell better. Here are some of my favorite soundbytes of received wisdom.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

- 1 DO put your headline below the main image, and the body copy beneath this. It mirrors the natural eye flow and gets 10 percent more readership than a headline set above the image.³⁷ (In a series of direct marketing tests, response increased by between 27 and 105 percent.³⁸)
- 2 DON'T set text over pictures. (It can reduce attention value by about 20 percent.³⁹) You wouldn't write a report to your boss and then doodle all over it to make it harder to read.
- 3 DO use a large initial drop capital to start the text. (This means a big first letter – look in your newspaper.) It telegraphs to your customer where to begin and increases readership by 13 percent.⁴⁰
- 4 DON'T juxtapose red and blue text – these colors are at opposite ends of the spectrum and the eye finds them a strain to deal with.⁴¹ (Avoid colored text in general.)
- 5 DO set body copy in a serif face, minimum 11 point, in narrow columns of about 40–50 characters.
- 6 DON'T set body copy in reversed-out type (i.e. white text on a black background). It's much harder to read. Short headlines, reversed out, are OK.
- 7 DO put a caption underneath the main image – it will be read by twice as many people as read the body copy.⁴²
- 8 DON'T put your logo in the headline or body copy. Your customer won't read it as part of the sentence. Use normal type for your brand name.

And some DOs specifically for direct mail:

- 9 DO pull out your main headline at the top of your letter (e.g. into a "Johnson box").⁴³
- 10 DO tell a synopsis of your message via the subheads above each paragraph – make it easy for the scan reader.
- 11 DO use a large typeface, narrow columns (average 10 words per line), and plenty of line spacing.
- PS 12 DO use a PS to repeat an important fact – it gets high readership because your customer looks to see who's writing to them.



Figure 36 Designeritis: no headline; text used as a graphic device; type reversed out and set over the image. And there really was an ad that looked like this.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

A few words about negatives

I've occasionally read that you shouldn't use negative expressions in ads, especially double negatives like this sign I spotted at a well-known fairground:

"If you are not as tall as me you cannot ride on the mini dodgem."

The argument goes that your customer will be confused by a statement containing double negatives. I can certainly buy this. If you're not careful, your headline won't make sense.

David Ogilvy cautioned against straight negatives, such as this one:

"Our salt contains no arsenic."

He said the danger was that the reader misses the negative and comes away with the opposite opinion (i.e. that the salt does contain arsenic).⁴⁴ This I find harder to agree with, although it's worth being alert to the possibility.

Steven Pinker is far less prescriptive when it comes to negatives and confusion. For instance, he argues that the well-known line "I can't get no satisfaction" is both perfectly grammatical and unequivocal in its meaning.⁴⁵

John Caples recommends you avoid headlines that paint the gloomy side of the picture.⁴⁶ For instance:

"Is worry robbing you of the good things in life?"

His advice is to take the cheerful, positive angle. Intuitively this feels right, and is supported by a generally known phenomenon within the sales promotion industry: that positive rewards get a better response than negative ones. For example, a free box of chocolates should pull more responses than a free first-aid kit of the same perceived value. Claude Hopkins found that positive ads outpulled their negative counterparts by four to one.⁴⁷

James F Engel states that people are less likely to enjoy buying and using what he calls "negative-reinforcement" products, are less recep-

tive to advertising for them, and spend less time and effort in buying them.⁴⁸

However, in the battle for share of the quitting smoker's newly found disposable income, "It needn't be hell with Nicotinell" has been used to good effect for some years. It contains both a negative and the dark side of the story. The brand is the UK's longest-established nicotine patch.

And then there's "I can't believe it's not butter." Double negative, yet immensely successful as a new product. It must be one of the few brands with a name that's actually a headline. And I don't imagine it would have done as well had it been called "I can't believe it's margarine." Perhaps this bears out Ogilvy's view: The word *butter* acts as an embedded command, so the customer subconsciously takes on board the notion that it is butter – or at least that it has buttery qualities.

My advice would be to take note of these authorities, and then to use your common sense. Avoid negatives as a general rule, but don't worry about going with a strong line just because it ain't positive.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

WORDING — SEVEN TOP TIPS

- 1 Find your Mr A.
- 2 Match with your customer.
- 3 Think and speak one to one.
- 4 Adopt a listening mode.
- 5 Use demotic language.
- 6 Put conversation before grammar.
- 7 Remember the sound of words.

KEY QUESTION

“Am I talking my customer’s language?”

ON REFLECTION

What's N-E-W?

How about this fact? You're some 28,000 words into a book on marketing communication, and there hasn't been a single reason why your customer should buy. No selling points, no persuasive techniques, no fancy "creative" tricks.

For instance, in the previous section when I talked about ways to make your words work better, I barely made mention of the single most important and effective thing you can do. (Put a benefit in your headline.)

That's because the NEW of NEW AIDA is, by and large, a structural matter. It's to do with the *way* you prioritize and present your message to your customer, rather than *what* it is you say in order to persuade them to choose your product. Think of it like those sensible words (sadly now a cliché) that precede every successful story: Are you sitting comfortably?

So if your reaction to what you've read so far in this book is "That's obvious," then I'm delighted. If you've been nodding your head and thinking it's hardly rocket science, then great. It means you can do it.

John Stapleton, writing about salesmanship and the art of communication, made the observation that "common sense is comparatively rare."¹ Indeed, when you look at some of the inept marketing going on around you, it's tempting to think of the expression "common sense" as a contradiction in terms.

However, this would be a bit unfair to us well-intentioned marketers. I prefer to put it down to a mixture of rush and exuberance. The job is always needed yesterday (so there's rarely time for proper reflection) and it's easy to get carried away with the glamor of marketing communications (and so choose something that looks like a good ad, but actually isn't).

Salesmanship — or NEW AIDA thinking — is a great antidote to this malady. Built in from the start, it makes sure you don't skip those steps that afterwards make it look like you had a temporary common-sense bypass.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

It puts you on the spot when the time comes for your customer to meet your marketing.

I've worked in firms where the sales guys, on returning browbeaten to head office, were accused of disloyalty; of always taking the customer's side; of seeing the problem only through the customer's eyes. *Be glad if yours do.*

Whether you're about to create or evaluate, it takes just a few moments to ask yourself the key questions: Will my customer understand what to do or think about? Will it be easy for them? Will they engage with my message? Navigation. Ease. Wording. NEW.

Once your customer is sitting comfortably, the persuasion can begin.