

STEP 6 — **DESIRE**

Give your customer the facts

“Sell me this pen.”

Have you ever found yourself in this situation? The dreaded interview question, when all you want to do is talk about your latest BASE jump and the website you set up for your brother’s bootleg record label and the novel you’re writing about the meaning of life. He wants you to sell him his pen!

If it does happen, don’t worry. It’s dead easy. I’ll show you.

First take the pen. Have a good look at it; think why you might use it. Then put it in your briefcase, out of sight. (No good salesman ever walks in and slaps his product down on the desk before understanding his customer’s needs.)

So now you start asking questions. What line of work is he in? (He’s probably a salesman, too.) What kind of impression does he like to make? Is a stylish signature important? How much writing does he have to do? Does he need to be able to write quickly? Vertically on a clipboard? On NCR forms? To turn pages quickly? To make alterations? Does he often lose pens? In the car? In the warehouse? Do people steal them from his desk?

And so on. (You’ve already got the job, by the way. The interviewer wanted to see whether you’d try to understand his needs, or blindly burble on about the features of the pen. Your task was to find out why he’d bought it, or — if it was a gift or a free sample — why he’d continued to use it.)

The moral of the story? You can’t make your customers need your product, but you can find out whether they want it. The communication task, then, is to help them realize that they do.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

Facts: The building blocks of desire

In the above scenario, I think it's pretty clear that you've been invited to begin selling at the "post-interest" stage. Call this desire if you wish, but to me it seems the task is to make the customer *more* interested. *Really* interested.

I introduce this semantic blurring for good reason. Since AIDA was invented it's given rise to – in my view – a comic-strip school of marketing thinking. It's as if your customer's brain was divided into little offices, where the tiny numskulls sit and wait to be convinced. Once you've finished in the interest department, you get a signature and toddle down the corridor to start working on desire.

It doesn't feel right, does it? Surely there's just a continuous spectrum of want? At any point the customer might buy – depending on their perception of hurdles (such as price, availability, and convenience).

If you tried to sell me a pen – if you asked the right questions – you'd discover I'm left-handed and like to write with an italic fountain pen. That means I have to fill in checks and greetings cards from the bottom up, right to left, to avoid smudging. Strange but true. So then you tell me about your patented ink that dries the instant it touches the page. Wanton interest takes over, and the sale is almost made.

So what's desire? And why is there a chapter on it? Answer: Because for you, the marketer, it's a very useful step.

For desire, read detail

I've mentioned several times David Ogilvy's maxim "content is more important than form." Most direct marketers would support this from personal experience. There's an even shorter way of putting it: "Facts sell."

Facts are what makes your customer know they want your product. The more they want it, the more trouble they'll take to buy it. Your job is to deliver the facts.

Facts, of course, equate to benefits. There are hard facts (like "I'll spend £10 less per week on petrol") and also what I call "soft" facts (like "I'll feel really cool and attractive").

So to create wanton interest (or *desire* if you prefer), you need to provide plenty of detail. You need to educate your customer. Only then can they make up their mind.

The numskulls fight back

But here's a paradox. Worldwide, marketers spend billions on advertising and other forms of marketing communication, yet the average college psychology textbook will tell you that people ignore messages they don't agree with. (Picture the numskulls, fingers in ears, chanting: "We can't hear you, we can't hear you.")

The thinking behind this theory of "cognitive consistency" is that we all naturally strive to maintain a consistent set of beliefs and attitudes.¹ Any challenge to this creates adverse psychological tension. (I think that means it does your head in.)

You only have to listen to opposing politicians on *Question Time* to witness cognitive consistency in action. In politics, the stakes are high and hence the dogmatism extreme. But we all do it in our daily lives, even at the most mundane level.



Figure 62 Cognitive consistency in action. Reproduced by kind permission of The Scottish National Party.

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We're receptive to information that maintains or enhances consistency, and we avoid information that conflicts with our beliefs and attitudes. This appears to be instinctive and universal human behavior — perhaps a trait that assisted the survival of our ancestors who evolved in small, tightly knit, competing tribes. Today it is elicited by the hail of opinionated marketing communications that besiege our thoughts.

Oops, my Fog Index just went up to 13. Here's how Ries and Trout put this same point in *Positioning*:

"The mind rejects new information that doesn't 'compute.' It accepts only that new information which matches its current state of mind. It filters out everything else."²

Indeed, the impetus behind positioning theory is provided by this very marketing communications conundrum. Just how do you get your customer to listen to a claim that conflicts with their beliefs? Of course, the best answer to this is to get there first, and as Ries and Trout point out, most market leaders did exactly that. They got into their customers' minds first, then made darned sure they never had good reason to think anything different.

To further paraphrase *Positioning*: Me-too brands come along later and run marketing and advertising programs as if their (first-in) competitors' positions don't exist. They advertise as if in a vacuum and are disappointed when their messages don't get through. You may know the feeling.

It has long been recognized by psychologists that persuasive communications are more successful at *creating* attitudes than *changing* attitudes. And change is doubly difficult when the attitudes are rooted in a person's self-worth or ego.³ At your peril try to tell someone she's a bad mother because she's buying the wrong brand.

I'll talk shortly about specific techniques that may help you to get your facts across. At this stage the main thing is to recognize that the message-rejection phenomenon exists, and the risk you run if you ignore it. First I'd like to consider an equally weighty counterphenomenon that you may be able to employ to your advantage.

Me do it

If you've had any contact with small kids, especially aged between about two and five, you'll have come across "Me do it." (More accurately, fortissimo: "ME DO IT!!!") Together, you might be making a birthday card, putting on a pair of shoes, or merely ringing a doorbell. No matter how ineptly, the kid wants to do it.

I think this is because humans have an innate drive to learn via experimentation – a drive that is especially powerful in the very young. Indeed, so powerful that a determined toddler will head-butt you just for the right to insert a coin in a parking meter.

I also think it's very revealing in what it tells us about learning. There's an old Chinese proverb that goes something like this:

"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."

During the time I spent working in sales, much of my job involved the training of both new salespeople and sales trainers (having first been trained to do this myself). My final project before moving into marketing was to rewrite the company's sales-training manual. There was one particular model that was very effective.

We called it – unimaginatively – The Training Cycle. But that's what it was, and

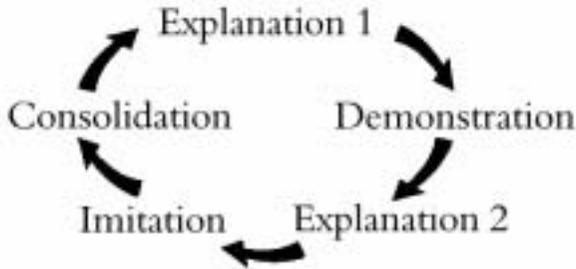
Figure 63 *Me do it.* © Reproduced by kind permission of Warburtons Ltd.



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that's just what it did. You could use it to impart even the tiniest technique or procedure.

Here's how it went:



Explanation 1 was very short. You might say: "I'm going to show you how to calculate what share of shelf space we have got in this supermarket." Then you would do it: Demonstration.

Explanation 2 was a little longer. Perhaps: "Notice how I counted up the total number of facings for our packs, and then for competitors' packs, and then worked out a percentage. We have 25 percent of the space here, but 35 percent of the market sector nationally, so we need a plan to improve our representation."

Then, quick as possible, you'd hand over the clipboard and pen, and let your trainee have a go at the next section in the store. Imitation. In my experience, this was when the learning took place.

You could check this by questioning. Systematic questioning was a key tool for the sales trainer – after every call you went through a whole host of points (fundamentally so you knew where you were up to). Questioning proved to me that, without doubt, there was a strong correlation between *doing* and *learning*.

And by doing, the trainee gained a belief in the procedures. With belief came confidence. This was especially vital when it came to learn how to close a sale.

Not long ago I surreptitiously watched a training session in a large stationery store. A salesperson was briefing five members of staff who were clustered around a new photocopier. She spoke clearly, with economy and

precision, and showed how various settings and papers produced different effects.

The trouble was, she was talking when I entered and still going strong when I left 10 minutes later. The staff were statuesque. Their minds were stationary.

They'd given up trying to take it in. No one even asked any questions (which is a sure sign of "lights on, no one home"). No doubt they'd resigned themselves to learning by trial and error as they were required to use the machine over the next few days.

The trainer was at least doing one thing right: demonstration. Unfortunately that's where it ended. In some circumstances demonstration alone is sufficient (recall the oven-cleaner salesman I referred to in Step 4), but imitation can truly influence minds.

Academic research bears this out. Studies show that attitudes toward products based on direct experience are held with more confidence and strength than those based on advertising alone.⁴ This has important implications for marketing communications.

Your customer can only want your product more if they learn more about it. In psychology, learning is a major area of study. Here's one definition:

"Learning: the process by which experience leads to changes in knowledge, attitudes and/or behaviour resulting from experience."⁵

The two key components of learning are *rehearsal* and *elaboration*. Rehearsal, as you'd expect, concerns mental repetition, while elaboration means the act of comparing the new stimulus to existing knowledge. It means involvement. When a child battles to be the one who presses the buttons on the cash machine, he's not being self-centered, he's obeying his natural (and subconscious) drive to do what helps him to learn – and that means doing it.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

Touch and go

The corollary for the marketer?

Let your customer do it. If at all possible, let them try your product. There's no more powerful way of building desire.

Paco Underhill writes at length about what he calls "the sensual shopper."⁶ His thesis, founded on a career of practical observation, is that use of the senses — sight, touch, smell, taste, hearing — is a crucial part of the decision-making process. He proposes that 90 percent of new grocery products fail not because they were ill conceived, but because people never tried them.

It makes sense, so to speak. How can you know you really want a particular bath towel until you touch it? Underhill reports that towels are touched on average by six shoppers before they are purchased. In another study for a haircare brand, 23 percent of shoppers tore into the boxes to test the viscosity and scent of the products.

A girl I knew worked on a cosmetics counter. She once told me that if the store wanted to shift a slow-selling line (say a particular fragrance of hand cream), all they had to do was put out a sampler bottle, and remove the samplers of the other fragrances in the range. Most customers would only buy the variety they were able to try.

So "test driving" doesn't only apply to high-ticket items like cars and hi-fis. When Kleenex launched the first quilted bathroom tissue, we were called in to devise an in-store sampling solution because curious shoppers were breaking into the packs in their thousands. (The solution — you'll be relieved to know — was a simple shelf-edge leaflet containing a couple of sheets of the tissue, to allow the customer to feel the quilting and the softness.)

I'll repeat the statistics I quoted in Step 2 when I talked about the National Lottery: Studies have shown that free samples can create 40 percent more trial. And free-sample users tend to exhibit greater levels of repeat purchase (+12 percent), leading to almost 60 percent higher long-term penetration.

If you're lucky enough to be able to do it *cost-effectively* and in a *relevant* manner, sampling could be the most potent weapon in your marketing

arsenal. (But beware the two italicized caveats in the preceding sentence. First, sampling has a high per-capita cost. If you can only afford to reach a tiny fraction of your customer base, you're probably wasting your time. Second, don't burn your budget sampling warm beer to housewives at 11am on a weekday.)

Charles Decker, writing about Procter & Gamble's introduction of Ariel detergent into Austria, reported the conclusion that sampling "wasn't the most *efficient* marketing programme, but it was the most *effective*." P&G ultimately sampled 100 percent of homes in the market. Ariel became the dominant brand.⁷

Remember my Leicas? I did eventually get a pair. I finally took the plunge, after saving up my small change for about three years.

There's a bunch of four of us who've been birdwatching together since we were teenagers. The first time I appeared with my shiny new Leicas my pals were queuing up for a look. They're as experienced users of optical equipment as you could find, yet to a man they were literally speechless. (Or rather, I can't print their reactions.)

When you look through a pair of Leicas you want to throw away your trusty old bins on the spot. Such is the clarity, you can recognize birds that you'd ordinarily use a telescope three times as powerful to observe. And the gearing of the focus mechanism means you can shift from near to far in a split second – you miss nothing.

The advertising copy I've just written in the preceding paragraph would have been no news to my pals. Like me, they'd been reading Leica ads for years. But it was the *doing* that communicated this *detail*. And doing builds desire. Suffice to say, that day I caused Leica sales to rise further.

The numskulls might try to block out your messages, but they can't resist the opportunity to meddle. Interrupt them with the chance of a no-obligation free trial and you might just get through. In the words of Claude Hopkins:

"A good article is its own best salesman."⁸

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in focus

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£109.00

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Alton Waters, W. Ipswich, Suffolk. Thu 28 June / Sat 8 July / Sat 1 Aug

Cley WWT Raptor Centre, Norfolk. Every Sunday and the first Sunday of each month

Fishing Green, Isle Valley CE Essex Sat 6 May / Sat 6 June / Sat 11 July / Sat 10 Aug

Larkfield Lakes, Nr Barry St. Edmunds, Suffolk Wed 10 June / Thu 20 June

Riverside Country Park, Gillingham, Kent Wed 1 May / Wed 1 June / Thu 10 July / Sat 1 Aug

Rye Harbour NR, East Sussex Thu 6 May / Sat 25 June / Wed 25 June / Wed 21 July / Sat 1 Aug

Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, Kent Sat 20 June / Sat 25 July / Sat 2 Aug

Seven Sisters Country Park, Suffolk, East Sussex Wed 20 Aug

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Wicken Fen, Cambridgeshire Sat 6 May / Sat 6 June / Sat 11 July / Sat 10 Aug / Sat 17 July / Sat 23 July / Sat 28 July / Sat 1 Aug / Sat 19 Aug

SOUTH AND WEST

Caton Low, Somerset Levels Sat 10 Aug

Dorset Beach, Portland, Dorset Sat 20 May / Sat 25 June / Sat 10 Aug

Emswold, South Devon (view rural and historic) Wed 20 May / Sat 10 June / Wed 2 July / Sat 20 July / Sat 10 Aug / Wed 2 Aug

Farmer Reserve, Dorsetshire Sat 10 Aug

Portland Bird Observatory, Dorset Sat 27 May / Sat 1 July / Sat 2 Aug

Ruddford Lake, West Devon Sat 1 May / Thu 22 May / Wed 11 June / Thu 3 July

Seaton Marshes, East Devon Wed 14 May / Thu 10 June / Sat 10 July / Sat 10 Aug

Topley Farm, South Devon Wed 24 May / Wed 20 July / Thu 20 Aug

Went Rye, Somerset. Wed 10 July / Yarnor Wood, Devon Sat 11 Aug

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Figure 64 A repeat of the In Focus ad previously shown in Figure 23. This canny optical retailer consistently invests in taking its product to its customer. Reproduced by kind permission of In Focus.

Desire equals *knowledge*

“Knowledge is a major determinant of consumer behaviour.”⁹ I memorized this for one of my marketing exams. Like many truisms, it’s easily overlooked.

In some marketing textbooks you’ll find a model called the Innovation–Decision Process. This is based on the idea that members of a consumer population cumulatively adopt a new product, starting with the innovators, then the early adopters, next the early majority, followed by the late majority, and finally the laggards.¹⁰ It’s every product manager’s dream to home in on the innovators and let the rest happen as if by magic.

But as Kotler puts it:

“No one has demonstrated the existence of a general personality trait called innovativeness.”¹¹

So rather than chase the Holy Grail of innovators, perhaps marketers would be better served to focus their efforts on building their customers’ knowledge. What consumers buy, where they buy, and when they buy will depend on their knowledge relating to these decisions. Deal with knowledge, and you deal with desire.

Steps you can take

Know your onions

Cut an onion vertically in half and you get a nice set of concentric layers. You buy onions mainly by their external appearance, though the stuff you want to eat is out of sight, in the middle. There’s a communication parallel here.

Newspapers – especially tabloids – are great exponents of what I would describe as “three-layered delivery.” If you recall my observations in Step 1, I noted how the tabloids allow you to decide in seconds whether an article is something you want to devote precious minutes to. They know their onions.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

For your own marketing communication, you may have many persuasive facts. Since you aren't selling face to face, you can't tell when the selling is complete. You don't know when your customer wants your product enough to go out and scale the hurdles that lie before them. And of course, some customers see more hurdles than others: Some want very little detail, others needs lots before they will buy.

Hence layered delivery.



Figure 65 Layer 1. Note how, for the lead article, 95 percent of the upfront space is given over to a tiny fraction of the total message content. Reproduced by kind permission of News International.

In Figure 65 I've repeated the front page from *The Sun* shown earlier. For the lead story, notice that almost 95 percent of the space is given over to just a tiny fraction of the total message content – two pictures and a four-word headline. That's layer 1. If the reader likes what they see, they can delve into layer 2: a succinct 66-word precis in the first and only column. If they want to digest still more... by now they've bought the paper. No need to waste valuable selling space on the front page – the rest of the article is tucked away in layer 3, on pages 8 and 9 deep inside the onion, where over 95 percent of the total message content can be found.

Direct marketers use a similar technique to deliver their messages. A good mailing works just like a newspaper. The layer 1 job is done by the message on the envelope, supported by the dominant headline and graphics on the letterhead.

For layer 2, the subheads above each paragraph summarize the main benefits, the action the customer should take, and why they should do it

<p>February 2000</p> <p>Mr A Sample 1 The Lane Apt 101 ABC XYZ</p> <p>Dear Mr Sample,</p> <p>Are you paying too much for your credit?</p> <p>Call us. We could easily save you money!</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p> <p>One Loan. One lower monthly repayment</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p> <p>Mr & Mrs Smith reduced their monthly outgoings by £217</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p> <p>Take advantage of our lowest interest rates...EVER!</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p>	<p>Would you say yes to a pay rise?</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p> <p>Become £2,000 to £40,000 for any purpose</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p> <p>Nothing to repay until July!</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p> <p>One flexibility means you get a loan to suit YOU!</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p> <p>Peace of mind costs FREE with your loan</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p> <p>There has never been an easier time to apply</p> <p>Learn more about our new, convenient advertising plan, and learn necessary skills to ensure maximum return on investment. Our new plan is designed to help you save money, and we can help you get the most out of it.</p> <p>Yours sincerely,  Tom Smith Managing Director</p> <p>ps. Apply now and you can qualify for a FREE Radio Martini</p>
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Figure 66 Layer 2. How subheads can be used to tell the essential story.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

now. In my view, the mark of a good sales letter is that you could take away all the letter text and still have a mailing capable of getting a response. (See Figure 66 for an excellent example, based on a real mailing.) John Watson goes so far as to say that body copy has no function for a customer who is highly interested – for them layers 1 and 2 will suffice.¹²

Finally, for layer 3, the letter text itself provides the chapter and verse that the interested-but-most-wavering customer needs to satisfy themselves that they should reach for their checkbook.

Long on copy, long on benefits

*“The seductive love of narrative, when we ourselves are the heroes of the events which we tell, often disregards the attention due to the time and patience of the audience, and the best and wisest have yielded to its fascination.” (Sir Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, 1817)*

The sad thing about being a marketer is that you can’t even read a classic novel without looking for tips. The quotation above leapt off the page when I read *Rob Roy*. I think it makes a couple of enlightening points. First, it says talk about yourself and you’ll bore your listener (remember two “you”s per “we”); second, it offers an insight into the length of copy.

Despite most marketers’ first reaction being to turn up their noses at long copy, handbooks written by direct marketing practitioners unanimously espouse long copy. Who’s right? Scott himself was no slouch with the pen: *Rob Roy* contains the best part of 200,000 words, with a pea-souper of a Fog Index hovering around the 20 mark.

David Ogilvy said that in his experience “long copy sells more than short.” He wrote at length in its favor, citing one press ad containing 6,450 words that pulled 10,000 responses, without even a coupon.¹³

I think if Scott were an agency copywriter today, he’d say the same as he did in 1817: The key issues are the *time* and *patience* of the audience. There’s nothing wrong with long copy, provided you don’t abuse this privilege. As Drayton Bird puts it:

“Because one maxim is that long copy always outpulls short, bad writers often write far too much.”¹⁴

In my opinion, there’s no such thing as long copy, or short copy, only *enough* copy. Give your customer a stream of relevant, interesting facts and benefits, and they’ll stay with you.

This view is supported by the findings of Starch, who concluded that:

“...people do read long ads and that, with the increase in text, readership decreases very slightly beyond the 75-word point. Length of text as such is a relatively minor factor. The most potent factor by far is the substance of the sales message and how it is presented. Vital content presented in appealing form, whether 100 or 500 words in length, will be seen and read by a substantial reader audience.”¹⁵



Figure 67 The sizzle versus the sausage. Two perfectly good ads from the same magazine, in the same product category. One boasts 32 words, the other 703 (or thereabouts). Copy is long enough when it completes the task in hand. Reproduced by kind permission of Pernod Ricard and Direct Wines.

DOES YOUR MARKETING SELL?

Use a chip-box

A useful tool in making copy easier to digest is what we named the “chip-box.” I’m sure lots of people have independently invented this technique, but we laid our own claim to it. Basically it’s what it says – a separate box containing a chunk of the text.



Mr T.A. Ahlett
Divisional Director
Sun Alliance Insurance
Werneth House
Oldham OL8 4TE

24 May 1996

Dear Tim

"Kleenex® blows away its rivals"

As you may have read in the press, Blue-Chip's Winter Survival Kit for Kleenex® Ultra was one of the most successful promotions at this year's recent ISP Awards.

The activity formed part of an 18-month campaign to support the product launch, culminating in a brand share for Kleenex® Ultra of 15.6% in January 1996 - three times the original launch target.

We believe it is another good example of the role sales promotion can play when employed on a planned and integrated basis.

Yours sincerely


Ian Moore.

Blue-Chip Marketing	18.5
IMP	18.0
Promotional Campaigns	16.0
Saatchi & Saatchi	15.5
The Marketing Store	15.5
SMP	10.5
Billington Carmell	9.0
Communicator	8.0
Masterguide	7.0
Option One	7.0

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Tel: 0181 912 5000
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EDINBURGH EH1 1JF
Tel: 0131 125 5000
Fax: 0131 237 3000

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4 TRAMMELL ST.
MANCHESTER M2 1JF
Tel: 0161 237 5000
Fax: 0161 237 3000

Figure 68 The chip-box: a simple device for untangling and juxtaposing the main strands of a message.

When I approve or edit copy, especially for ads and mailings, I often notice the writer is wrestling with two or more strands of the message. For instance, at its simplest, the writer will be telling the customer a) what to do and b) why they should do it.

A similar tangle can occur in an “informative” communication (i.e. one not requiring a response). Here the writer tells the recipient a) what to think about and b) why they should believe it.

I can empathize with the writer. The task is often to combine a navigation/ease message with an interest/desire message. Within a single letter text, it’s not always straightforward to integrate these two components and maintain the flow of (the customer’s) thinking.

The chip-box acts as a kind of pressure valve. If you look at Figure 68 you can see what I mean. Admittedly this is not a long-copy example, but notice at a glance how the chip-box pulls out (and emphasizes) a key section of information that otherwise would have cluttered the letter text. In this instance, the chip-box acts as a kind of visual aid, almost like a diagram or chart.

Thus the two main strands of thought that the letter is trying to communicate are kept apart, and so are easier to digest. You can use a chip-box (or several in a longer letter or ad) for sections of your message such as “How to apply” or “Reasons to buy” to equally good effect.

In one split-test we ran, a chip-box mailing outperformed a non-chip-box mailing by more than 300 percent, even though the content of the two letters was virtually identical.

Let the facts get in the way

It’s long been known in direct marketing circles that factual propositions work best. For instance, here are two headlines, for an imaginary new dental anesthetic.

Headline A: “Dentists save time and money with new RapidoNumb.”

Headline B: “How a dentist from Basildon increased his profits by £249 a week. New RapidoNumb – the tooth’s ready to drill in 15 seconds.”

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While both headlines express similar benefits, my money would be on headline B, longer and more unwieldy though it is. Facts bring vague benefits to life. The introduction of a specific dentist, an exact cash sum, and a precise time converts a toothless platitude into a needle-sharp proposition.

All good direct marketers know this, but the principle is often ignored in other forms of communication. In two successive years we ran identical on-pack promotions on a leading tissue brand. The offer was: Buy four packs and send for a voucher for your next pack free. If everybody replied, four million free packs would have been despatched.

In year 1, the proposition stated: "Claim a free pack of tissues." The response was 4.7 percent.

In year 2, the proposition stated: "4 million free packs to be claimed." The response was 14.5 percent.

The first year's result of 4.7 percent was around about the industry norm for this kind of offer, and the outcome was viewed as satisfactory. Prior to the repeat promotion, I recommended to our client that we adopt the direct marketing technique of introducing a genuine, factual number into the proposition. The result: an extraordinary uplift in response. (Probably because – seeing that there were four million free packs – the customer believed the offer would be around long enough for them to collect and apply.)

Proof and testimonial

Facts prove benefits. Customers believe facts and convert them into sales. But in the absence of facts, customers turn to authority.

When Crest toothpaste was first launched in the US, despite its superior performance it was unable to break through in the market. Established competitive products were able to make similar promises about cavity prevention. However, after a full six years Crest finally secured endorsement of its claims from the American Dental Association. This enabled the customer to believe in the benefit. Sales tripled and Crest overtook Colgate as the leading brand.¹⁶

Authority comes in many forms. It can be as grand as the American Dental Association, or as undistinguished as your pal whom you ask in the

TM000246

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Mitsubishi Carisma 1.6 Elegance

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Typical example

Carisma 1.8 Elegance*	
On the road price	£10,995.00
Number of payments	0
Monthly repayments	£0
Deposit	£5,497.50
Charge for credit	£0
Optional final payment (OFP)**	£5,497.50
Total credit price	£10,995.00
APR	0%

*Take a 36-month lease. **Optional final payment (OFP) is a one-off payment at the end of the lease term. The total credit price is the sum of the deposit and the monthly payments. The total credit price is the sum of the deposit and the monthly payments. The total credit price is the sum of the deposit and the monthly payments.

Take a 36-month lease. **Optional final payment (OFP) is a one-off payment at the end of the lease term. The total credit price is the sum of the deposit and the monthly payments. The total credit price is the sum of the deposit and the monthly payments. The total credit price is the sum of the deposit and the monthly payments.



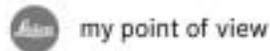
Figure 69 Facts sell. With hardly a superfluous word in sight, an extensive specification and a keen financial package do all the talking for Mitsubishi. Reproduced by kind permission of Mitsubishi Cars.

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“In the last 20 years,
only one thing has come
between Bill and his birds.”



During that time, Bill has become the UK's most recognised birdwatcher and has inspired a whole generation with his devotion to the study of birds and wildlife. So it is only natural that he would choose the best observation equipment - LEICA. Bill's 30 year partnership with LEICA began when he asked some friends if he could try their LEICA Trinod binoculars. Bill recalls, "they were smaller, lighter, had great eyepieces and, best of all, the optics were brilliant!" So brilliant, in fact, Bill hasn't looked back since. LEICA binoculars carry a 30 year warranty and are available at your LEICA dealer.



Leica Camera Ltd, Elstey Avenue, Greynall, Milton Keynes, MK3 9LS. Telephone: 01908 234720 for literature or 01908 648443 for general and service enquiries. www.leica-camera.com LEICA is pleased to be a sponsor of Raptor Conservation.

Figure 70 Bill Oddie. A credible and endearing brand spokesman. Reproduced by kind permission of Leica Camera Ltd and Mr Bill Oddie.

pub because he knows about computers. Whichever, it's a fact that we all seek sources of authority when we're uncertain about making a purchase.

Leica has for many years employed Bill Oddie as brand spokesman for its binoculars; in my view, a well-considered endorsement. Not only is Bill Oddie a likeable, entertaining celebrity, but he also knows his birds (and his kit). Had comedian Peter Kay appeared in Leica ads, I may have read them out of curiosity, but I would have been doubtful about his ability to advise me on such an experience-based product.

Peter Kay as spokesman for John Smith's bitter, on the other hand – no problem. And not because it's easier to believe someone like him could be an expert on beer. Peter Kay's an expert on *Zeitgeist*, and that's what I would be buying into.

Certainly don't be fooled that for "celebrity" you can read "magic wand." A couple of years ago I remember being in a presentation by an advertising agency to a client for whom we were working on a separate project. The brand in question was beginning to flag and the advertising was getting the blame. Today was the "reveal" for a new strategy. The client services director gradually built up the suspense, finally to announce with great import: "The time has come to inject a little bit of fame into the brand." (I couldn't believe my ears. If fame's so good, why wait until now?)

In the next few months a small fortune (well, not even small) was spent in an exotic location filming a new commercial featuring a well-known rock group. It bore little resemblance to anything that had gone before for the brand, and the budget stretched to a single execution. It was ditched within the year; by then the brand team had all moved on.

What does the research say about this subject? In short it's this: The more credible the source, the more the persuasion. But the more deeply your customer needs to consider your product before purchase, the less likely it is that a "random" celebrity will have a persuasive effect.¹⁷ (A problem overcome by choosing Bill Oddie to advertise binoculars, or David Beckham football boots. But you wouldn't do it the other way round.)

Some "celebrity" ads score very high levels of recall. But there is a caveat. Studies have shown that unless the product being advertised is perceived as relevant by the audience, viewers simply watch the ad for its

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executional values; i.e. as a form of entertainment. This sort of recall clearly has little value to a commercial enterprise concerned about sales. (It's a bit like sending your best salesperson round to all your customers, only for him to tell jokes for their enjoyment. It doesn't take much for showmanship to displace salesmanship.)

As I said above, authority need not come from a celebrity. Indeed, your customer is more likely to trust a "homophilous" person when they need information about a new product.¹⁸ (Homophilous means someone who shares beliefs, education, and social status – hence the persuasive power of your homophilous pal in the pub.) So whatever the nature of your business, you should always be able to find credible sources to help back up your claims.

DRTV ads are packed with satisfied homophilous customers. And DRTV ads live or die by the responses they generate. Surely no coincidence?

In more traditional direct marketing parlance, this technique is known as the "testimonial." It is a staple of the industry and something every business can exploit. The key is to be credible: A blurred picture of "Mrs X from Ullapool" claiming she got whiter whites won't wash.

If you can't find real people to feature in your marketing, you might be able to exploit a more general angle instead. Copywriter Alastair Crompton calls it "testimonials from competitors."¹⁹ The idea here is that you say something like this:

"The local garage that the directors of Toyota trust to service their limousines."

In Scotland, the best-selling single-malt whisky has long been Glenmorangie. In the rest of Britain it's Glenfiddich. I've always been surprised that more is not made of "The malt the Scots prefer."

Use the emotions to reach the intellect

If you start out by telling your customer they're wrong, the chances are they'll give you the cold shoulder. Their emotional reaction overrides their intellect. Roy H Williams puts it like this:

Successful Personal Investing

How to acquire the independent, unbiased, practical investing and money-management know-how you need, in one complete, no-nonsense package.

Here is just a small sample of the many, many enthusiastic responses to the SPI course:

"SPI is exactly what I have been looking for for a long time." B.V.B., Crewe

"Don't change a thing ... As a result of SPI I now have a **large surplus at the bank** – tax savings – a small profit on shares." I. K., Walton-on-Thames

"...the first two lessons of SPI are absolutely fascinating..." B.B., Horley

"I couldn't stop reading SPI – I have read it three times." J. R., Porthcawl



"... SPI is a counter to the sort of waffle a stockbroker feeds one with. And so-called 'financial advisers' come to that!"
A. B., Ranslip

"£83,589.60. Not a bad return on my investment in SPI." Mr. F., Surrey



"This course should be taught in classes all over the country, so that the mystique surrounding investing can be removed." R.H., London

"Through your advice my investments have **increased more than £30,000** in the past 6 months. This course has been the best value for money that I have ever spent." G. H., West Bridgford

"SPI is very clear and simple and has something for everyone including those who are starting out with not too much money, right to those who want to do their own wheeling and dealing." A. J., Kirkdale



"SPI has become my 'Money Bible'. I am also pleased that friends and colleagues now ask my advice."
S. W., Usbridge

"Wish I had been introduced to Successful Personal Investing 10 years ago." C. S., Westhumbill



"I would recommend it to all, including those who are already successful investors ... excellently presented in a forthright manner, **clearly guiding** one through all aspects of finance."
J. S., East Yorkshire

"Very brilliant course. A passage to wealth ..."
E. P., London

The full names and addresses of these SPI course participants are a matter of record and are withheld here solely in respect of their personal privacy.

Statement of Principles

1. IRS is an independent service offering unbiased education and information to assist you in making informed investing and money management decisions.

2. IRS is not affiliated with one stockbroker, unit trust or investment trust, agency or financial intermediary of any type. We make no financial offerings.

3. No salesman will call you – we have none. You may drop out of our course at any time and pay only for the materials you keep.



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Figure 71 Classic use of the testimonial. Reproduced by kind permission of Charterhouse Communications plc.

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“We usually do what we feel is right, then use intellectual logic to justify what our emotions have decided.”²⁰

Williams’ view is that a marketing communication will be more powerful if it sets out first to engage the emotions, and to do so by reminding the customer of something they’ve always known or suspected. I wholeheartedly agree with this thesis: It gets right to the core of how a good salesperson would operate on a one-to-one basis. Here’s an example translating the concept into advertising.

Not long after the merger that gave rise to the giant insurer Royal & SunAlliance (RSA), we worked on a project team to develop new advertising aimed at the company’s 10,000 or so High Street brokers. RSA’s marketing manager at the time, Steve Kingshott (one of the sadly rare breed I would describe as marketeer rather than marketer), was keen to blend NLP techniques with our own creative approach.

The structural upheavals in the insurance market in recent years have made life very difficult for the broker. Inevitably, service levels have fluctuated, as waves of new staff and new systems have rippled through the major insurers’ organizations. Cynical and skeptical would best describe the attitude of the average broker.

A challenge. As a result of our project team’s thinking, to appeal to the typical “auditory” broker (i.e. a person showing a preference for communication in words, rather than via pictures), I wrote the ad shown in Figure 72: “Announcing the launch of yet another household product that’s *not quite right* for your customers.”

Wow. “Not quite right.” And Steve got it approved!

I wish I could tell you this was the most successful ad that RSA ever ran. Unfortunately, the scale of trade advertising just didn’t justify the cost of sufficiently detailed research and measurement. However, anecdotally, it worked – certainly we were told it created considerable interest in the new product.

Here at last was advertising that the broker-liaison teams weren’t embarrassed about. It was telling the truth. None of the usual platitudes about flexibility, support, and commitment.

Announcing the launch of yet another household product that's *not quite right* for your customers

(and seven reasons you should sell it)



ONE: No one else can. It's only available through Brokers like you.

TWO: It's competitive. You'll find it regularly among the Top 5 on your screen.

THREE: It's easy. With one of the shortest application forms around, it's a breeze for you and your customers.

FOUR: And it's going to get even better! That's where YOU come in.

FIVE: Satisfy more customers. Work with us to develop the products your customers want.

SIX: And you'll see changes fast. We are building a whole range of products in a flexible and adaptable way. Options will include Annual Worldwide Travel, Legal Expenses and Caravans.

SEVEN: **Choices One** is here from November 1st. The new base contract, it's perfect for customers with low claims histories, looking for low premiums to match.

So make a positive choice. Call your dedicated Business Team Manager now, or e-mail us directly on choices@royal-and-sunalliance.co.uk.

There are seven good reasons why you should.

www.royal-and-sunalliance.co.uk/broker

ROYAL & SUNALLIANCE

Figure 72 Honesty equals credibility. Reproduced by kind permission of Royal & SunAlliance.

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I would have loved to have called on a customer and used the same script. “I’m here to talk with you about the launch of yet another household product that’s not quite right for your customers. And I can give you seven good reasons why you should sell it.” It’s actually what a real salesperson would say.

The back-up story the RSA people related to brokers was like this: “Look, we know you need new products to compete with the direct insurers, and you need them fast. Rather than wait, we’re bringing Choices One to market right now. We could tinker for years and still not get it right. Have the raw ammunition today and help us shape it to meet your customers’ needs.”

Intuitively, this type of approach makes absolute sense. Indeed, research supports the principle. Two-sided messages (those including pros and cons) have been shown to increase customer perceptions of advertiser truthfulness and believability, compared to one-sided messages (those presenting only pros).²¹

Maybe this is a technique you can use.

Not a million miles away from this approach is the broader issue of positioning. I’ve referred to this several times, and its popularization by Ries and Trout in their book of the same name. The theory goes that if you can’t get into your customer’s mind first, your best bet is to do it by reference to something they already understand and believe.

It certainly makes for quicker understanding. Think how quickly unleaded petrol caught on. Yet it took years for diesel cars to become popular. (Unless you studied organic chemistry you’ve probably got no idea what diesel really is.) Why didn’t they just call it HMP – short for high-mileage petrol?

Often, positioning tactics have the simultaneous effect of repositioning the competition. The launch of *The Independent* surely forced many readers to re-evaluate the neutrality of their usual newspaper. Miller Lite, a runaway success in the US, raised calorie consciousness among millions of drinkers. And today’s crop of organic line extensions are vexing brand managers, whose original offerings by definition must be unorganic.

The prize for the best positioning job in recent years must, however, surely go to a political party: New Labour. (And if at this point you're thinking, "Hey – NEW AIDA," you'd be right.)



Figure 73 Positioning theory put into practice.

Classical conditioning

If you didn't mess around in biology class you might remember Pavlov's dogs. Every time he fed them, he rang a bell. Eventually, just by ringing the bell, he could make the dogs salivate. It was the original classical conditioning experiment.

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Psychologists who studied marketing in action realized that for many years marketers had been employing similar techniques, if inadvertently. (I mentioned in Step 4 the playing of Christmas carols in shops, and the questionable use of sex appeal.)

Here's how it's meant to work. The original Häagen-Dazs campaign is again a good example. The ads are designed to evoke pleasurable and warm emotions in the mind of the viewer. These emotions then become associated with the product. Later, the viewer, now a *shopper*, sees the product, recalls the emotions, likes the feeling, and buys the product.

In markets such as lager, cigarettes, and saloon cars, competing products are virtually the same. In these sectors, classical conditioning is heavily relied on to create a reason to buy. And brands that have been most successful are those that have captured key positions in the customer's mind: coolest, wittiest, sexiest, smartest, most daring.

My advice on classical conditioning? For the vast majority of businesses: Steer well clear. I say this not because it won't work, but because I see so many examples of it *not working*. (Please read on.)

The irrelevant simile

The irrelevant simile is a term I invented, so my apologies if there's a better version I've never heard of. A simile, as you may recall, is when "a thing is described by being likened to something."²² Hence: drinks like a fish; fit as a fiddle; and reeks like a lumb (Scots for smokes like a chimney).

So, one thing being likened to another. I have no problem with this in an ad... except when the connection is irrelevant. Let me explain why I believe it's a mistake.

Imagine you're interviewing a candidate for a job. The job is for a relief position, so it requires versatility, filling in for anyone who might be absent. Thus you want to know if the candidate is a flexible sort.

"Oh yes," he replies. And he takes from his briefcase a picture of an international gymnast, bent over backwards in the crab position. He continues: "Here's a picture of a very flexible person. Because I'm holding it up beside me, it means I'm a very flexible person, too."

After you'd surreptitiously checked your escape route, you'd no doubt bring the interview to a close at the earliest opportunity.

Mad as it would be to attempt to sell yourself like this, you can pick up virtually any magazine or switch on the television and find big blue-chip companies doing just that. (Car manufacturers are among the worst culprits.) They think up the point they want to communicate, find an entirely unconnected example of the same concept, and hold it up beside themselves. Then they wonder why their ads don't work.

David Ogilvy politely advised against the use of what he called analogies. He wrote that Gallup found readers misunderstood them. Often, they thought it was the analogous item that was being advertised.²³

I'll go a stage further and rudely advise against analogies. *It's dim to use them.* With so many other techniques available, why select an approach that is so patently nonsense?

And that's why I recommend you avoid classical conditioning. Nine times in every ten it comes out as an irrelevant simile.

Take the (disguised) ad shown in Figure 74. While the ad is for financial services, the image shows a jet airliner. The advertiser is trying to say they're both best when handled by ultra-professionals. True. And that this means the advertiser is ultra-professional. Not true. An irrelevant simile proves nothing.

What if the fictional interviewee had shown a picture of *himself* in the crab position? Still pretty irrelevant as far as the job is concerned, although at least you'd think he'd got a bit about him. But far better for him to have handed you a reference from a former employer, or described how in his previous job he was expected to cover any of seven different positions at short notice.

Killing them softly

If you deal in fragrances, fashions, or expensive watches and jewelry, you'd be excused for thinking I've neglected you. At first sight, many ads for these products seem to ignore most of the rules that lead to effective communication. No headlines, no benefits, sometimes not even a brand name. Just an extravagant piece of photography.

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Some things are best in the hands of the ultra-professional

Pick up virtually any magazine or switch on the TV and you can find big blue-chip companies trying to persuade you with irrelevant similes. They think up the point they want to communicate, find an entirely unconnected example of the same concept, and hold it up beside themselves. But why on earth should you be convinced?

David Ogilvy politely advised against the use of what he called analogies. He wrote that Gallup found that readers misunderstood them. Often, they thought it was the analogous item that was being advertised.

Figure 74 An irrelevant simile proves nothing. That an aircraft needs a qualified pilot does not mean an unrelated financial services company has ultra-professional staff.

Yet you know you can't run ads with headlines like "Wear Armani and you'll look really cool." It doesn't work like that.

While in Step 4 I argued it was a fallacy that a picture is automatically worth 10,000 words, you might also recall I promised to show a vital and unique role for pictures. And here it is.

Because there is no way a customer can rationally justify spending £10,000 on a watch (or £1,000 or even £100), or splashing out on perfume that costs more per ounce than gold, or buying a new outfit that will be passé (if not past it) in three months... because of these intellectual barriers, you can only sell such products to your customers' emotions. And the good news is, when it comes to sales, the emotional outpulls the rational every time.

I'm not saying this can't be done with words. But it is the one area of marketing communication where visual techniques are in a class of their own. Like sensory language, pictures are a shortcut to the emotions.

The right picture can make your customer live your moment in their mind. It might be imagination, but they're "doing it" just the same. And doing builds desire.

Humans have sensitive antennae for picking up the tiniest of cues that impinge on emotional needs. And the eye is a vital conduit.

These needs include belonging, acceptance, status, sex appeal, and self-expression. They exert powerful influences over behavior. Together they make up the *self-image*.

Your self-image is how you perceive yourself and your relationship to the world around you.²⁴ And if you're like most people, you'll have a perceived gap between your *actual* self and your *ideal* self. Behavioral scientists have long established that a central human motive is to constantly enhance this view of self – and to strive to close the gap between actual and ideal.

Bring on shopping. The facts that appeal to the emotions – that I earlier called the soft facts – are every bit as real as hard facts like "washes whiter" or "kills moles" or "0–60 in 5.4 seconds." For instance, here's a soft fact put into words:

"Your pals won't take the mickey out of you if you wear Nike trainers."

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Figure 75 Creating peer-group acceptance for a brand and its customers. Reproduced by kind permission of Nike.

This invented example might sound trivial, but peer-group rejection for wearing the wrong gear is just about every teenage boy's greatest fear. (In my day Doc Martens and Ben Sherman were badges that kept you in the gang.) Obviously Nike can't put this headline in an ad, but nor does it need to – subtle imagery does the job.

And soft facts can be just as important for mundane products. Take washing-up liquid. For what seemed like forever, Fairy Liquid was advertised on a dual hard-and-soft strategy. Hard-hitting ads showed how many more dishes it washed, while nice emotional vignettes of mum and daughter pulled at the heartstrings.

Soft hands, and lasts longer. Which is which? Actually, I think *soft hands* was the rational benefit, and *lasts longer* the emotional (because lasts longer translates into good housekeeping and thus boosts mum's self-image).

So if your communication objective involves an appeal to the emotions, then a visual appeal to your customer's self-image may be a powerful tool. If you're in the fragrance or fashion business, I think your biggest advertising challenge lies not in creating desire, but in making the most of the crucial steps that begin and end the buying process. A pictures-only approach imposes severe constraints on achieving both initial navigation and attention, and ultimate action – so that's where your efforts should focus.

I mentioned in Step 4 my 1,028-ad survey in which only 29 percent promised a benefit in their headline. For fashion ads, especially clothes and fragrance, we're talking low single figures. In fact, many of these had no headline at all. Yet when you're in a magazine like *Marie Claire*, competing with another 148 full-page ads (never mind 250 pages of editorial), your visual gets the briefest of scampers along the catwalk. At times like this, the marketer really should question a wordless execution.

In Figure 76 overleaf is an example of an ad for Sloggi that looks really good, and is enhanced by its headline. It promises two benefits, and demonstrates there is no need to leave to chance what the reader takes out of the message.

In Figure 77 is another really nice idea, this time for Lurpak. The image plus the packshot work together to reveal the answer to the conundrum. But note there's no headline.

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Figure 76 Resist the temptation... to drop the headline. Reproduced by kind permission of Triumph International Ltd.



Figure 77 "Delicious butter with fresh garlic already built in." Reproduced by kind permission of Arla Foods Plc and BMPDDB.

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The product benefit is “delicious butter containing freshly crushed garlic.” That seems a pretty strong message to me, and not a light to hide under a bushel.

In the approval room this ad should be greeted by cheers. These should then be qualified by the sobering question: How will customer meet marketing? If it’s by browsing at 1–2 seconds per page, I’d add a headline.

On the other hand, I have no doubt that if you can get your customer to work out the conundrum on their own, it’s better than just telling them. The deeper involvement will have a greater impact on their learning. And knowledge determines behavior.

So yes, you can use your judgment... but you can also do some simple testing to understand a) how your customer mainly meets your marketing, and b) what they take out from it in different forms – for instance, with and without a headline.

DESIRE — SEVEN TOP TIPS

- 1 Start by telling your customer they’re right.**
- 2 Let your customer “do it.”**
- 3 Use imagery to reach their emotions.**
- 4 Layer your message.**
- 5 Use specifics.**
- 6 Call on relevant authorities.**
- 7 Avoid irrelevant similes.**

KEY QUESTION

“Does my customer have all the facts?”