



PART OF THE COMMONSENSE MARKETING SERIES®

# 51 HELPFUL MARKETING IDEAS

*Simple, tested, yet often neglected ideas guaranteed to improve results*

DRAYTON BIRD



“Drayton Bird knows more about marketing than anyone in the world.”

David Ogilvy:  
Founder, Ogilvy & Mather



“Drayton Bird is a wise and wily direct marketer. People all over the world have been lucky enough to learn from him.”

Sir Martin Sorrell, Founder, WPP

**100% MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE: “PUT THESE IDEAS TO THE TEST. IF YOUR PROFITS DON’T INCREASE BY 100 TIMES WHAT YOU PAID FOR THIS BOOK, I’LL GIVE YOU YOUR MONEY BACK — GLADLY, IF A LITTLE PUZZLED.”**



**DRAYTON BIRD** is an internationally-applauded author, copywriter, teacher, lecturer and consultant, widely regarded as among those who have done most to shape and document today's marketing scene.

His best-known books include *Commonsense Direct and Digital Marketing* (currently in its 28th year and 5th edition), *Sales Letters that Sell* and *Marketing Insights and Outrages*. *Commonsense Direct and Digital Marketing* was described by David Ogilvy as "Pure gold. Read it and re-read it. It contains the knowledge of a lifetime" and has sold more than 200,000 copies in 17 languages.

Drayton has written over 1,000 columns for international magazines, spoken in 50 countries and worked with many leading brands, among them American Express, BA, Deutsche Post, Ford, Microsoft, Nestle, Proctor & Gamble, Philips, The Royal Mail, Unilever and Visa.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing named Drayton, with others such as Tom Peters, Ted Levitt and Philip Kotler, as one of the 50 individuals who have shaped modern marketing.

He now runs the London marketing consultancy Drayton Bird Associates, the online Commonsense Marketing programme ([www.draytonbirdcommonsense.com](http://www.draytonbirdcommonsense.com)) and the European Academy of Direct & Interactive Marketing Studies.

## PRAISE FOR DRAYTON BIRD

“Here is a man who has lived it, studied it and done it.  
When it comes to direct marketing there is no-one better than  
Drayton Bird.”

*Director of the First US Trade Mission for Direct Marketing*

People toss the phrase “living legend” around far too casually.  
Drayton Bird really is such a person. He knows direct marketing  
from the inside out, and the crucial details necessary to turn  
concepts, strategies, and words themselves into sales,  
empires, and fortunes.

*David Garfinkel, Publisher, World Copywriting Blog*

“Your books are among my most valued possessions, and easily  
among the greatest ever written on advertising, right up there  
with those by Caples, Ogilvy, Schwab, Reeves and Hopkins.”

*Gary Bencivenga, “Hall of Fame” copywriter*

## **ALSO BY DRAYTON BIRD:**

Commonsense Direct and Digital Marketing *Kogan Page, 2007*

How to Write Sales Letters that Sell *Kogan Page, 1997*

Marketing Insights and Outrages *Kogan Page, 2000*

The Master Marketer: How to Combine Tried and Tested  
Techniques with the Latest Ideas to Achieve Spectacular  
Marketing Success (with Christopher Ryan) *Kogan Page, 1994*

Open for Business! How to Write Letters that Get Results  
(with Courtney Ferguson) *McGraw-Hill 2001*

Some Rats Run Faster *Secker & Warburg, 1964*

The Drayton Bird Commonsense Marketing online seminars:  
[www.draytonbirdcommonsense.com](http://www.draytonbirdcommonsense.com)

© Drayton Bird 2011

The right of Drayton Bird to be identified as the author of this book has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the author, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms and licences issued by the CLA. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the author at the under mentioned address:

Drayton Bird Associates  
Mariner's Wharf  
8 Holyrood St  
London SE1 2EL

[www.draytonbirdcommonsense.com](http://www.draytonbirdcommonsense.com)

# 51 HELPFUL MARKETING IDEAS

*Simple, tested, yet often neglected ideas  
guaranteed to improve results*

DRAYTON BIRD

*Foreword by Brian Featherstonhaugh,  
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer,  
OgilvyOne Worldwide*

DRAYTON BIRD ASSOCIATES LTD  
2011



# CONTENTS

## FOREWORD

Rory Sutherland, Executive Creative Director and Vice-Chairman, OgilvyOne London and Vice-Chairman, Ogilvy Group UK

## INTRODUCTION

Drayton Bird

### 1. “KEEP AT IT UNTIL THEY GIVE IN”

Communicate more than your competitors and you'll outdo them every time.

### 2. SALESMANSHIP IN PRINT

Is your advertising an active member of your sales force – or does it have another agenda?

### 3. HOW LONG IS TOO LONG?

Your prospects will read your copy for as long as it is interesting and relevant – and no longer.

### 4. TRY AN EDITORIAL STYLE

How to boost your response many times over, simply by avoiding the conventional look of an ad.

### 5. NEVER SELL TO A STRANGER

Give your friends the warmest welcome – they're the ones most likely to buy.

### 6. MAKE AN EXHIBITION OF YOURSELF

Ever bought a car without taking a test-drive first? Nor have your customers.

### 7. BRIBERY SELDOM FAILS

Many people claim to be immune to their charms, but incentives hijack our attention and spur us to action.

### 8. DON'T BE AFRAID TO GET EMOTIONAL

Marketing is a battle for hearts and minds – strictly in that order.

### 9. WRITE FROM YOU TO ME

Nothing matches the immediacy and appeal of one individual communicating with another.

### 10. WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Sorry, but your customers don't want to hear about you.

### 11. THE OBVIOUS IS ALWAYS OVERLOOKED

In marketing, familiarity can breed forgetfulness. Let's all try to remember that.

### 12. DON'T ASK, WON'T GET

Call for a reply or action – then do it again and again until you've got what you want.



**13. ENGLISH SPOKEN HERE?**

*“Use simple words everyone knows, then everyone will understand.”*

**14. NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS**

*On-line marketing is just accelerated off-line marketing, and don't let them tell you different.*

**15. A CREATIVE CHECKLIST**

*Tests prove time and again that some things usually work while others never do. Can you tell the difference?*

**16. EXPLAIN YOURSELF**

*When you're offering a benefit to your customers, they'll want you to justify your generosity.*

**17. DECISIONS, DECISIONS...**

*Don't just settle for a reply: make people choose.*

**18. SHOW AND TELL**

*Art directors might prefer it otherwise, but your marketing images must match your message.*

**19. THE X-FACTOR – WORDS THAT PAINT A PICTURE**

*Vivid, visual writing lifts your message off the page and into the imagination.*

**20. STAND ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS**

*Studying the masters of your profession is the fastest, surest route to success.*

**21. HELLO? ANYONE THERE?**

*When customers decide to buy, let them choose their own way to tell you the good news.*

**22. YOUR CUSTOMER IS NOT A MORON**

*“She is your wife”, to complete the famous David Ogilvy maxim; treat her with the respect she deserves.*

**23. DARE TO BE DIFFERENT**

*Seek out and showcase your unique qualities – because if you don't know them, neither will your customers.*

**24. BEFORE THE WORDS, CONSULT THE NERDS**

*Make sure your creative people talk to your database people – they know what your customers want to hear.*

**25. TIMES CHANGE. PEOPLE DON'T**

*In an ever-evolving world, human nature remains obstinately constant – as do the pillars of successful marketing*

**26. READ YOUR COPY OUT LOUD**

*Few examples of jargon, pomposity and corporate bullshit will survive a live performance.*

### **27. “THE HELL WITH RESEARCH”**

*A bit extreme, perhaps; but be sure to use its findings for illumination, not support.*

### **28. SAY WHAT?**

*“If language is used incorrectly, then what is said is not what is meant.”*

### **29. TEMPTED TO CHANGE? RESIST IT**

*If you can't prove in tests that your new ideas will do better, leave well alone.*

### **30. MEMBERS ONLY – BE EXCLUSIVE**

*You can go to your customers cap-in-hand. Or you can make it a rare privilege for them to buy.*

### **31. HOW TO BE THE STAR OF YOUR SHOW**

*But first, make sure you understand why so many PowerPoint speeches don't work.*

### **32. “SEARCH THE WORLD AND STEAL THE BEST”**

*From automobiles to zoo supplies, clever marketers around the world are selling the same products to the same people as you are.*

### **33. A SURPRISINGLY SUCCESSFUL IDEA**

*Once you have a something interesting to say, try to make it unexpected too.*

### **34. THINK BEFORE YOU SLOGANIZE**

*A snappy catchphrase is no substitute for thoughtful, believable words about how you help people.*

### **35. WHAT IS YOUR CUSTOMER WORTH?**

*How a simple calculation can put an end to marketing budget guesstimates.*

### **36. WORRIED? NERVOUS? ANXIOUS?**

*Play on people's insecurities – but kindly – and make the most of your own.*

### **37. DON'T BE FOOLED BY DIGITAL DRIVEL**

*Getting a “digital marketer” to write your copy is like having a software programmer write the ads for a new computer.*

### **38. WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO?**

*Before you start worrying about what to say, be sure you've singled out who's to hear it.*

### **39. MEANING WHAT, EXACTLY?**

*When something sounds good, ask for the details.*

### **40. A MODEST PROPOSAL**

*Start with the truth, not what you wish to be the truth.*

### **41. LOOK BEYOND THE NUMBERS**

*Two important points about marketing statistics: 1 – study and understand them. 2 – know when to think for yourself.*

**42. NEVER FORGET WHY YOU'RE HERE**

*If selling is a dirty word to you, you're in the wrong job.*

**43. WHERE TO GET IDEAS**

*Creative people swear by many different routines. Most of them amount to just getting on with it.*

**44. KNOW WHAT BRANDS ARE ABOUT**

*Plagued by pretentious and ignorant waffle, branding is nonetheless a essential ingredient of successful marketing.*

**45. HOW DO I LOOK?**

*It's a noisy, cluttered, look-at-me world out there; you had better dress to kill.*

**46. YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR**

*If you want results, give people the time and money to deliver them.*

**47. IMITATE, DON'T INNOVATE**

*Until you know how to do better, trying to be different for its own sake is a dangerous game.*

**48. EVER ASKED YOURSELF WHY YOU ADVERTISE?**

*Before you invest your millions, it makes sense to be clear about what you aim to accomplish.*

**49. "HELP FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING"**

*Tempting though it is to distract yourself with side-issues, your priority must be to focus on getting your core business right.*

**50. KEEP IT REAL**

*Using everyday analogies to formulate your marketing plans can help keep your feet securely on the ground.*

**51. DON'T TALK. ACT.**

*These Helpful Ideas are worth nothing if they don't prompt you to improve your results.*

**REFERENCES & RESOURCES**

## FOREWORD

In “51 Helpful Marketing Ideas”, Drayton Bird takes a lifetime of learning on what works and what doesn’t, and lays it out in crisp and simple language

I first met Drayton over twenty years ago when I was the newly minted managing director of OgilvyOne (then Ogilvy Direct) in Toronto and he was the global Creative Director.

Drayton taught me and my staff the roots of direct marketing from the basics up. He drilled us on the principles of targeting and offers and urged us to test, test, test.

He exhorted us to ‘never sell to a stranger’. It wasn’t by accident that in the next five years our agency tripled in size and won over 100 awards for creativity and effectiveness.

Drayton keeps it simple. He cuts through the jargon and always lands on the golden question, as David Ogilvy did: What would you do if it were your own money?

Any serious student of marketing and selling needs to read Drayton’s book. These are the lessons of a lifetime that last a lifetime.

Brian Fetherstonhaugh  
*Chairman and CEO*  
*OgilvyOne Worldwide*

## INTRODUCTION

### FIRST STEAL, THEN IMPROVE

*Drayton Bird*

You have to kiss a lot of frogs to find a prince.

I subscribe to all manner of things, hoping that every now and then somebody will say something interesting. As a result I get messages of such stunning banality that I sometimes rub my eyes in disbelief.

Take this from someone who seems to have noticed what happens in a supermarket for the very first time and, undeterred by an inability to spell Walmart, is thrilled to bits at having drawn an obvious conclusion.

Before you dismiss it, though, there is an important lesson in what follows – though not the one the writer chose.

Here's the message:

*As I was out on my usual rounds at the supermarket I noticed something REALLY interesting.*

*Let me tell you... you can really learn a lot of sneaky marketing tricks and strategies by analyzing what these big supermarkets (such as Wallmart or Tesco) do on their shelves in order to sell their own products.*

*First, they analyze the marketplace to see what is selling well. Then, they enter that market with their OWN branded product and retail it ALONGSIDE the dominant competition for that food product at a much lower price.*



IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW IN 1977 OGILVY SAYS OF HIS ROLLS-ROYCE AD: "I DIDN'T WRITE THAT HEADLINE. IT'S A QUOTATION FROM AN ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED ABOUT 20 YEARS BEFORE IN AN ENGLISH AUTOMOBILE MAGAZINE."

*The REALLY clever thing that they do here is...*

*They make THEIR branded version resemble that of the packaging of that premium dominant competitor for that food product!*

After this astounding insight, the writer puts up some pictures to make the point for sight-impaired readers, then concludes:

*So how can you use this knowledge in Internet marketing?*

Well...

*Step 1: find a solid product in your market.*

*Step 2: create your own 'similar' version of that product.*

(Note the pointless quotation marks around the word similar).

*You'll try and make it BETTER than the competitors in terms of quality/substance and even by adding MORE into it.*

*Step 3: come in at a competitive price!*

Laughably naive as it is, this suggestion will be new to some people – and that takes us back to the dawn of business history: when in doubt, first steal, then improve.

Most of the ideas in this book are not much more complex. Yet many people have never heard of them – and an alarming number who have ignore them.

The obvious is often overlooked.

Countless enthusiastic people have discovered marketing via the Internet without realising it did not start last week. If they look into what others have learned and written down over the last 160 years or so they will save themselves much heartache and misery.

Here are 51 of the simple things I have found can make a huge difference to your business success, whether you work for yourself, an agency or a firm in any kind of marketing

- advertising, direct marketing, promotions or online.  
Try three or four. You could be pleasantly surprised.



July 2010

### **MY RATHER EXTRAVAGANT 100% MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE**

Some of these ideas may seem almost laughably simple. Some may relate to you and your plans; some may not.

You probably already know a few – yet one of the most common comments I have received about them is, “I knew that, and we should be doing it, but we’re not.”

It’s so easy to overlook even the most obvious things, isn’t it? I do all the time.

The important thing is that every one of the Helpful Ideas in this book is based on experience, not theory.

One of the world’s most successful direct marketers told me that not knowing about one of the ideas cost him at least a million dollars to him.

Put them to the test for yourself. If your profits don’t increase by 100 times what you paid for the book, I’ll give you your money back – gladly, if a little puzzled.



## “Keep at it until they give in”

---

*Communicate more than your competitors and you'll outdo them every time.*

Too many businesses spend too much time doing nothing. And while they sweat the small stuff, their customers are ignored. But like friendships, your commercial relations must be constantly maintained and refreshed. Simply communicating more often, preferably about things that interest and benefit your customers and prospects, will work wonders.

If you find what I'm about to suggest pathetically obvious, I'm sorry. Many of the things I'll put to you are.

And the reason is simple. Although we may know things, far too often we don't do them.

So here's something one of my clients does. They send out the same (not very brilliant) e-mail week after week after week.

Let me guess what you're thinking. Is it something like this? “Surely that is far too often? And anyhow, if they sent out a variety of imaginative ones they'd do better.”

Well, they do what they do for two reasons.

1. Because it works. And it works because you never know when prospects will buy, so you have to keep plugging away.
2. Because it's better than nothing. And they're so busy fighting alligators that they'd probably send out nothing if they weren't careful.

I constantly see clients who spend weeks, even months,



squandering precious time over small details that will make little or no difference – when they should just get on with it.

### A tale of two firms

Three years ago, my partner and I went to see two companies in the same city on the same day.

One went on to spend six months having meetings about the copy we suggested – in fact I have no idea if it ever went out.

The other sent out the mailing we proposed within a week, and became our biggest client within three months. Today they are the leading firm in their field. This has little to do with us. But it has everything to do with two things:

1. They communicate more than their competitors.

Once they have a prospect they keep everlastingly at that prospect. I once asked their marketing director how long they keep mailing and e-mailing people. “Until they give in,” he replied.

2. They don’t sit around wasting hot air on whether something will work or not. They get on with it.

As the French writer Voltaire put it over 250 years ago, “The best is the enemy of the good”.

### Just do it

“When you’re up to your arse in alligators, there’s no time to drain the swamp”. It’s easy to be paralysed by indecision, especially when times are tough. And that’s when you end up chewing over the minutiae – and doing nothing.

Want a sure-fire way to eliminate useless discussion and wasted time? Let your customers decide for you.

People test to find out whether one message will work better than another. But here is an even simpler reason: it removes all excuses for inaction.

The American direct mail advertising pioneer Richard V Benson said, “There are two answers to every problem. Answer #1: Test everything. Answer #2: Refer to answer #1.”

I’ll wager that if you communicate more often than your competitors, you will outdo them. For example, how many subscriptions renewals should a magazine publisher send out? The answer is: go on until it costs you more to send them than the income they generate.

Keep at it till it doesn’t pay... then give it a rest and try again.

There is a direct relationship between profit and communication. The more you tell, the more you sell.

If you spend five minutes a day thinking of reasons to talk to your prospects and customers – things that might benefit or interest them (not you) – you will find it can reward you with the best ROI you ever had.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Communicating often and persistently with your prospects gets results – certainly more than agonising over the details of your messages ever will.*
- *“The best way to get something done is to begin.”  
Procrastination may work tomorrow; action works today.*

### What now?

- *Keep on talking to your prospects and customers until it doesn't pay.*
- *Consider varying your message at some point.  
Repetition gets results, but your customers and prospects will eventually tire of the same old same old.*
- *Beware paralysis: testing can help resolve endless subjective discussion.*

## Salesmanship in print

---

*Is your advertising an active member of your sales force – or does it have another agenda?*

Businesses exist to sell things and their sales people get paid to make that happen. So why would your advertising and marketing communications be designed to do anything else but sell? Yet millions are spent every day on pointlessly “original” and “creative” non-advertising. Count yourself lucky not to fall into that trap.

Like Helpful Idea No 1, this is a blinding glimpse of the obvious – yet completely ignored by most marketers. But unlike the first, it comes with a special offer you might find even more helpful.

More on that in a moment, because first I’d like you to join me you on a journey back in time.

If you study advertising – and I imagine you do, or how can you improve? – you will notice that most is very bad. A good example from people who should know better ran a while ago on the London Underground. It was a poster from the Advertising Standards Authority which read: “We’re here to make advertising better. Not to make better advertising. (Sorry.)”

This is what I call “creative masturbation” – produced entirely to please the writer, with no discernible purpose whatever. It does absolutely nothing to satisfy the question in every reader’s mind: “What’s in it for me?”

“The prospect doesn’t give a damn about you, your company or your product,” said Seattle guru Bob Hacker.

“All that matters is, ‘What’s in it for me?’”

What do they mean by “better” advertising? More original? More “creative” – which for many amounts to the same thing? Or with more “impact”, whatever that means?

Did you say, “Yes” to one or more of the above? If you trust the real giants of the industry, they are all wrong.

### **Want to know what advertising is (and isn't)?**

To explain why, let me take you to a modest office above a bar in Chicago 103 years ago. There, the first good definition of advertising emerged. Even now, many marketers – and some very big ones – don’t know it; but those who do

*“The only purpose of advertising is to sell. It has no other justification worth mentioning.”*

have a priceless advantage.

Until the moment I’m talking about, many vague phrases were used to describe advertising and how to do it. Most famous was the motto of AJ Ayer, then the leading US agency. They said that to get good advertising you must “Keep everlastingly at it”. True; but not very helpful.

The office above the bar belonged to Lord & Thomas, a small firm destined to enjoy enormous success as a result of that evening. The intellectual curiosity of a young man who had just started running the firm had led him to seek a clear definition of his profession.

He was Albert Lasker, and he went on to make more money from advertising than anyone else, before or since. He realised that the way you define what you do determines what you do.

On that night a man in the bar below sent up his card with a note saying: “I know you want to know what advertising is. I have the answer. Send back the card, and I will come and tell you.”

### Five words that built an advertising empire

Lasker sent the card back, and a few minutes later a tall, striking moustachioed ex-Canadian Mountie called John E Kennedy entered. He said to Lasker: “Advertising is salesmanship in print”. Remembering that media now encompass not just print, but radio, cinema, TV and the Internet, that definition still stands.

Lasker hired Kennedy, and Lord & Thomas set out to spread the gospel of salesmanship in print. Before the end of World War 1 they were the world’s largest advertising agency, which they remained until Lasker – who worked so hard he had regular nervous breakdowns – was away from the office for a while, and J Walter Thompson overtook them.

Bad advertising is advertising which doesn’t sell (and an amazing amount doesn’t) or is aimed at satisfying the egos of those who create or run it – the clients – more than making sales.

In fact most creative people are more interested in awards than sales. That’s not my opinion – just plain fact from research. They are keener on building their names than your sales.

So if you ever wonder why your stuff doesn’t work, that’s a good place to start: you’re not reading from the same hymn sheet.

### It isn’t creative if it doesn’t sell

Another early advertising titan, Claude Hopkins, succeeded Kennedy at Lord & Thomas. He put it this way: “Instead of sales, they seek applause”.

Hopkins may have been the most able copywriter ever. He launched such famous brands as Quaker Puffed Wheat, Pepsodent and Chevrolet, and his copy took a previously little-known brand of beer, Schlitz, and quickly made it America’s biggest seller.

He was so talented that Lasker hired him at the then unheard of salary of \$185,000 a year – when the dollar was worth eight times more than now and tax was almost nil. Another legendary adman, Raymond Rubicam, noted, “The only purpose of advertising is to sell. It has no other justification worth mentioning.” If you assume “sell” means to persuade anyone to do or believe something, it’s hard to better that.

Bill Bernbach, named Adman of the 20th Century in Advertising Age, said, “All this talk of creativity has me worried. I fear lest in seeking the creativity we lose the sell”.

What about originality? Well, Mozart – pretty creative, I think you will agree – said “I never tried to be original in my life”. And David Ogilvy said “Originality is the greatest sin in the advertiser’s lexicon”.

David practiced what he preached, too: he stole the line from his brother-in-law, Rosser Reeves, who invented the USP – Unique Selling Proposition.

**Send your best salesman – why wouldn’t you?**

At this point I bet you’re wondering what my second



helpful idea is. I’ve implied it but not said it. It is this. If you want your messages to work, just ask this simple question: Do they do what a salesman would do?

After all, if you could afford to, you would send your best salesmen round to every prospect. All other

THE OPENING OF THIS LETTER, STILL UNBEATEN IN TESTS AFTER 6 YEARS, IS BASED ON A SALESMAN'S PITCH

media are just substitutes for the real, live thing.

When my colleagues and I get a new client, we usually get one of their salespeople to give us a live sales pitch. Then we try and replicate this in other media. The person who delivers that pitch gets his or her bread and butter from it. Nothing could be more powerful.

At a time when their chief competitors were either in the doldrums or actually losing money, one of our clients enjoyed a 30% increase in sales in the first three months of the year. I would love to say this was all because of us, but of course there were many other factors. However, most of their leads come from two pieces – direct mail and door-drops. They were based almost entirely on a 2-hour pitch one of their top salesmen gave us – of course, without knowing we were not genuine prospects.

By the way, I am just amazed at how few marketers read books. They are like the man I mentioned in my last piece – too busy fighting alligators to drain the swamp.

That swamp is in fact the swamp of ignorance.

Why spend years learning by trial and error when a weekend with one good book can put you miles ahead? If you'd like any suggestions, see Reading & Resource List on page 207.



**The book that David Ogilvy said every marketer must read – free**

I correspond with a lot of US Internet experts. They operate in the newest, fastest growing medium.

Yet strangely enough they all know and have learned from a book first published in 1924. *Scientific Advertising* by Claude Hopkins is the shortest and, still, probably the best book on the subject ever written.

The shortest chapter is “Just Salesmanship”. If you read it you will know more about this business than most of the people you work with. If you act on its lessons, I guarantee you will get better results.

In his introduction to the book, David Ogilvy says that nobody should have anything to do with this business until he has read the book seven times.

Would you like a copy? Visit [www.draytonbird.com](http://www.draytonbird.com), register your details and download *Scientific Advertising* and other valuable material, free of charge.

**Scientific Advertising**



By Claude C Hopkins

### Helpful Highlights

- *Advertising is salesmanship in print. Its only purpose is to sell.*
- *Originality in advertising, often referred to as “creativity”, is a snare and a delusion. The only genuine creative advertising is that which sells your product.*
- *Rare is the marketer who understands these basic truths, If you do, you are already ahead of the pack.*

### What now?

- *Check your current agency and advertising: do they seek sales – or applause?*
- *Have your top sales people, rather than your marketing department, lead the next agency briefing.*
- *Read the masters and steal their wisdom.*

## How long is too long?

---

*Your prospects will read your copy for as long as it is interesting and relevant – and no longer.*

Have you ever met a salesperson who decided to give you only one good reason to choose their product – and then abruptly left the room? The best of them capture your interest with a torrent of irresistible reasons-why that they'll prolong until you buy something or throw them out.

This Helpful Idea is one I have preached about year after year – and it never fails to excite argument. Some people just can't believe it.

Let me start with this quote from Al Eicoff in his book *Broadcast Direct Marketing*: “No creative writer has ever been able to approach the effectiveness of the boardwalk huckster who often sold 50–75% of his entire audience”.

That quotation underlines what I suggested in Helpful Idea No 2: aim to emulate a good sales person.

Al Eicoff was responsible for more TV and radio commercials than anyone I know of. The early ones did exactly what Al's statement implies. He filmed successful hucksters from the boardwalks, edited the results, then ran them as commercials.

Some of them were 30 minutes long. And they made millions.

### **Long copy extends profits**

Does a 30-minute commercial sound a bit much to you? Then I suggest you turn on your TV any time in the early

morning, anywhere in the world – for example, Sky 682 in the UK. You'll see lots of 30-minute or even 60-minute commercials. You just don't think of them as commercials because they seem like ordinary programmes. They keep running because they make money. Lots of it.

So try using longer copy. Much longer. Because it tends to work better – in any medium.

Here are the results of some tests run by a colleague of mine:

Copy length (words)	Response rate
1,064	17.08%
1,999	19.09%
2,763	24.24%

Now, if an extra profit of 41.9% doesn't interest you, please stop reading now. You are making far too much money.

But if it does, let me simply say that I have never seen short copy prove as profitable as long copy making the same proposition. (The longer copy may get fewer immediate replies – but far more eventual sales).

Obviously, the more demanding the proposition, the more copy is needed – and vice-versa. But asking for an enquiry about something simple does not call for great length.

### **Tell the whole story, sell the whole way**

The funny thing is, though, that the people I find to be most surprised by, and even disbelieving in, the success of long copy are salespeople. They never seem to relate what they do to what happens in another medium – yet they should.

No good salesperson would dream of trying to be brief. They keep going until the prospect either buys or throws



THE AD ON THE RIGHT, WHICH I WROTE, DID 10 TIMES BETTER THAN THE ONE ON THE LEFT, CREATED BY ANOTHER AGENCY

them out. That’s what your copy should do.

This does not mean you should strive officiously to drone on and on.

Dull long copy will flop just as depressingly as dull short copy. And although I find e-mails of three, four or even seven pages seem to work, I think it’s always a good idea to get people to click through to a landing page or website – where you can run really long copy.

The trick, of course, is being able to write long copy that appeals to your audience’s interests and literacy. That is another story.

But my colleagues and I make our living by getting people better results, and I can’t recall us ever running shorter copy to do so.

So next time you’re looking for better results, try longer copy. Try giving every reason why people should do what you want. Deal with every reason why they might not do so. Logically, it’s bound to make more sales.

(However, you might want to consider the words of Seattle guru Bob Hacker: “The more you tell, the less you sell”. Your only object is to get the prospect to agree to the next step, he says. Focus on the offer. Give too much information and you hand the prospect one or more reasons to say no.)

### **Why more words mean more sales**

One reason why long copy generally does so well was aptly put by one of the greatest-ever copywriters, John Caples. In a Wall Street Journal interview he said:

*“Give people every reason to do what you want. Otherwise, it is rather like a salesman who sees you today and only gives you one reason to buy the product; then another reason to buy tomorrow – and so on.”*

Another virtue of long copy is that repetition sells. Some years ago Gallup did research into what successful advertisements had in common. Ads that repeated the proposition three times were, on average, most successful. Your letters or emails are advertisements that seek response. They work in the same way.

This doesn’t mean you say exactly the same thing three times. It means you find slightly different ways of saying it – but you do repeat, so as to lodge your proposition in people’s minds.

Just like I did right there.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *How long should your copy be? There is no magic length. The real answer is: as long as it takes to make the sale.*
- *Successful salespeople never aim to be brief for brevity's sake*

### **What now?**

- *Demonstrate every reason-why, demolish every reason-why-not, and make your point more than once.*
- *Persist with your selling message for as long as you judge it interesting and relevant to your audience. Then (and only then) stop.*

## Try an editorial style

---

*How to boost your response many times over, simply by avoiding the conventional look of an ad.*

If you think that people avidly want to read or watch your advertising, you're probably flattering yourself (or your agency – and they've got big enough heads already). What you and I actually want is news, opinion and gossip, not the stuff in between. You could try running better ads, but they'll still be ads. A smart idea is to adopt the same style as the editorial or programme material that people actually like. What's more, it works a treat.

Here's a shameful confession:

I had the idea of offering these Helpful Ideas before I knew exactly what they would be.

Don't get me wrong – I know of at least 101 that work – because I've tried them, or know someone who has. But deciding which ones to talk about, then making them interesting and relevant to you – that's a different kettle of fish.

Nonetheless, I promise you, every single one of these ideas has worked not once, but many times. They are well worth you thinking about and trying.

Let me remind you of something I said in my last message:

*“I suggest you turn on your TV any time in the early morning, anywhere in the world. You'll see lots of 30-minute or even 60-minute commercials.*

*“You just don't think of them as commercials because they seem like ordinary programmes. They keep running*



*because they make money. Lots of it.”*

### **Nobody watches TV for the commercials**

A lot of people actually turn down the sound, switch channels or go and make a cuppa. Revealingly, the greatest single discharge into the US sewage system each year is during the half-time Super Bowl commercials – little exercises in creativity that can cost over \$2,000,000 for 30 seconds.

If general advertisers depended on getting results for their money, they probably wouldn't buy those spots.

In much the same way, nobody buys a paper or magazine to read the ads. They want the news and gossip. (And, interestingly, John Caples discovered that after benefits, news is what most attracts people to advertisements.)

*The greatest single discharge into the US sewage system each year is during the half-time Super Bowl commercials.*

You can draw a simple conclusion from all this. Since people don't like ads, maybe yours should try not to look like one.

Amazingly, this doesn't seem to have occurred to many people. US direct marketing author Ed Nash states that “The first law of layout is to be noticed”. I have found time and again, that, on the contrary, a very good principle is to do exactly the opposite. You should fit in with the environment you are in.

The results can be astounding. The late Richard V Benson, whom I quoted in Helpful Idea No 1, claimed that an editorial ad will increase readership by 500–600%. Clearly, the more people read your copy, the more will reply.

### **“Good write-ups” beat good ads**

When, some years ago, I tested editorial-style ads for a retail client – Magnet – people came into the stores and commented on the “good write ups” we were getting.

Even one of their directors was fooled. This was despite the fact that the ads were clearly headed “Advertisement”, as

the publications always insist.

Claude Hopkins said:

*“Some advocate large type and big headlines. Yet they do not admire salesmen who talk in loud voices... Others look for something queer and unusual. They want ads distinctive in style or illustration. Would you want that in a salesman?”*

*“Do nothing to merely interest, amuse or attract. That is not your province. Do only that which wins the people you are after in the cheapest possible way.”*



A "GOOD WRITE UP"

Does that mean all your ads should melt into the background by aping an editorial style? Does it mean that I am right, and others are wrong? No: it means you must test, and find out what works for you and whatever you sell.

Every time I have tested an editorial style ad, it has improved results – for everything from charities to washing machines, by up to 123%. So I suggest you try it, too.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *For all their “creativity” and “originality”, ads aren’t the first things people want to read or watch. Yours included.*
- *Editorial-style ads are not some sort of soft option: they regularly score better results over the equivalent explicit advertising.*

### **What now?**

- *As always, think of your advertising as your salesperson: would you want him or her to be a fast-talking, foot-in-the-door greaseball with dollar signs in their eyes?*
- *It can be smart to stop your ads looking like ads.*

## Never sell to a stranger

---

*Give your friends the warmest welcome – they're the ones most likely to buy.*

What if your best business opportunities were not somewhere off on the far horizon but right here under your nose? How would you like it if, instead of struggling to attract the attention of indifferent “cold” prospects, you could simply welcome in customers waiting at your door? By switching your efforts away from business strangers and redirecting them to interested “friends”, you can make a lot more profit, a lot more easily.

This Helpful Idea is about millions of dollars that are wasted every year – needlessly.

It all starts with that wonderful word “strategy”. There’s a lot of hot air about it in marketing. The word comes from the Greek for general. What does it mean? “Using your forces to achieve an objective as effectively as possible.”

In business, that means getting the maximum profit with the minimum necessary effort and cost.

Or in the words of former Coca Cola marketing boss Sergio Zyman, “Selling more stuff more often to more people at higher prices”

Most marketers spend prodigious time and effort looking for new business, whilst ignoring money that’s just waiting to be picked up – money we already have within our grasp, but don’t realise it, or forget it.

The prime example: enquiries you have received, but don’t try to convert with enough determination, intelligence or vigour. Let me explain, and see if you agree.

### Sounds sensible – but is crazy

Compare two communications:

One is a mailing or e-mail to people a marketer thinks might be prospects. “Cold” prospects, in other words.

The marketer has put an immense amount of effort into it. It’s got every trick in the book, because getting a response from someone you don’t know is hard. Makes sense, right?

The other is a reply to someone who’s enquired about your products or services. A brochure or other material with a letter thanking the respondent for the enquiry and suggesting they read the brochure and order now. If it’s being done on-line it will be a simple thank-you and a suggestion to visit the website.

This is a much easier task, as the respondent has already expressed interest. So a brief, casual message saying “Here is what you requested” makes sense, right?

*“I’m here!  
I’m interested!  
Come and get me!”*

Wrong, wrong, wrong – a thousand times wrong!

Because what seems to make sense is in fact senseless. And that is where the vanishing millions can be found. For though it is indeed true that selling cold is harder than selling to warm enquirers, it is even truer that the easy money is waiting for you among those warm enquiries.

So, logically enough, more effort – not less – should be applied to them. They really deserve the best response you can offer. They have raised their hands and said, “I’m here! I’m interested! Come and get me!”

Even better, they are infinitely more likely to reply. Just consider: for one of our clients, a cold mailing may typically get a 1% response – and that would be a good result. Yet among those who have actively enquired, they may get five times that percentage

In fact I bet there is more money lying around waiting to

be picked up because of this than anywhere else in your business. Not just because many take these enquiries for granted as “easy” sales and don’t try hard enough. But also because they don’t follow them up enough – which you should do, as one of my favourite clients put it, “until they give in”.

Because they will buy when they want to buy – not when it suits you.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Your sales prospects come in two flavours: warmly interested and coldly indifferent. Which ones are you going to focus your best efforts on?*
- *Don’t think of your warm prospects as “easy”, however – no-one likes to be taken for granted. Rather, offer them your closest attention and most attractive offers to cement and profit from a deepening, long-term relationship.*

### What now?

- *If you want more than your fair share of the “lost millions”, put more effort into enquiry responses than into cold mailings – and follow up until it doesn’t pay any more.*
- *Instead of battering at closed doors, why not open the ones that are already ajar?*

## Make an exhibition of yourself

---

*Ever bought a car without taking a test-drive first?  
Nor have your customers.*

Let's face it: we marketers are some way from the top of the charts when it comes to a reputation for honesty and fair dealing. People know we've got something to sell. That's why they leap at the chance to get hands-on and judge our claims for themselves. So whenever you can, don't just tell them – show them what you're made of.

I'd hate you to think the only thing I know about is direct marketing. I also love cooking and a few other things your spam filter would block.

However, I am really proud of my knowledge of soul music and jazz – and I bet you don't know anyone else who saw Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis and Ella Fitzgerald with the Count Basie Band – live.

I could go on, but I'll restrict myself to marketing for now.

Let me start by asking you what made you buy the last three new products or services you tried. While you're thinking, here's a hint.

A while ago, Buick paid Cap Gemini Ernst & Young to ask people what made them buy their last new car. Obviously people were influenced by more than one thing, but here are the answers:

- Car firms always spend a lot – maybe most – of their budget on TV. Only 17% of people said that influenced their decision.
- 26% said it was something they saw on the Internet. I'll

lay heavy odds that figure would be higher now

- But here it gets really interesting. 48% said they were swayed by direct mail from dealers – hardly the most imaginative material you’ll ever see.
- But that wasn’t the most effective motivator. Because 71% said they were most swayed by word of mouth. A friend suggested something to them.
- And going back to my question about what made you buy, I bet that applies to you, too, more often than not.

### You can’t beat the experience

Now, before I make my point, have you ever seen a VW Touareg towing a jumbo jet?

This little stunt was organised by a firm which is cursed by having me as chairman – and was so memorable it was used in the TV commercials.

It’s an example of what is probably the hottest thing in marketing today: experiential marketing. That is, arranging occasions when people not only see your product in use – they try it out.



THIS STUNT GENERATED AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF SPONTANEOUS (FREE) MEDIA COVERAGE



If they like the experience, this has three immediate benefits.

- Your customers become far more loyal.
- A remarkable percentage of your prospects go ahead and buy.
- And whichever they are, they all tell their friends. Word of mouth.

That really should not surprise you, actually.

Ask yourself what is the most cost-effective weapon in Internet marketing.

Probably viral – word of mouth in cyberspace.

What is the most cost-effective weapon in direct marketing? Probably MGM – member-get-member, or friend-get-friend – word of mouth in print.

Now, the experiential marketing firm I mentioned thrives in several countries, with clients including VW and a few other brands you'd recognise, like Bentley. I strongly suspect the secret of their success is that I keep well away from them, but I'm not busy trying to sell them to you. I just want to make a helpful point.

The closer you can get to demonstrating what you sell in words or pictures, or giving people a free trial, the better you will do.

Fairfax Cone, one of the founders of Foote, Cone & Belding, once said "Advertising is what you do when you can't be there in person".

If you were there, you would demonstrate.

So if any of your material just talks about what you do but doesn't show it, look at it again.

*The closer you can get to demonstrating what you sell in words or pictures, or giving people a free trial, the better you will do.*

**Helpful Highlights**

- *People trust the evidence of their own eyes far more than anything we marketers can tell them.*
- *They also believe their friends, which is why word of mouth is by a wide margin the most important factor in many buying decisions.*

**What now?**

- *Find a way to demonstrate what you do so that your customers can make their own decisions – and pass on their experience to others.*

## Bribery seldom fails

---

*Many people claim to be immune to their charms, but incentives hijack our attention and spur us to action*

Incentives work. Why? Because even the most affluent of us find it hard to resist the appeal of getting something for nothing – tests prove it, time and again. Yet this powerful weapon, used with skill and discretion, need cost little or nothing to add to your marketing arsenal.

Do you like eating and drinking? I do. When I had a big corporate job I once wrote an article called “I eat for England”.

Do you like saving money? Me, too. I’m so cheap sometimes I feel almost embarrassed

Are you curious? Of course, or you wouldn’t be reading this.

A while ago, I went with a fair companion to The Admiralty restaurant in Somerset House overlooking the Thames, where they had a deal – half price on the food. The meal was excellent and the place was full. So, being curious, I asked the person on the door how many people had come because of the offer.

About half, she said.

They surely didn’t lose money on us at nearly £70.

### **The big incentive to use incentives: they pay**

It still astounds me that so few people realize two things about this:

1. When used wisely, incentives pay.
2. If used too much, they cheapen your brand,

Why do they pay? Because generally you get all the people you would have got – plus a few you wouldn't have. I guess about 15% – 25%. And the extra ones convert into customers at much the same rate as the others.

Perhaps the wisest, and certainly the wittiest, client I ever had was Victor Ross, Chairman of Reader's Digest. He said: "I have never seen a relevant incentive fail to pay for itself".

If you're not trying incentives, do. If you are, test alternatives (it may make a huge difference).

There are three other reasons why incentives work:

1. They overcome fear – of being sold something the prospect doesn't need or can't afford.
2. They overcome laziness.
3. They give an excuse for trying.

### If promises don't work, try a threat

For all these reasons they should be prominent.

Always describe your incentive, and say what it's worth. The more desirable it sounds, the more replies you'll get. The more it's worth, the more people want it.

If it's a book (paper is so cheap – and ebooks are even cheaper!) on fitness, for example, give it a title and say how many pages it has. If possible, sell it elsewhere – thus setting a price.

Try more than one incentive. You can have one for replying, another for replying within 14 days, a third for



THIS LEAFLET FROM THE WALL STREET JOURNAL IS ENTIRELY DEDICATED TO SELLING THE INCENTIVE

buying two or buying the luxury version, trying another product or service, or recommending a friend

Conversely, you can try pointing out a few things that people might lose – a threat, if you like. This may work even better; studies suggest it does:

- Buy before a certain date, or on a certain day.
- There are only so many left.
- It's a limited edition.
- It's restricted to certain privileged customers.

One caveat about cut-off dates: if they are too early and the ad breaks late, you will get no orders. If they are too far in advance, the premise loses its urgency.

People are cynical. They think the cost of the incentive comes out of the product. So, always say why you're being so nice:

- As a reward for doing something.
- To encourage them to try.
- Because “we find it's the cheapest way to get new customers”.
- Because it's our centenary.

### **What makes a good incentive?**

The Golden Rule about incentive offers is this: add value, rather than cheapening your brand. A free financial planning booklet adds value, while costing you little. Repeated discounts, on the other hand, nibble away at your revenues and cheapen your brand.

Discounts, incidentally, are better for acquiring customers, or rewarding them. Use them sparingly.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Luminously logical and rational though you are, dear reader, incentive offers will get you every time. Have you never picked up a two-for-one supermarket offer or elbowed your way to that half-price Armani suit?*
- *Incentives grab attention, kick-start hesitation and prompt action.*

### What now?

- *Minimise the cost of your offer but make sure you talk up its value – the two are not the same.*
- *Know when to stop. Too many incentives, too often – especially discounts – can smack of desperation and damage your brand.*

## Don't be afraid to get emotional

---

*Marketing is a battle for hearts and minds – strictly in that order.*

No sex, please, we're British? Too many marketers apply that sort of lazy generalisation to their business customers, assuming that working folk jettison their humanity the moment they step through the office door. But the fact is, we're all human beings, all the time. And our human emotions powerfully influence our decisions, however much we may rationalise them after the event.

Do you think the British are morphing in some weird way?

We were always known as a pretty dull, phlegmatic bunch, compared to the excitable French, the fiery Spanish and the sexy Italians.

Well, something strange seems to be happening in business.

Across the road from our offices, a building firm declares that it's "passionate" about whatever it does. Pret-a-Manger is passionate about food. The North East of England is full of passionate people – and passionate country, too, so their posters claim. And Churchill are passionate about insurance

Do these people have no sex lives? I sometimes wonder.

(It certainly proves that many ad agencies are passionate about copying each other.)

### **Human, all too human**

All this passion reminds me of a big mistake many who sell to businesses make. Which is to assume that business decisions are made on rational grounds and that emotion doesn't come into it.

This is nonsense – and to prove it I often ask audiences whether they can think of anyone they work with whom they hate. It never fails to raise a laugh of recognition.

Don't you agree that the way we love to label things often does more to confuse than help? We talk of above the line and below, of b2c and b2b. “Consumers” and “business people”. Is that how our customers see themselves? Do they have lines running through their brains?

They are all human beings.

We know perfectly well what things motivate people when

*The truth is, you don't grow a second head on your way to the office, and you may spend more waking hours there than anywhere else.*

we sell make-up, a car or even a hair-remover. People want to be looked at, admired – and definitely not shunned.

And in business, they want what?

Yes – to be looked up to, admired and definitely not shunned. To be successful, quoted as examples for other people to emulate and not seen as losers.

In daily life or in business, our fears, desires and motivations are not only important to us but also pretty similar in both arenas. Because – guess what? – we are the same human beings whether we're working in the office or relaxing at home.

### **Hearts first – minds will follow**

When we're selling to business, my colleagues and I frequently find that a dash of passion can make all the difference to results:

- For an express delivery firm, we suggested that delivery managers could go from Zero – never noticed until something goes wrong – to Hero, by relying on our client.
- For a credit collection company, we focused on the



personal stress suffered by credit managers when trying to reconcile the conflicting demands of their finance and sales directors.

- For a telephony service, we wrote about the rage that touch-tone services inspire in people – and contrasted that with the solution our client offered.

The truth is, you don't grow a second head on your way to the office, and you may spend more waking hours there than anywhere else. It's not necessarily less interesting or emotional a life than the one you spend at home. It is often more so.

People lie, cheat and finagle their way to whatever business goal they may have. And they kill for money – which is what most business revolves around.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Man is not a rational animal at work any more than anywhere else. He or she makes decisions on emotional grounds then tries – usually successfully – to find logical arguments to justify them.*
- *So, if you want better results when selling to business, look into your heart – then use your head to find a way of explaining why the emotional argument makes sense.*

### What now?

- *Underneath every corporate suit beats an all-too-human heart, full of human emotions. Make your appeal to that, and let logic take second place.*

## Write from you to me

---

*Nothing matches the immediacy and appeal of one individual communicating with another.*

At the heart of direct marketing is a relationship between you, with something to offer, and me, who may be interested in it. In our business, this is about as intimate as it gets. So why has it become fashionable for companies to present themselves as “teams”, thus erasing at a stroke any sense of personal communication? The answer lies in the seductive allure of jargon.

Are you afflicted by “information overload”?

I thought I’d slip in some modish jargon, for reasons you’ll soon appreciate. But what follows was provoked by a message from “The IDMF Team”, which turned out to be some people who ran the International Direct Marketing Fair.

What is this obsession with initials? Aren’t there enough around? And what is this obsession with teams? Are we all playing football?

It’s like being greeted by “the onboard team” – on a train hopelessly delayed somewhere between Stafford and Crewe.

If I wanted to reply to the IDMF Team’s message, whom should I reply to? (I did – and got no response.)

Come to that, do you like dealing with a team or would you prefer to talk to a single person and – oh, I don’t know – maybe build a relationship?

The word “team” and the thinking behind it are a negation of direct marketing and service, which are about serving individuals better, based on their special characteristics.

Somebody made a fortune by calling it “one-to-one” marketing – which it isn’t, by the way.

### **Those who can’t, teach?**

So I read about a seminar in “power talking” and “communication skills” with great interest – especially when it said that 80% of people fail at work because they don’t “relate well” to other people ...“a clear case of failed communication”.

Well, the seminar was cheap, the course leader is practically a genius – “multi skilled as an Occupational Psychologist, Executive Mentor, Presenter and Counsellor” – and the subject is highly relevant.

But the copy put me off. As far as I or anyone else who cares for the English language might be concerned it was indeed a case of failed communication. It had more clichés and jargon in it than a politician’s speech.

I was promised “user-friendly, high-level skills” and “solution focused communication techniques”. There was obsessive use of expressions based on the word “impact” – “impacts on”, “impactful”, “high-impact” and “positive impact”. And naturally that shop-soiled word “engage” popped up (why not “intrigue” or “interest”?)

If that’s how people who teach communication write, it explains a lot of the mindless tripe we all have to plough through — in documents, on the internet, in meetings: everywhere.

*Denny Hatch*

### **Buzz words are a big bore**

The IDMF e-mail included a game. They call it an involvement device, because that sounds posher than a “game” – but which would you prefer? To play a game or

get involved with a device?

Undaunted, the Team told me this was an “innovative” idea.

Here’s another word people use because they think it sounds shinier, more vibrant – newer, even – than “new”. Actually it sounds like something you’ve heard a million times before, and it bores you.

(Check the dictionary and you’ll find that innovative really means something less than new. Sort of “new-ish”. Which is sort of ironic.)

Don’t use hackneyed language like that, please. It makes you sound like a politician.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Presenting yourself as a “team” is not only an example of tiresomely modish jargon. It also cuts right across the essence of direct marketing, which is a relationship between individuals.*

### What now?

- *Unless you’ve got 11 heads, don’t be a team. Write from you to me – and see Helpful Idea 10 for which of us should come first.*

## What's in it for me?

---

*Sorry, but your customers don't want to hear about you.*

Be honest: are you more interested in me, or in you? Don't worry, it's only human. We all share the same self-absorption. That's why it is so important to direct your marketing communications relentlessly at your customers' concerns and to avoid dwelling on your own virtues. You or me? A simple detail, but one you'd better get right.

What I am about to suggest to you is so basic, I'm almost embarrassed. But it's utterly essential – and too often ignored.

What's more, checking on it may do you more immediate good than all sorts of grander things like strategy and positioning.

Forgive me if you think it's beneath you – but I hope it isn't.

Here's a question for you. What's the most powerful word in selling communications? Would you say “free”? I used to, but I suspect it's not, really. I think it is “you” – and derivations, like “your” and “yours”.

Here's why:

1. You are what you're interested in most of all – sad but true.
2. The more time you use “you” words in your messages, the more they get read.
3. Conversely, the more you use “we” words – like us, our and ours – the less interested people will be.

Marketing is like real life. In real life, don't you hate people who boast and talk about themselves? In real life, don't you prefer people who talk to you about your interests? Same in selling.

So, even if this sounds a bit elementary, go through your messages – in whatever medium – and do a “me/you” count.

If the “you” words don't outnumber the “me” words two-to-one, change things.

I just looked at the online Home page of one leading marketer. In fewer than 150 words, there was not one “you” word”. But there were seventeen selfish “we” words, starting with that old friend “About us”.

### **Little details make big differences**

“Drayton”, you may ask, “How can such trivia be important?”

Well, people often compare marketing to war – and use martial words like “strategy”, “territory”, “conquest”, “attrition” and so on. So here's some advice for you from a famous general.

Towards the end of his life, the Duke of Wellington was asked to what he owed his famous victories. “Attention to detail”, he replied.

So pay attention to this little you/me detail. Count how many times your messages talk about your customers – and how much they're about you. And get the balance right.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *Impeccably brought-up as you doubtlessly were, the brutal fact remains that the focus of your concern is on yourself. Your customers feel the same way.*
- *The only messages you or they are interested in are those that engage their wants and needs.*

### **What now?**

- *Do a simple “we”/“you” count on your copy and make sure “we” takes a modest back seat.*

## The obvious is always overlooked

*In marketing, familiarity can breed forgetfulness. Let's all try to remember that.*

In which the author reminds us to pay attention to the basics, confesses to his own fallibility, and offers by way of penance an attractive reward in return for a few minutes of your time.

This Helpful Idea was suggested to me by one of the ablest people I ever knew, the late Mani Ayer, former head of Ogilvy, Benson & Mather in India – and a very funny man. David Ogilvy described him as “the most outstanding individual in the Ogilvy network”.

(Ogilvy, Benson & Mather was known as OBM, which Mani said stood for Other Buggers' Money. The reality was that he was a very good custodian of his clients' funds. Not all ad agencies are.)

But seriously, have you noticed how often we overlook the obvious? I do – and that's a serious understatement. Too often I fail to take my own medicine; like everyone else I get into terrible pickles and flounder hopelessly. So I hope you haven't got the idea that I think I know everything and do it all right.

This series of Helpful Ideas is a perfect example. You see, so far I have overlooked something so important and so basic that over the years I must have told people to do it literally thousands of times. It is so powerful that people have written a whole slew of books about it.



### **Tomorrow's customers? Just like today's**

This goes under several names and is based on a simple, but very important principle: the customer you want is like the customer you've got.

It is by far the cheapest way of getting new customers.

It used to be called member-get-member, or friend-get-a-friend. These days, it's also called viral marketing – but it's just the same thing under a fancy new name to make it sound important.

#### **Helpful Highlights**

- *I hate the phrase “the elephant in the room”, but its tedious overuse does demonstrate a truth: that the best of us can sometimes overlook even the most familiar marketing principles.*

#### **What now?**

- *By all means think up new and better ways to get the results you want – but spare a moment for the stuff that's so obvious it's often invisible.*
- *Check back regularly on the fundamentals of marketing: they may be boringly familiar but they work as well as ever.*

## Don't ask, won't get

---

*Call for a reply or action – then do it again and again until you've got what you want.*

Genius has been given many definitions, but perhaps the best – and certainly the most useful – is “an infinite capacity for taking pains”. In other words, never give up. That's a lesson for all of us, geniuses or not. And right down at the everyday level, it translates into asking your customers to do what you want them to do, asking again, and then asking once more. Say it like you mean it and people will get the message.

Have you met any geniuses? Or is it geni? I've met only two.

One was Charlie Chaplin, whom I came across – very briefly – when I was writing ads for a film called Fahrenheit 451. He just happened to be in the same studio I was, and the producer introduced us. A small, quiet, neat, white-haired man in a dark blue overcoat looking cosy in a soft white scarf – with a very beautiful wife.

The other, whom I've mentioned already and will do so again, is David Ogilvy. Maybe ours is such a trivial business that nobody in it merits the description “genius”. But if any do, I suspect he did.

I once asked a man who'd worked with him for 40 years what made Ogilvy remarkable.

He said, “Persistence”.

The man I was talking to is highly successful and at the top of his profession. He is worth many millions. He said to me:

*“I have done extremely well – better than I ever expected. And I think one reason is that I am not a quitter. Other people try something a few times then give up. I keep going for two or even three years. But David never gives up. Ten, twenty, thirty years. He just keeps going.”*

### **“An infinite capacity for taking pains”**

That is how somebody described genius.

To illustrate it, here is a true story about David Ogilvy.

It gives you some idea about his working practices.

He rang me up one day at home at 10:30 in the morning.

I was cooking the Sunday lunch. This is how the short conversation went.

“Hello, David here.”

“Morning, David.”

“What’s wrong with Ogilvy and Mather?”

“Let me think about it, and I’ll get back to you.”

“Thank you. Oh – Merry Christmas.”

Yes: it really was Christmas morning. I spent much of Boxing Day writing him a long memo.

### **Keep on keeping on**

Well, you may take this as a good maxim for running your life. But it actually applies equally to small things. Things as small – seemingly trivial, even – as asking for a reply or an order.

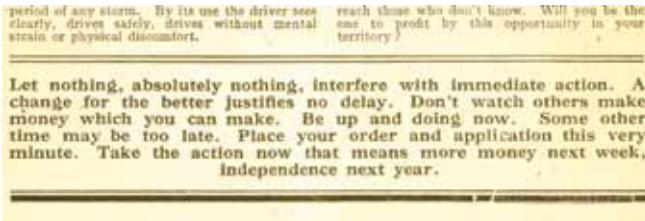
So here’s perhaps my simplest Helpful Idea so far. So absurdly simple, you may be tempted to laugh at my naivety.

Don’t ask for the reply or order once or even twice. Ask repeatedly.

If you’re running a TV spot, keep the number on the screen for longer. If you have a website, ask for a response on every page. Same with a catalogue. If it’s an ad, ask in the coupon

– and ask also outside the coupon. If it's a direct mail letter or e-mail, don't just ask once, ask more than once.

And ask forcefully.



CALLS TO ACTION DO NOT COME MUCH STRONGER THAN THIS, DO THEY?

None of this limp-wristed “We look forward to hearing from you” waffle. Be serious. Go for the order!

I always try to ask at least three times, using phrases like:

- “Why not reply now, while this is on your mind?”
- “Make it the next things you do.”
- “Call me the minute you finish reading this.”
- “Don’t delay: your competitors won’t.”

Or in a piece I wrote a while ago: “Why watch others make money you could be making?”

Hardly very strategic, is it? But far more profitable, I promise you.

### Helpful Highlights

- *As Woody Allen remarked, “80 percent of success is just showing up”. Keep at it, whatever it is, and you’re well on the way to triumph.*
- *The same goes for your marketing messages, particularly when it comes to calling for action. Repeating your request will always work better than holding back. (Like getting laid, it seldom happens unless you ask.)*

### What now?

- *Urge your prospects in no uncertain terms to act, and do it again and again until you’ve got a result.*
- *If you don’t get one, it wasn’t for want of asking.*

## English spoken here?

---

*“Use simple words everyone knows, then everyone will understand.”*

It's hard enough to make a success of business. People, product, finance, market, timing and a host of other factors have to be just right. But if, on top of all that, your potential customers can't understand you, then you're really in trouble. Fortunately, there's an alternative to the impenetrable mumbo-jumbo that obscures so many marketing messages. It's called plain English.

Do you know what single thing in modern life pisses people off more than any other?

Yes, the dear old automated phone answering systems.

And I learned what irritates business people most a few weeks ago. It's people using jargon in meetings. A few years ago I read that over 25% of business executives admitted to using jargon even they didn't understand.

No wonder, then, that when it comes to selling technological products especially, so many messages dissolve into a sort of linguistic swamp.

Here's a good example from an e-mail someone sent me this morning:

*At Blah-co we have just developed an email stationery online software package that allows one in house member of staff to deploy all email users with a professionally designed Email stationery template, designed by one of our team of designers for all users and to include their unique contact details, meaning not only will the presentation*

*of their emails improve but equally as important all be consistent throughout your organisation.*

Well, I think I understand the beginning and the end of that (70-word!) sentence. I recognize all the words. But I'm damned if I know what they mean when put together.

Here's another series of bewildering utterances, extracted from mailings sent by another firm:

- Are you one of those lucky few who have bedded down IT operations?
- Would you realise a significant increase in business agility, accelerated decision making, employees pursuing a common agenda and a heightened awareness of your strategy?
- Adopting a new change driver that communicates change and strategy in a high impact and engaging way.
- A controlled feedback channel enables you to capture a snapshot of employee morale in real time.
- Cascade this down to your people.

Etcetera, ad nauseam. Which is a shame, because this company actually does have a great product to sell. Yet its own "sales" copy is in all probability turning would-be customers away, sadly scratching their heads.

### **Keep it simple**

The alternative is easy: stick to plain English. Don't run breathless 70-word sentences like the one from Blah-co. Don't use words like "access" as in "access the world's leading independent experts and other practitioners", when you mean "hear" or "meet". Maybe the writer thinks it sounds more important. I think it sounds pompous and silly.

Winston Churchill – a great writer of English prose, quite apart from all his other achievements – said, "Use simple

words everyone knows, then everyone will understand”.

The man with World War II to win thought that worth saying, and it's equally important if you're selling a financial or technical product or service. Use the technical terms you need to reassure a specialist audience, by all means, but put the rest in English.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Some are born to jargon, some have jargon thrust upon them. If you're the former, there may, alas, be no cure.*
- *But if you're using tangled language in the hope of making a better impression, think again. Most of your customers would far rather hear from you in plain and simple English.*

### What now?

- *Ruthlessly edit your writing, striking out anything you wouldn't say in ordinary conversation or which you know in your heart is meaningless gobbledygook.*



## Never mind the bollocks

---

*On-line marketing is just accelerated off-line marketing, and don't let them tell you different.*

Whenever a new medium is born, there is no shortage of experts to declare that all the rules have changed. The latest example is on-line marketing, around which the mystique thickens daily. But don't be fooled. Technical details of execution may change, of course, but just remember this: you're still selling to living, breathing human beings. And they, as anyone familiar with Darwin will confirm, take a whole lot longer to evolve.

My subject today is “Déjà vu all over again”. And I hope it gives you one of the most helpful of all these Helpful Ideas.

It was prompted by an invitation to do an after-dinner speech to a couple of hundred people at an awards dinner in Utrecht. I immediately promised to lower the tone of the occasion with my usual effortless skill, but the chap who was paying me said I had to entertain and inspire.

“Tell me all about the audience”, I said.

“Well, online is so fashionable that they're all bit ashamed of being in direct marketing. The Netherlands direct marketing association has even changed its name to ‘Dialogue’”.

“Oh dear”, I said, and started working on a few good jokes and a song to cheer them all up.

### **Ashamed – then we hit the jackpot**

This took me back to those dear, dead days when nobody at parties would admit they worked in direct marketing.

We used to mutter something vague about advertising and bury our noses in our drinks.

Then – hallelujah! – our discipline became fashionable. Lucky chaps like me sold our businesses (for far too little) to hungry advertising groups.

Too good to last, of course! Soon people were busy inventing grand new names for what we do.

CRM – Customer Relationship Management – for instance. Big firms hired CRM Managers and set up departments without bothering too much about what it meant. Management consultancy vultures swooped. IT firms said, and still do, that all you need is a computer programme.

Billions were lost all round because nobody knew the basics of direct marketing.

Then came on-line. And after even more billions were lost, eventually people started to get it right.

Now it, too, is flavour of the decade – and it's not going away. It's growing and growing. But because it's a new medium, people are bemused by it.

(They think direct mail, for instance, is old hat. Well, guess what? US direct mail continues to work. It's hard to ignore something physical that comes through your door with your name on it. So don't despair.)

*You aren't a different person when you look at a computer screen or TV screen or direct mail. Nor are your customers.*

### **Test it faster**

As Denny Hatch points out, if you run A/B or A/B/C split tests on-line, you can find a winner damn near in real time. That offer then translates into print, direct mail and broadcast. Far more efficient (and cheaper!) than direct mail testing where you don't get an answer for eight weeks, or off-the-page advertising which will take a week or more.

### Reasons to be cheerful

Here's my take on all this: on-line marketing is just accelerated off-line marketing.

I came up with that analogy when I was interviewed on Indian television a few years ago, and since then my colleagues and I have spent a lot of time justifying its truth.

If you doubt it, go to the Amazon website. There is not a thing on there about on-line marketing that doesn't directly relate to what smart off-line direct marketers have been doing for decades.

The thing about on-line is that the medium may have changed, but human nature hasn't. You aren't a different person when you look at a computer screen from the person you are when you look at a TV screen or a piece of direct mail.

Nor are your customers.

#### Helpful Highlights

- *Don't let on-line marketing "experts" muddy the waters. Give or take the technicalities, the rules of the game are the same as ever.*

#### What now?

- *Give yourself a refresher course in traditional direct marketing, starting with Reading & Resources on page 205.*
- *Consider joining a direct marketing course such as my Commonsense Direct Marketing programme or EADIM.*

## A creative checklist

---

*Tests prove time and again that some things usually work while others never do. Can you tell the difference?*

Not for the first time – or the last – a dire warning about the notion of “creativity”. Far too many advertising agencies and their clients aim primarily, or even exclusively, to be “creative”, as they understand it. The meretricious results are everywhere to be seen, in ads that variously boast, baffle or bore. For the pampered practitioners of this sort of thing, selling has become a forgotten idea, if not dirty word.

Do you have to judge creative work? Bloody hard, isn't it?

So maybe you're not that amazed at some of the weird stuff that emerges.

Do you recall a TV campaign for Barclays? It featured Samuel L Jackson walking through the country accompanied by a most appealing pig, and must have cost millions. “(You can see the commercial on youtube, if you missed it)”

Being a bit thick, I didn't see what a pig had to do with banking (though lately I'm beginning to make the connection).

Shortly after it ran, I had an audience of 1,500 salespeople in front of me, I asked them if they thought this campaign would persuade a single person to switch to Barclays. One person did. Most of the rest thought it would do nothing – or actually lose customers. Then I asked a class of marketing students what they thought. Not one could even understand it – and even if they had, the most lucrative customers for

any bank are not them but their parents, middle-aged or older.

To be honest, I wonder if those who created or approved the ad had any idea what makes advertising persuade and sell. Perhaps they fancied the idea of meeting and working with Mr Jackson. Maybe they just liked pigs

*Being a bit thick,  
I didn't see what a pig had to  
do with banking.*

### **Good messages sell for good reasons**

Nothing changes. Following the pig idea, Barclays ran copy lines like “The hole in the wall” and deeply embarrassing guff about their staff outside their banks. Trying to be matey and friendly, I imagine.

What do you want from your bank? I know one Barclays customer very well. She just wishes they could be vaguely efficient from time to time. No signs of that, though.

But enough! Here is my Helpful Idea.

For more years than I care to contemplate I have tried to determine what makes messages sell. Not based on my opinion, but on all the available research and testing. This Helpful Idea is a checklist founded on what I learned you must look for if you want to sell.

### **A quick creative checklist**

I'm not God, but I am a Believer – in a systematic, tested approach to judging the likely effectiveness of creative work. And my 11 Commandments are not rules, but questions. Interrogate your communications this way and I promise you will improve your results – perhaps so much it will be a Revelation

1. Does your opening quickly offer or clearly imply a clear, strong benefit.
2. Is everything instantly clear? If it's funny, clever or obscure – beware.

3. Have you told the whole story? Unless you give every sensible reason to buy, answer obvious questions and overcome all reasonable objections, you'll lose sales.
4. Is what you sell fully and clearly described?
5. Is the tone right? Don't be funny about serious things (e.g. charity, business or money).
6. Do you demonstrate benefit – give examples, quantify it, compare it to alternatives? People want to know how and why you are better.
7. Do you prove your claim is true? Testimonials? Independent figures?
8. Do you ask firmly enough for a reply, tell people precisely what to do? Repeat your arguments at that point.
9. Is the coupon, order form or request to reply big enough, clear, simple and easy to use?
10. Does your copy, when read aloud, sound like someone talking? Good!
11. Have you shown it to someone uninvolved, preferably a likely prospect? Ask if they understand it – and if they would buy.

You may find using this checklist a bit of bore. But it's a lot less boring than stuff that flops. Because if you want to sell, you'll find that some – perhaps many – of your messages miss one or more of the points above. Mine often do, before I've double-checked.

By the way, these principles are similar, but not identical, for advertising not designed to sell immediately, which usually (but not always) has less copy. And usually (but not always) would be a damn sight better if it did try to sell immediately.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Beware “creativity”. Remind yourself that, in marketing, a communication that’s designed to sell, and doesn’t, is a failure pure and simple.*
- *Such failures, costing you plenty and delivering nothing, have no business in your business.*

### What now?

- *Good messages sell for good reasons – check yours against my list above. It’s solidly based on testing and research. Once you get going with your own measured direct marketing, you’ll probably be able to add a few more of your own.*

## Explain yourself

---

*When you're offering a benefit to your customers, they'll want you to justify your generosity.*

By a peculiar quirk of human nature, most of us are instinctively cagey when offered some unexpected, free or almost-free benefit. The instinct goes back millennia – “Beware Greeks bearing gifts” – and can cause your prospects to slam the door. If you want to overcome their mistrust, you must justify your apparent big-heartedness, using that rarest of commodities in the world of advertising: the truth.

Maybe you saw it, maybe not, but on a TV show years ago, a man was giving away genuine £5 notes on Waterloo Bridge.

Nobody would take them. They all thought there must be a catch.

That true story leads me to talk about what may be the simplest, most powerful persuasive technique there is. It's over 150 years old. It works like a charm. It's called “reason-why” copy. Let me explain what I mean and why this is such a powerfully effective tool.

For decades now, I have been offering the world the benefit of my alleged wit and wisdom through books, newsletters, speeches, seminars and online programmes. Many of these efforts have earned me very little immediate financial reward – if any. Some of them cost my pocket dear.

Why do I do it? A lot of those on the receiving end will have asked themselves the same question: “Drayton seems an extraordinarily helpful soul. I wonder why?”



But you, dear reader, are not stupid; you are a marketer. You can easily see that I plug on with my proselytising because I have an ulterior motive. I hope that you – or someone you know – will have a problem one day and think of me and my colleagues. I don't expect you to leap up after three messages and say "Get me those Drayton Bird people" because you don't need help every day. But when you do, perhaps you'll think of us.

However, the average customer is nothing like you. You're familiar with marketing

*The best way to allay your doubting customers' suspicions is a secret weapon called the truth.*

techniques. You know what I'm up to. They don't – or at any rate, not many of them do.

So when writing to Mr and Mrs Average, ninety-nine times out of a hundred I would be wrong not to give a "reason why". It is one of the most powerful persuasive levers you can have working for you.

Yet how often do you see marketers explain why they are making a wonderful offer? Do they realize that, while few customers are geniuses, most are guarded. And the more seductive the offer, the more suspicious they tend to be – like all those people who refused the £5 notes.

### **A reason why is a reason to buy**

The best way to allay your doubting customers' suspicions is a secret weapon called the truth, which is the basis of "reason why" copy.

The "reason why" idea was developed in the middle of the 19th century by a man called John E Powers. His great discovery was that, if you give people a proper explanation for what you are saying, they are more likely to be swayed by your arguments.

Powers was in fact so honest that one of his employers – John Wanamaker, founder of the great Chicago department

store – eventually fired him, exasperated by copy such as: “We have a lot of rotten raincoats that we want to get rid of”. Or “[Our neckties] are not as good as they look, but they are good enough – 25 cents”. But not before his truth-telling had shifted a lot of raincoats and ties.

You may ask yourself: does this advertising archaeology have any relevance today? The answer is an emphatic “Yes”. Even today, few advertisers appreciate the importance of giving a reason why.

Suppose you are planning a sale. You do much better if you give a reason for it. “Closing Down Sale” is a far more convincing announcement than bare “Sale”, because people think that if you are closing down, you really do have to sell off your stock cheaply. Not that they are being taken for fools.

They’ve been given a reason why. Which nicely translates as “a reason to buy”.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Try handing out banknotes in the street and you’ll soon discover a basic human instinct: there is no such thing as a free lunch.*
- *Marketing people understand what’s going on – that free lunch is merely bait – but ordinary folk need an explanation.*

### What now?

- *Don’t assume that your generous, no-obligation free offer will be welcomed with open arms. Suspicious minds need reasons not to suspect your motives – so let them have them.*
- *Made-up reasons-why will probably make the situation worse; the best ones are based on the truth.*

## Decisions, decisions...

---

*Don't just settle for a reply: make people choose.*

Many people hate having to make their minds up about anything, and while they prevaricate the sale gets lost. One way to shove those shilly-shallyers into action is to confront them with a simple choice: will you or won't you? That is why so many successful direct marketers don't only ask for a positive response but also allow you to say No. Fence-sitters, take note.

Frankly, this is yet another Helpful Idea I feel almost ashamed of offering. But once again I will, because so few people seem aware of its importance.

And this is despite the fact that it's been used for at least 35 years, and I'm willing to bet you've seen it yourself – yet not tried it.

I say “willing to bet” because you have almost certainly been approached – maybe more than once – by The Reader's Digest. Am I right?

When you were, you may have noticed that you were offered two ways of replying – a “Yes” envelope, probably in pristine white, and a “No” envelope, in not-so-smart thin brown paper.

This device increases response. It was developed years ago at the Digest by a man I have already mentioned in this series: their former Chairman, Victor Ross, who was my favourite client ever.

The Yes-No envelopes rules dictate that the for a sweeps to be legal, the respondent had the same chance of winning the prize(s) whether or not he bought. People in their gut

believed buying a subscription to the Digest increase their chances of winning, even though the fine print said that was not the case. The YES envelope had one address on the face and the NO envelope had a completely different address (maybe even in a different state). People who wanted to win the \$1 million prize did not want their envelope to go to Siberia, so they ordered a subscription.]

### **Off the fence and into action**

I asked Victor how he arrived at the idea. He said it was through reflecting upon the difference between those people – about 10% – who replied to their mailings and the 90% who didn't. He and his colleagues wondered about these non-responders. Many must have been close to replying but couldn't make their minds up. The Yes/No idea was a way to force them off the fence. And it worked. They got plenty of Nos; but they got more Yeses too.

In my experience, this is always the case. It has the added benefit that next time you mail the same people, you can eliminate the No respondents, save money and get a higher overall response. It is a childishly simple version of regression analysis, by the way (and it works in e-mails too, in case you were wondering).

The idea was developed further by a US copywriter, John Francis Tighe, who introduced Yes, No or Maybe stickers. He was selling a publication. The Maybe sticker gave you the option of saying “Well, I'm not really sure, but send me a sample copy anyhow and I'll see what I think”.

This also worked. John told me that, when he tested it, the Maybes came in a rush just before the date the offer closed.

An Indian friend of mine, R Sridhar, developed two added variations. These allowed people to say, “No, I don't want this, but I am interested in X Y or Z” or “Not now, but later”.

See the box below for a mailing I wrote a few years ago,

which shows you how simple this is to carry out.

\*\*\*\*\* 15% CLIENT SAVINGS CERTIFICATE – PLEASE FAX BACK \*\*\*\*\*

If in the next 30 days you agree to a free 14 day trial of LNB, you qualify for a 15% discount should you later decide to subscribe. This discount is restricted to new LNB online research clients.

We anticipate a high response to this letter. Would you be kind enough to give me your views?  
Please tick one of the boxes and fax back this Certificate to **020 7400 2842**.  
If you are NOT interested, do please tell us, we do not wish to waste your time. Thank you.

YES. We are interested. Please give more details on cost and arrange a free 14-day trial

PERHAPS. We are interested, but would like to know more. Please ask a representative to call us

NO, THANK YOU. This is of no interest to us

Please note: before replying you can see a quick demonstration of LNB at [www.lexisnexis.co.uk/uk/legal](http://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/uk/legal)

Your Firm: Geldards LLP      Your Name: Mr Huw Williams  
Name of best person to contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel number: \_\_\_\_\_

THIS INCREDIBLY SIMPLE FORM IS ON THE LAST PAGE OF A VERY SUCCESSFUL 6-PAGE LETTER

### Helpful Highlights

- *By forcing a Yes/No decision on wavering prospects, you'll very probably increase your overall response. Many others have.*
- *Inviting the Nos to declare themselves also helps you eliminate unprofitable no-hopers and concentrate your efforts where they are most likely to succeed.*

### What now?

- *Don't just settle for a reply: make people choose. It works.*
- *Consider revising your response mechanisms to offer No and even Maybe options in addition to a simple Yes.*
- *Test it: I suspect you'll be pleasantly surprised.*

## Show and tell

---

*Art directors might prefer it otherwise, but your marketing images must match your message.*

In a world wallpapered with gorgeous, seductive pictures bestowed upon us at no charge by benevolent advertisers, this is going to sound like a mean-spirited moan. But here it is. The purpose of images in marketing communications is to communicate, not decorate. And, newsflash: they can't do that if they're irrelevant, confusing or otherwise disconnected from the message itself. Obvious enough when you think about it – and certainly when it's you who's picking up the tab.

Do you think a picture says more than a thousand words?

I don't. I have seen few, if any, pictures that say very much without the help of a caption. In fact if you walk round any art gallery and watch what people do it is quite salutary: they tend to look at the captions to the paintings before the paintings themselves.

I am not sure if this applies to things like “installations” – dismembered animals, bits of debris, turds and all the other stuff that passes for art nowadays – but here's something I do know.

An extraordinarily large number of those paid to create or assess the likely effectiveness of commercial messages have no idea what constitutes a good picture.

Here's a splendid example. Take your eyes off those legs for a moment and you'll notice that it's an ad for Intel.

ADVERTISING A CLOTHES BRAND? A DANCE CLASS? NO – INTEL.

What makes anybody imagine – even for a fleeting, insane instant – that this will make anybody buy a single extra Intel gizmo?

If you can tell me, please do.

### **Picture your proposition, not something else**

While you're thinking up a plausible argument, let me tell you what a lot of expensive research conducted about twenty years ago discovered. It won't surprise you – in fact you'll say, "Of course!" But it will come as news to the multitude of bright young creative masturbators who produce ads like this.

The research, conducted in the US, showed people lots of ads with pictures in them. The thesis – so sensible and obvious, one almost feels bound to apologise – was that it is a good idea to let the reader have some idea of what the ad is about.

(Don't laugh. Many ads, and mailings for that matter, seem so bored with what is being sold that they try to avoid the issue. Personally, I think if you don't believe – or can't persuade yourself – that what you are selling is interesting, you're in the wrong job, pal.)

*This will come as news to a multitude of bright young creative masturbators.*

The US researchers asked people what they thought was being advertised in each case.

One example was a picture of a sexy girl in what looked like bubble bath, with one bare leg exposed.

People thought some sort of soap or beauty product.

In fact it was an ad for Courvoisier – there was a glass and bottle clearly shown in the ad. But with all that skin on view, who (or what man, anyway) is going to bother with them?

The research revealed the obvious: people assume that

whatever is in the picture is related to the subject of the ad. So don't put irrelevant, silly – or even downright confusing – images in your ads.

Relevance is more important than ingenuity.

And, just one more point: a picture may not say more than a thousand words. But it does speak quicker. It can actually override logic, so to speak.

In the case of the Intel ad, what were the reactions in my office?

“Don't like the dress” was one.

“Nice legs” was another.

None of us can tell you what the proposition was. And none of us cares, either.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Pictures in marketing communications have one purpose only, which is to sell. If they fail to do that they are – literally – a waste of space.*
- *Worse still, an irrelevant picture can actually “un-sell” your product by suggesting that your message is about something else.*

### What now?

- *Make sure the images in your ads and communications make an obvious, active contribution to your message. (Art directors often have different ideas – probably “creative” ones – so be warned.)*



## The X-factor –

---

### words that paint a picture

---

*Vivid, visual writing lifts your message off the page and into the imagination.*

A picture may or may not say more than a thousand words. Seldom, in my opinion. But what about another kind of image – one that is conjured in your mind, not by line and colour, but by words? Word-pictures are extraordinarily powerful, precisely because it's you who paints them, and they can easily multiply the effectiveness of your advertising. As they say in broadcasting: radio has all the best pictures.

If I utter the word “rabbit” to you, what pops into your mind?

Do you see the word or the animal? You see the animal, right?

Pictures fix themselves in the memory far more firmly than words. But you can divide word-pictures into two kinds.

Here is one in the box below. It is the first four paragraphs of a letter that is part of probably the most profitable advertisement ever run – a mailing for the *Wall Street Journal*.

(Did I hear you ask if a mailing is an advertisement? Of course it is; and a good one has far more impact on your brand than practically any commercial.)

On a beautiful late spring afternoon, twenty-five years ago, two young men graduated from the same college. They were very much alike, these two young men. Both had been better than average students, both were personable and both – as young college graduates are – were filled with dreams of the future.

Recently, these men returned to their college for their 25th reunion.

They were still very much alike. Both were happily married. Both had three children. And both, it turned out had gone to work for the same Midwestern manufacturing company, after graduation, and were still there.

But there was a difference. One of the men was the manager of a small department of that company. The other was its president.

WHEN, AFTER 28 YEARS, THIS MAILING WAS BEATEN,  
THE NEW APPROACH USED EXACTLY THE SAME INTRODUCTION

Now let me ask you something I have asked dozens of audiences all over the world.

When you read those first six words, “On a beautiful late spring afternoon,” did a picture come into your mind? Unless you are most unusual you’ll say “Yes”. Yet the words themselves tell you little more than the time the event took place.

### **Great pictures, for far less than 1,000 words**

So that is one kind of word-picture: one you make yourself. And by making that effort, you become even more involved in the story – and thus the proposition – than if there were no description.

Here’s another example:

It is after hours and most of the people have gone home.  
There is a chess game in the office of the production manager  
and a light still burns in the cashier’s cage...

THIS AD, WHICH APPEARED OVER 60 YEARS AGO,  
IS ONE OF THE FINEST PIECES OF AGENCY PROMOTION EVER

Here again, your imagination fills in the scene.

The other kind of word-picture is one where the scene is described on the page.

Here is one written by a friend of mine, the late Bill Jayme

– generally reckoned to be the best copywriter of his time.

First, fill a pitcher with ice.

Now pour in a bottle of ordinary red wine, a quarter cup of brandy, and a small bottle of club soda.

Sweeten to taste with a quarter to half cup of sugar, garnish with slices of apple, lemon and orange...

...then move your chair to a warm, sunny spot. You've just made yourself Sangria, one of the great glories of Spain...

IF YOU WEREN'T THIRSTY BEFORE, YOU ARE NOW – BILL JAYME AT HIS DESCRIPTIVE BEST

In all these cases you can see how the word-picture adds the X-factor – which is emotion – the element that motivates far more than reason alone.

### Helpful Highlights

- *It's not always easy to find or make images for your marketing communications that are both relevant and effective.*
- *Photographers, picture libraries and art directors all charge ritzy rates. Word-pictures cost you nothing.*

### What now?

- *Be sure you haven't missed any opportunity to bring your messages to life by using words to paint colourful pictures that attract and involve your customers.*

## Stand on the shoulders of giants

*Studying the masters of your profession is the fastest, surest route to success.*

How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice! That ancient gag holds a timeless truth. In marketing too, the difference between winners and losers is largely that the winners study and practice their trade. While so many in this business hope to pick it up as they go along, these smart individuals know how to learn from the best. Most of all, they read - leaving the amateurs floundering cluelessly in their wake.

Do you realise you are one of a very small, distinguished, lazy minority?

Did that sound a bit paradoxical – or as if I was buttering you up – or both? It was both, and I'll tell you why, with some helpful suggestions.

A few naturally suspicious souls (marketing does that to you, doesn't it?) have asked if I just sit down and write these Helpful Ideas off-the-cuff. Others think I wrote them all before I began. Would you like to know where they come from? Only one source – and anyone can tap it just as easily as I do.

### **Are you intelligently lazy?**

Let me explain what I mean.

The only reason I can give you these ideas is the same reason you're reading them. I study.

Because you're reading this, I know you study too – which is why I put you in that small, distinguished minority.

But you may have wondered why I put you in a lazy

minority category as well.

Well, when I started in advertising I was amazed to see that most people relied on flair, luck, good looks, intuition, what they liked – anything except the study of what worked and what didn't. "What glorious good luck," I said to myself. "I've found a business where people are too stupid to study. How can I fail?"

But what's even more amazing is that today, decades later, nothing has changed. It's probably even worse!

I must have asked thousands of people at conferences and seminars what marketing books they've read. The overwhelming majority have read few or even none.

I'm staggered. Not because they're idle. Most of them are diligently beavering away – often on things that are a waste of time. But they spend far too much time on the urgent, rather than the important; on the latest fashionable fads, as a substitute for grounded knowledge.

*The only reason I can give you these ideas is the same reason you're reading them. I study.*

The truth is that you and I are the real lazy ones – which is the paradox I mentioned.

Isn't it sheer madness to spend arduous years learning as you go along – like these amateurs do – when you can easily pick up what you need in a few weekends from people who've invested lifetimes and billions learning what you need to know? The best people do it. David Ogilvy told me over dinner one night, "Everything I know I learned from John Caples".

Now that's what I call being smart, professional and intelligently lazy.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Successful marketers cultivate the habit of looking at advertising and seeing what they can learn. I have a library of thousands of examples – good and bad – and I add to them constantly.*

### What now?

- *Go to Reading & Resources on page 205 and get stuck in. You'll find that any one of the books listed there has something to tell you about your own marketing challenges.*
- *If you're wondering where to start, try Tested Advertising Methods by John Caples and Ogilvy on Advertising: bibles both.*
- *Once you become a regular student of the subject, you'll find it impossible to stop. Or you're in the wrong business.*

## Hello? Anyone there?

---

*When customers decide to buy, let them choose their own way to tell you the good news.*

Direct marketing is a game of two halves. It starts with your communication to your prospect, which is the half that most people think of first. But the other one is equally important – perhaps even more so – and that is your prospect’s reply. It’s easy to neglect this, or make it unnecessarily difficult. Yet those who respond to you are probably those who are going to buy.

Do you know that dire old joke about a man waiting for the bus who had a carrot in his ear? A helpful passer-by said, “Excuse me, do you know there’s a carrot stuck in your ear?”

The reply (in case you didn’t know) was, “Sorry, I can’t hear you. I’ve got a carrot stuck in my ear.”

Ba-doom!

Sorry about that. But the reason I tell it is that it’s relevant. Quite a few businesses have carrots stuck in their ears – and it’s costing them a fortune.

I gave you a good example in Helpful Idea 9: the “IDMF Team”, that hydra-headed beast that that sent out e-mails but didn’t reply.

There are plenty more: usually people who broadcast e-mails, but also big, fat, lazy, greedy, stupid firms like AOL (which fittingly rhymes with rot in hell). Not to mention all the people like them who ask you to fill in a questionnaire about their alleged service – then never reply to a specific

comment you have, let alone tell you what the results of the survey were.

### Is your door always open?

Years ago, the direct marketing business was often called the direct response business. But of course, it's not a one-way affair, and those who act as though it is are being exceptionally stupid.

So, Helpful Idea 21 is: Always make it easy for people to respond – and never send out a message where they can't.

If they want to write, let them; if they want to phone, let them; if they want to e-mail, let them. And if they want to come and see you, let them.

There's an old phrase that applies: the customer is always right.

Rather obvious, you may say – but many seemingly intelligent people running big organisations ignore it.

*The direct marketing business – aka the direct response business – is not a one-way affair.*

Who are the biggest culprits? Probably the banks and broadband suppliers. True, they often allow you to reply – nowadays usually to

somewhere in India. And I feel really sorry for the poor souls who answer. They don't know Streatham from Strasbourg, they're given a script which makes no allowances for anything beyond the predictable, and they're being harassed to handle so many calls an hour.

Of course the consequence of all this never occurs to the supercilious “strategic planners” in Canary Wharf.

They get away with it, in the case of things like broadband, because when everyone wants it, marketing doesn't matter. But it will all come back to haunt them as increasingly we sheep refuse to be shorn so easily.

And there are two reasons why our revolt is imminent:



1. The Internet, which allows people to shout their grievances to the world.

2. Competition.

You don't believe me? Well, remember when the banks only opened when it suited them? They've come a long way – but not far enough.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *Surprising though it apparently is to some people, direct marketing is aimed at getting a direct response.*
- *Yet, instead of welcoming that reply – and the profitable dialogue it can provoke – many direct marketers neglect or even wilfully obstruct those who seek to get in touch.*

### **What now?**

- *Find out how your customers and prospects prefer to respond to you, then make it easy for them to do it their way.*

## Your customer is not a moron

---

*“She is your wife”, to complete the famous David Ogilvy maxim; treat her with the respect she deserves.*

It is truly extraordinary how some companies seem to regard their customers as pesky irritants, fit to be dealt with as perfunctorily as possible and then ignored. Yet nothing could be better calculated to arouse resentment in the breast of the faithful patron.

A friend of mine, Roger Millington, is one of the funniest and most able copywriters I know. So I will let him introduce in his inimitable fashion Helpful Idea 22 which is: Don't treat the customer like a ★★ ★★.

You can fill in the asterisks to suit yourself. They probably stand for “fool” or “clot”.

What is really a shame is when a firm which has always treated customers well stops doing so.

Since 1993 I have shown in seminars an excellent example of this: a thank-you letter from the office supplies company Viking Direct to my PA Denise. Yet she also showed me three letters from Viking that arrived at once, all addressing her as “Valued Customer”.

This phrase in fact means precisely the opposite of what it says – and undid the good done by the thank-you.

It means “Even though you've been buying things from us for fifteen years we can't be bothered to make a note of your name”. Don't use the phrase, whatever you do.

An even better example of this sort of folly came from the Berkeley Square car dealer Jack Barclay who wrote to me when I still considered Bentleys and Rolls-Royces to be a

reasonable choice of personal transport.

Dear Customer

As a driver of a Bentley or Rolls-Royce, we at Jack Barclay regard you as a member of the Bentley and Rolls-Royce family. With this in mind, it gives us great pleasure to invite you to attend our Service Clinic event, due to take place between 2nd to 4th April 2004.

BOUGHT A BENTLEY BUT STILL A MERE "CUSTOMER"

This letter raises a number of interesting questions:

Can't they be bothered to write personally to somebody who has squandered countless thousands on their wretched vehicles?

Can't they be bothered to find out what I drive? I don't drive at all, actually – my ex-wife did – but why do they seem to think I am a member of their family?

Just as a matter of interest, when they wrote I had a flat 100 yards away from their offices and my wife was perfectly able to tell you the name of their service manager – and a quite a few other members of their staff.

The great American merchant Julius Rosenwald, who built up Sears, Roebuck and Co to be the world's biggest retailer, said his ambition was to stand on both sides of the counter at once.

This is hard to do, but at the very least I recommend the following three-part advice which I first coined for a talk at American Express in New York some years ago:

1. Respect your customer
2. Stay close to your customer
3. Use your imagination.

If you neglect that advice and treat your customers and prospects like idiots, then frankly they'd have to be idiots to buy your wares.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *Unless you are in the motley business, you are not selling to fools but to thinking people with their own needs and wants.*
- *These individuals have freely chosen to do business with you. You'd be crazy not to treat them with the utmost understanding and respect.*

### **What now?**

- *Are you sure that your “valued customers” are not valued in name alone? Make them feel genuinely recognised and appreciated, every time you communicate with them.*

## Dare to be different

---

*Seek out and showcase your unique qualities, because if you don't know them, neither will your customers.*

Being a customer is first of all about choice. Before he or she buys anything from you, they must choose. So why not give them a little help (or indeed, a lot) to make the right decision? The simplest, and probably the best, method of guiding customers to your door is to show them how you are different – in a good way – from all the rest. Then the choice is easy.

Here's a little something to get your attention.



DIG OUT YOUR DIFFERENCE

I'll explain what he's doing there in a minute, but first, a question every customer asks – usually subconsciously – but which absurdly few marketers bother to deal with in their messages.

“Why should I choose you?”

Sue works for a bank and told me she was interested in how you sell insurance to businesses. I sent her a copy of a Sales

Organiser we put together for an insurance broker last year. (A Sales Organiser is a sort of cheat-sheet sales people carry round which they can leave behind: you can also use it as part of a mailing, if you plan it carefully.)

Sue thought our Organiser was “a great example of an engaging piece of copy for an area in which it is often very hard to differentiate – although I guess that could be said about a lot of businesses”.

I was pleased, of course – we all like a little praise – but I thought I’d talk about what she said a little, with a simple hint: Always make sure you differentiate yourself. And make sure that you do so in every single message you send out.

If you don’t, you’re making things needlessly hard for your customers. They have to base their choice on little more than guesswork – like throwing darts at a board while wearing a blindfold.

### **There’s no-one quite like you**

One man, Rosser Reeves, built a huge advertising agency by finding and promoting a particular kind of differentiation: he called it the USP – the Unique Selling Proposition. (Actually, I nearly went to work for him in the US many years ago as a creative director – but that’s another story.)

Rosser’s idea – simple, like all good ones – was to find one benefit nobody else could offer and hammer it home relentlessly.

Of course, that may be easier said than done. As Sue commented, many businesses are virtually identical. But there’s more than one way to skin a cat. For example, you may not have anything unique to offer, but there could be something you do that you can be the first to talk about. If so, that’s your USP. When you’re the only person saying it, you own it.

A good example is Carphone Warehouse. Were they the

only firm offering advice to phone buyers? No. They were, initially, just the only ones saying so – and as a result created an almost unassailable advantage.

What's more, if others start talking about the benefit you're promoting, they can even end up selling for you. That's because you've already fixed that particular benefit in people's minds and they associate it with you – not the me-too upstarts.

Moreover, if having one special benefit is good, how do you like the idea of several? The more reasons you give, the better you will do. Sometimes by bundling a few together you end up with a sort of packaged USP.

<b>What's so special about you?</b>
Here's a list of 21 questions to start you thinking of the ways in which you are not one of the herd:
Are you unique?
Cheaper?
Quicker?
Better value?
Safer?
The most trusted?
The friendliest?
The first?
The top-seller?
The most tested?
Give quicker service?
The most advanced?
The latest?
The oldest?
The most loved?

The one experts prefer?
The most reliable?
More fun?
Sold in a special way?
Easier to deal with?
More helpful?

Why the mole at the start of this Helpful Idea? Because to find the things that make you different, you have to dig.

And that's often harder for you in your business than it is for outsiders, because you're too close to everything. You either don't notice things or you ignore them. (This is where an ad agency can be a genuine help.)

But dig you must.

### Helpful Highlights

- *In most businesses, customers have a choice: your product or your competitors'.*
- *They need help with choosing. And the best way you can lend them a hand is to show how you are different – and why that is good.*

### What now

- *Robin Wight, the W in ad agency WCRS, said "Interrogate your product until it confesses to its strengths". It's excellent advice – but make sure those strengths are different from anyone else's.*
- *If there really is nothing unique about what you do, be the only one to trumpet the very fact you do it. Most companies don't bother.*



## Before the words, consult the nerds

---

*Make sure your creative people talk to your database people – they know what your customers want to hear.*

An iron law of direct marketing has always been that what you say to your prospects must be based on what you know about them. The guardians of the insight and understanding you need to do this are those lovely, far from nerdy people who manage your databases. Learn at their knees – or get your creative team to do so. They'll return with a hoard of ideas for messages that are relevant, interesting and persuasive for the audiences you value most.

Years ago I used to talk about what I call the “Nod Factor”, which is essential in your messages.

I came up with this because most selling messages get one of three reactions.

1. So what? The first and most common is total indifference, because the message is irrelevant, stupid or meaningless. A line like “T-mobile – stick together” gets at best a puzzled “Uh?”
2. Oh, come on! The second reaction, almost as frequent, occurs when the message is boastful drivel – like “The future is bright. The future is Orange” and almost all car advertising.
3. OK – I'm with you so far... The third is what you should

aim for. You have said something the reader simply cannot disagree with. This gets the nod. And it is the beginning of successful persuasion.

Once you've got someone to agree to one thing you can then say something else hard to disagree with – and so on until you ask for a reply.

Having agreed to everything else in the chain, why should they say “No”?

The late Peter Drucker wrote many years ago: “The perfect advertisement is one of which the reader can say, ‘This is for me, and me alone’”. In other words, it gets the nod. Mass advertising simply cannot be that personal and relevant, which helps explain why direct marketing – online or off – has overtaken it.

More particularly, it helps explain why the database is so important.

### **Database without tears**

One of the best practical database experts in this country is Jon Epstein of r-cubed – no nerd, he.

He's worked with everyone from American Express to Coca Cola – and I've collaborated with him many times over the years. What I like about Jon is that he focuses quite simply on one thing: how to turn your data into money.

I asked him what he would tell a client, in terms of data analysis, would most benefit them. I was reassured to see that what he said fitted in very neatly with how I see direct marketing.

1. Define the ends exactly – only then talk data
2. Find the 20% of effort that delivers 80% of results
3. Never talk about the Average Customer
4. De-select your worst customers

5. Contact your best customers more often
6. Spend more on new customers and new prospects
7. Ask your best enquirers and lapsers to come back
8. Sell when your customer is ready to buy
9. Keep and use your contact history with individuals
10. Use silent controls to prove real incremental impact
11. Ruthlessly keep demanding “why did they do that?”

I asked Jon to explain why those eleven points matter – and here is what I learned.

### **Define the ends exactly - only then talk data**

- Quantify “success” exactly, or you won’t know when you achieve it. Most marketers aim to do “better”, but too few define how much better.
- Nail your colours to the mast! Have the guts to tell everyone how you define success.
- Will you be able to see that you have achieved success when and if it occurs?
- Supposing it doesn’t, will you be able to learn from failure – and if so, what?

If you say no to any of the above, Jon thinks you should start all over again. Most of the money spent on creating, analysing and exploiting data is lost at this first stage.

### **Find the 20% of effort that delivers 80% of results**

- The Pareto principle applies here. It has strong financial implications which you ignore at your peril as this is not an academic exercise.
- It’s not about response but about money. Only invest in data if you can see it’s likely to produce more money

than it costs.

- If you think it makes sense as a loss leader, can you point to and measure where else the profit will be made?
- Watch out for weasel words about strategy or brand-building. This must pay off sometime, somewhere

Jon talks about your investment as “data-money”, and asks: how will you and your data-money make more than it would at the bank?

### **Never talk about the Average Customer**

- There is no such beast. We are talking about individuals. Don't treat them all the same.
- While drafting this we were working with Jon on a client's problems. He found that 10% of one file of customers provided over 90% of the results. The same principle will apply to you.
- You must vary your investment by individual, not list or segment. In every cell there are better and worse customers.
- Don't be average – it only leads to average results.

Jon, like all good people, is enraged by the second-rate. “Why do so many people still base their targeting on segmentation – the land of the average consumer?” he asks.

### **De-select your worst customers**

- Direct Marketing is about spending your money where it does most good.
- So what's better? £80 sales for £20 cost, or £100 for £50? The answer should be obvious – but it isn't to many marketers
- Finding the worst is far easier than finding the best. It's

far easier to predict the many least likely than the few most likely to respond – and you need far less data.

- You lose very few sales by dropping the worst but you save lots of money.
- You can reinvest that money in talking to the best or testing.
- You must find the 20% that delivers the 80%. Then you must quickly apply the principle everywhere: data, systems, data preparation, selection, analysis.
- Speed & flexibility make money – not completeness.

Data, targeting, analysis, etc can never be perfect! Trying to make them so is very, very expensive. As Voltaire noted, “The best is the enemy of the good”.

### **Contact your best customers more often**

- First you must define what you mean by “best”: which is what achieves your objectives.
- Usually that is the greatest return for the least cost – the highest possible ROI.
- Nearly always, your most recent, most frequent and highest spending customers deliver the maximum ROI.
- This is actually the oldest, simplest list-rule: RFM - Recency, Frequency, Monetary Value

As Jon puts it, “It’s as old as the hills, it’s easy and it works. Use it!”

### **Spend more on new customers and new prospects**

- When you are new to people, they are more interested: the ROI of first-time contact is always dramatically higher.

- Marketers talk about the “afterglow” – that rather agreeable feeling when we have just bought something.
- That is when customers are at their most receptive, but they cool quickly.
- As customers, they become bored or dissatisfied. As prospects, they will be ruthlessly courted by others.
- “New” gives us a clean slate for communications. Some marketers ring-fence and protect their new customers – they’re mad.

I have pointed this out already: when they’re new they are far more hot to trot. Neglect this opportunity and you throw away a fortune.

### **Ask your best enquirers and lapsers to come back**

- • “Once they’ve dropped off, it’s not worth trying” – false.
- They may leave or not convert for temporary reasons. We may be still relevant, even loved, but it’s not the right time.
- There is usually data to differentiate the best prospects among enquirers and lapsers from the worst. These are the ones to re-solicit.
- Remember, if you don’t ask, you don’t get.

I have talked elsewhere about the extraordinary impact and memorability of a simple “thank you”. Customers love to be remembered and acknowledged.

### **Sell when your customer is ready to buy**

- People buy when it suits them – not you.
- Who would you target? Customers with the right profile, or the ones ready to buy?

- When is more powerful than who. Some 80% of non-response is down to the wrong time.
- Work out when they buy, and don't imagine your messages will change them.
- Look for “hot data” that could trigger activity. An unexpected contact may be a buying signal – say an enquiry about something you haven't offered, an insurance claim, or a change of address
- Make sure staff are listening!

Jon is particularly keen on this. When the right time is glimpsed, he says, ROI can be multiplied.

### **Keep and use your contact history with individuals**

- What's it worth spending on an individual or a household? You can't say if you don't know how much you spent in the past – and what it produced.
- One big sin is comparing customers by past sales, without looking at past investment.
- If you know what you spent on each person – and what it produced, how do you use that knowledge?
- You may find that repeat purchasers have had masses spent on them. Does that affect future investment? When do you cut off spending?
- Do you use that knowledge by segment, or by individual?
- Do you use mailings, phone, email, friend-get-friend – inbound and outbound? If so, what are the key moments when it pays off? Is data recorded. Is it useable?

Jon has found that smart use of contact history can

outperform all other data. But, he laments, some clients still look at buying third-party data first.

### **Use silent controls to prove real incremental impact**

- “The mailing did well – 20% response!” Yes, but how many would have bought *anyway*?”
- The real response cannot be known without a controlled test. No technology or technique can overcome this. This is a basic rule of targeting – and it’s worth many millions.
- Yet amazingly, few companies measure real results. No measurement – no comment.

As Jon points out, good marketing generates incremental sales, not ones you would have got anyhow. And for that you must follow the basic rule of testing: compared to what? He elaborates on this in his last point.

### **Ruthlessly keep demanding “Why did they do that?”**

- You’ve had a good idea – but how will you know it works?
- Test it versus doing something different, or nothing at all. A properly tested result = learning = repeatability = gains.
- This is the beauty of DM – it is easily measurable – but you have to want to learn. Untested activity implies a “we can’t improve it” attitude. But there is always a better way to get more ROI.
- Poor (or, even worse, no) testing = wrong insight = waste and loss.



- Good analysis is driven by good questions, not data or statistics.

I couldn't have put it better myself – actually, not nearly as well. But Jon's points show how universal principles apply in this business.

### **Why using database intelligence is a clever idea**

There's an idea which I refer to as the magic crossroads, which for me is that point where what you want to say meets what you know about your prospect or customer. But first, here's some terror for you.

Harvey Mackay said in his book *Swim With The Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*: “Something you know about your customer may be more important than anything you know about your product”. So even if you begin a message to accountants with something dull and unimaginative like “As an accountant...”, you will probably get them reading.

As a matter of fact I have seen exactly those words increase response by 200% in a mailing to sell business loans.

Well, that seems very simple doesn't it? Just use database knowledge intelligently. But I noticed long ago that the chief objective of any organisation with more than one department is to make it hard to do anything intelligent. In marketing, one way this is done is by making sure the people who create the messages talk as little as possible to the people who manage the database.

So here's Helpful Idea 24: Make sure that before anything is created, your database people talk to your creative people, and vice-versa. That way, what you say to your prospects may be something they actually want to hear.

Do I see you nodding?

### Helpful Highlights

- *If you know your audience, you know how to get the Nod from them. Step by affirmative step, you can build an unbroken chain of small consents that leads to a final, inescapable “Yes”.*
- *That understanding of your audience comes from well managed and properly interpreted databases – and it’s gold dust. Because a directly relevant message outguns a randomly “creative” one, any day of the week.*

### What now?

- *Introduce the people who supply and manage your databases to those who create your marketing messages, and get them talking.*
- *Check back later to find out how what you know about your customers and prospects is going to inform what you say to them.*



concept of the modern book club. He wrote one of the most successful advertisements ever, which ran for 40 years (see Helpful Idea 36).

In his book, Sackheim tells the story of the ads, some of the first he ever wrote, in the late 1890s. Which one worked better? “Let this Machine do your Washing Free” (with its happier user and much longer copy) trounced the negative approach of “Are You Chained To The Wash Tub?” and launched a brilliant career.

*“Times change.  
People don’t.”*

I read Sackheim’s story and then wrote my own ad, headed “Try this washing machine free in your home for 7 days”. I even used the same typeface, which at that time was out of fashion.

One reason I decided on this approach was because I had found that, once people had the washing machine in their homes, hardly any sent them back – whereas only 20% of normal enquirers converted to sales. But I was also strongly influenced by the success of Sackheim’s similar tactics half a century earlier.

Why should we pay attention to advertising of an almost archaeological antiquity? Because, as the great John Caples noted, basic human nature is a constant. Asked by the Wall Street Journal if the principles he laid down in the ‘30s and ‘40s still applied, Caples replied: “Times change. People don’t.”

### Fatal fancies

My successful washing machine ad worked like a charm, and saved a ton of money in salesman's commission. But there is a sad postscript.

After I quit the agency to go into the mail order business, they forgot the principles I had listed for them, started getting "creative", and the client went broke. The poor fellow who owned the company committed suicide. So good marketing can be a matter of life and death. And fancy ideas can kill.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Modern and trendy though our business may see itself to be, many of its greatest achievements were recorded in our grandparents' time.*
- *Methods that worked well then are likely to do so again now, for the simple reason that essential human nature doesn't change.*

### What now?

- *Study what has worked in the past – even the distant past. You can start with our Reading & Resource List on page 205.*
- *Don't be shy of filching the best ideas you find – chances are, they too were based on stolen goods (see Helpful Idea 32).*

## Read your copy out loud

*Few examples of jargon, pomposity and corporate bullshit will survive a live performance.*

Something happens to people when they sit down to write. Something bad. Instead of their normal way of talking, they adopt a strange new tone and vocabulary. Phrases like “user-centric implementation” and “enhanced granularity” – never heard in real life – pepper the page, and the result is lifeless corporatese that appeals to no-one. Fortunately, there’s a simple cure: write like you speak – then listen.

Do you suffer from a crippling condition called deadline panic? I do – and it attacked me with some ferocity the other Sunday night when, after a few glasses of cheering sangria, I looked at my schedule for the week.

I was immediately reminded of a maxim by one of my old bosses: “Whatever you’re doing, you should have started sooner”. Bill Phillips ran Ogilvy & Mather when I sold my old agency to them, and we both like quotations.

(One of his I particularly appreciate is “A neat stall is the sign of a dead horse”. If you saw my desk, you’d know why.)

Anyhow, that night I realised with some alarm I was shortly



EVELYN WAUGH –  
“A GOOD LETTER IS LIKE A  
CONVERSATION”

due in Bucharest and Kiev to do four seminars, one of which I hadn’t written yet. Since it takes a couple of days’ work to put together a good talk, this was quite a worry. So early on Monday morning I started going

through possible material.

By chance I found one or two apt quotations. The first was from Evelyn Waugh, one of the great comic writers of the 20th century and a wonderful stylist.

During the Second World War, he and his wife corresponded regularly with each other, and on one occasion he wrote complaining about how dull her letters were.

“A good letter is like a conversation,” he suggested.

This reminded me of a meeting I had with the managing director of Mercedes Passenger Cars when we started doing their direct marketing. He was concerned about the tone of their copy – and in fact that is why we got the business.

We talked about this for a while, then I asked:

*“Have you ever actually sold cars?”*

*“Yes” he replied.*

*Then I asked: “Did you talk to your customers the way you’ve been talking to me?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“Well,” I said, “That is the kind of tone your direct mail should have”.*

### **Write like you speak**

The difference between good copy and so-so copy is often about tone. Of course, few writers even understand the basics. But even when they do, most write with a sort of half-witted enthusiasm where everything is “fabulous” and “exciting”. Their copy lacks credibility. Readers say, “Oh, come on!”

Really good copy is conversational in tone, and is adapted to suit its context.

So, Helpful Idea 26: Read your copy out loud. Does it sound like someone talking? It should.

Or does it sound like typical sales copy, the sort that any one of your competitors could run (and probably does)? It shouldn't.

The other thing to watch out for is that the language must be appropriate to the writer and the recipient.

If you're supposed to be the chairman, write like a wise and friendly adviser. If you're writing to another chairman, write as an equal. If you're supposed to be someone who handles complaints, adapt accordingly. And so on.

It's deceptively simple – but not that easy to do. You just have to work at it. Out loud.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Good direct marketing is a dialogue, so your copy should be a conversation.*
- *In actual conversations, you adapt your tone to suit the person you're talking with and your relationship to them. Same goes for your marketing copy.*

### What now?

- *Close the office door and read your copy to the room like a rehearsing thespian. False notes and awkward phrases will trip up your tongue and beg to be amended.*
- *Whatever medium you use, aim to speak to your customer exactly as you would in person.*



## “The hell with research”

---

*A bit extreme, perhaps; but be sure to use its findings for illumination, not support.*

At the risk of offending my many friends in the business, it's tempting to say that the only genuinely reliable research is conducted by Mr Patel at his corner shop. By which I mean that actual sales are the sole true test of whether your product will sell. That's overstating the case: good research, well executed and wisely interpreted, is an invaluable tool in your marketing plans. Just don't settle for anything less.

Do you do much research? If so, do you pay attention to what it reveals?

I once did a talk to IT researchers called “The research said it would sell; so how come we went broke?”

Of course, I did some research of my own for the talk because, although many years ago I helped set up a research firm, I don't claim great expertise. So I went to a brilliant friend, Professor Andrew Ehrenberg of South Bank University (so brilliant they've named a building after him).

He said one reason for the dubious reputation of research is that researchers ask the wrong questions. They may ask “Would you buy this?” or “Do you like it?” or even, “Would you give up that for this?”

But the real question is: “Would you pay for it with your money?”

Another is that we believe what we want to believe: that our fabulous new campaign *will* succeed, our brilliant new gizmo *will* sell. A third is that researchers, not content with

reporting the facts, insist on interpreting them as they fancy.

I was reminded of this by a report that came out a few years ago from Gartner, who do a lot of research into what's happening on-line. Gleefully headed "*E-mail Savings Threaten a \$196.8 Billion Direct Mail Market*", the report claimed that, by 2010, "direct mail will almost be a hardly-remembered relic". (I love the "almost".)

Well, as Churchill said when Hitler threatened to wring England's neck like a chicken, "Some chicken. Some neck."

The reality is that in 2008 US direct mail volumes were still happily growing at 5% per year. True, Internet commerce was growing at 25% – but from a much lower base.

The Gartner report also stated that "the response rate from targeted e-mail advertising is much higher than direct mail". This is no longer true. Today, if you got a 2% response from an e-mail it would be an event to celebrate.

### **Saying one thing, doing another?**

Another reason why research tends to flop was suggested by a former client of mine who said:

*"When market researchers try to assess the level of interest in a concept, they recruit a sample of relevant people, or a nationally representative sample, and ask them what they think.*

*"There are all the problems of interviewees trying not to offend the researcher, wanting to get away quickly, saying what they think you want to hear, etc. At the end of the day, we are dealing with claimed interest or appeal, rather than actual.*

*"For example, we research a new brand and 40% of people say they would definitely try it. Then it costs us £15 million and 2 years to achieve 2% market share. That's an error factor of 20 times."*

The fact is, people can tell you:

- What they know
- What they think
- What they believe
- What they understand
- What they don't understand
- What they like or dislike
- How they decide
- What they think you want to hear

But not what they will do.

And more to the point, they're no help at all when it comes to things they've never encountered.

The late Leo Burnett famously said:

*“The public does not know what it wants... There is no sure way of finding out until the idea is exposed under normal conditions of sale. If people could tell you in advance what they want, there would never have been a wheel, a lever, much less an automobile, an airplane or a TV set.”*

Leo Burnett said,  
“The hell with the  
research. Run it.”

I worked for Leo Burnett in my first big job in London. His agency, based in Chicago, won an account called Marlboro. (This was in the days when nobody knew cigarettes were so bad for you.) The Chicago office put together some ads featuring cowboys. But – and I actually heard this from Draper Daniels, the copywriter on this campaign – the research said they would flop.

Leo Burnett said, “The hell with the research. Run it.”

And of course Marlboro became – and remains – the best-selling cigarette in the world.

The moral, and Helpful Idea 27: Use research for

illumination – not for support like a drunk clutching a lamp-post. Who said that? David Ogilvy, who was greatly admired by Leo Burnett – and vice versa.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Research is not a science, it's an art. Properly done, it casts valuable light on consumer behaviour and helps you profitably refine your marketing. But it can also be flat wrong. The trick, of course, is to spot the difference.*
- *You can ask people all sorts of questions about what they think, but still not be sure of what they will do. That's bad because it's the doing, not the thinking, that will determine the success or failure of your project.*

### What now?

- *Use the dangerous weapon of research with caution. Beware the fatally distorting effects of people saying what you want to hear – and of you wanting to hear it.*
- *Be prepared, if everything else tells you you're onto a winner, to take a leap in the face of research and – who knows? – launch your own Marlboro triumph.*

## Say what?

*“If language is used incorrectly, then what is said is not what is meant.”*

Ironic, isn't it? The marketing communications business is probably worse infected with pretentious, obscure, wilfully anti-communicative bullshit than any other. Yet poll after poll says we hate jargon with a passion. The solution is obvious: say what you mean, in language that's clear to all. Tricky at first, especially if you've got an MBA, but you'll soon get the hang of it.

Here's a little fun for you. A business school sent me a message a week or so ago inviting me to “Develop your strategic thinking and advance your career”.

My career has been in tatters for years, but that is not why I guffawed derisively. It's the same almost every time I read the word “strategy” or its derivatives.



GENERAL OMAR BRADLEY – NOT A FAN OF “STRATEGY”

You may recall I touched on this before, quoting the Duke of Wellington, but here's something from another genius of war. General Omar Bradley planned the largest military operation in history, the D-Day Invasion in 1944. He said “Amateurs talk strategy; professionals talk logistics”. Someone else associated with D-Day remarked, “Strategy is all very well, but it pays to give thought from time to time to the results”. That man was Winston Churchill.

The business schools churn out countless MBAs every year, who get good jobs and climb swiftly through the ranks. They

talk a blue streak in meetings, know everything about theory (and strategy) – and, far too often, very little about practice.

So you may or may not be surprised to know that a survey conducted in 2006 found that marketers from successful companies are far less likely to have MBAs than those from their less successful counterparts.

To be specific, marketing executives from 18 under-performing companies – those which had sales grow 7% less than their category average – were twice as likely to have been recruited out of MBA programmes than marketing executives from out-performing companies, which averaged growth 6.2% higher than their categories over the same period. Among executives from under-performing companies, 90% had MBAs vs. 55% at out-performing companies.

People who don't have MBAs can be impressed with the tidal wave of high-sounding tripe these people come out with, and copy it. A good example is a message I got three days ago about how we could “leverage each others strengths” which means help each other (and has an apostrophe missing).

One consequence of all this verbiage appeared in two research reports I once read. One revealed that 26% of executives admit to using expressions they don't understand in meetings. The other said that the thing people dislike most in their jobs is jargon.

As I have noted before, Winston Churchill advised: “Use simple words everyone knows, then everyone will understand”.

And if I haven't already quoted enough authorities on this point, let me add Confucius. He said that if language is used incorrectly, what is said is not what is meant, everything goes to pot, and “the people stand about in helpless confusion”. If you are looking for text-book cases of that, consider the

Confucian confusions of the National Health Service or the British police force.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *Big words often signify little minds. People who habitually use jargon are impressing only themselves – and failing to put their message across into the bargain.*
- *Great leaders and achievers have always known that simple language gets the best results.*

### **What now?**

- *Say what you mean (and mean what you say – but that's another story), rather than hiding behind buzz-words and jargon.*
- *Plain speaking and writing are rare in the business world. That's why they will make your communications both effective and distinctive.*

## Tempted to change? Resist it

---

*If you can't prove in tests that your new ideas will do better, leave well alone.*

Fixing un-broke things is not only a waste of time and money – it can also prove disastrous. The annals of marketing are spattered with the blood of marketers whose untested, unnecessary new ideas backfired. Read about New Coke or Hoover free flights, if you haven't already, and weep. Then the next time you're tempted to change something for no obvious reason, don't.

Mark Twain said that “the principal objective of each new [US] Administration is to make the last one look good”.

His words occurred to me when considering something that often occupies my idle hours: the limited shelf-life of the average marketing director. These are individuals who stay in their jobs anywhere between 12 months and two years, depending on whose statistics you trust and whether it's the US or the UK you're talking about.

Short enough to assume that things did not go with a swing – but long enough to achieve some and often all of the following:

1. Make big promises to whoever hired them.
2. Receive a sycophantic profile in the marketing press, using lots of quotes from:
  - a. The agency that worked with them before and hopes to get the account when it moves.
  - b. The agency that hopes to keep the account although they know this is unlikely.



- c. Friends who hope the favour will be returned when they get a new job.
  - d. People who report to them, who suggest with little evidence that they have an Einstein-like brain, are marvellous company and kind to animals, though also demanding, no-nonsense types.
3. Change many things, but especially the agency – without doing anything to see if that is wise.
  4. Hold lots of waffle-bound meetings about branding.
  5. Pay a consultancy too much money for producing ill-founded research and incomprehensible, jargon-clotted reports for the meetings to waste time on.
  6. Get found out because sales didn't go up.
  7. Get another job from people who never bother to check on their performance, any more than the previous lot did, and know little about marketing anyhow because their background is in finance.

I might add that much the same things apply to many chief executives, but over a longer period and at infinitely greater expense. However, the point is simple and is Helpful Idea No 29: If you can't prove in tests that your changes will do better, leave well alone.

Some examples:

- Before putting guff about your employees outside your banks that causes them toe-curling embarrassment and makes your customers laugh derisively, try it in a few branches first.
- Before changing your logo and positioning, which everyone may be very happy with, run tests to see if response to ads and mailings goes up or down. The

buffoon who ruined Abbey neglected to do this and they were up for sale within two years. Brilliant!

- Before doing anything, ask people who've been around for a few years – and probably will be when you've gone – what they think. Otherwise it's like moving into someone's home and rearranging all the furniture without asking them.

One reason why it is usually stupid to tamper with your logo and positioning is that, in seeking new customers – who may or may not like what you have to offer – you certainly risk alienating the ones you have. More generally, consider that the chap they fired to hire you may not have been a complete idiot and that your customers may be fairly happy with things as they are now.

And above all, be assured that spending more time on practical improvements that customers might like, rather than superficial tinkering, will serve you much better.

If you think I'm talking rubbish, read *Simply Better* by Professors Patrick Barwise and Sean Meehan. I know one of the authors, but that doesn't stop it being a bloody good, readable, sensible book in a world of smoke and mirrors.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *Changing stuff is often a lot easier than improving it. Cynical types also know that making dramatic changes can help suggest a well thought-out plan where there is in fact none.*
- *Newfangled ideas risk alienating your existing customers, with no guarantee that others will like them.*

### **What now?**

- *When considering new directions, find ways to try them out on a small scale first, then respect the results. Less spectacular, more likely to succeed, is a good rule of thumb.*

## Members Only – be exclusive

*You can go to your customers cap-in-hand. Or you can make it a rare privilege for them to buy.*

Whether the immediate object of your desire is your latest date, a new Ferrari or that tempting chocolate bar, one thing will make it many times more enticing: the fact that it's almost beyond your reach. Forbidden fruit, and all that. But besides being a universal trait of human nature, thwarted longing is also a powerful marketing ploy: make them want you at least as much as you want them.

Here's a little quiz for you. Who said the following?

1. "Those who can, do; those who cannot, teach."
2. "What men seek is not knowledge, but certainty."
3. "Will you sleep with me for a million pounds?"

I bet the last question got your attention, and I will tell you the dialogue that followed it in a moment, but first, the picture below is of the man who said all those things.



GEORGE BERNARD SHAW – WOULD YOU SLEEP WITH HIM FOR £1M?

The million-pound question was asked of a lady at a smart dinner party by George Bernard Shaw. The reply was in the affirmative. Shaw then asked:

*"Will you sleep with me for a shilling?"*

*"What do you take me for?" replied the lady indignantly.*

*“We have already established what you are,” said Shaw.  
“Now we are just discussing the price.”*

After that little frolic in the antechambers of literature, let’s return to the first statement which is good fun but not always true, and I bring in evidence a friend, Professor Srikumar Rao. We first met when he was Chairman of the Marketing Department at Long Island University, where he used my book *Commonsense Direct Marketing* as a text. Then we did consultancy together for a demented IT firm in the US with a great idea and no clue at all about business or marketing.

Today, Srikumar runs one of the most talked-of executive education programmes in the world. It has been written about, and he has been interviewed, by much of the most influential media in the US. Google him if you want to know more, but I mention him because, unlike many teachers, especially business school professors, Srikumar is no mere theorist. He really can do. And one thing he does exceptionally well is write copy.

### **Why it pays to invest in good copy**

Srikumar’s remarkable ability derives from a deep understanding of what good marketing can achieve, coupled with real insight into the art of persuasion. Here are two examples of copy by Srikumar Rao. The first is to sell a seminar. It’s a wonderful analysis of why good marketing matters:

*Let’s do some math. Assume your current marketing program yields two qualified leads per hundred contacts and that one of these becomes a customer. Further assume that, as a result of techniques you learn in this seminar, you are able to increase lead generation by 2% and the conversion rate remains the same. You now get four qualified leads per hundred contacts and two customers.*

*Say you need a 10% increase in your marketing budget – which is 20% of total expenses – to achieve this. This means that a 2% increase in expenditure has yielded a 100% increase in profits. Where else can you get this kind of leverage? And what becomes of the numbers if you can achieve this while spending less on marketing? And we have not even talked about increases in the revenue per customer.*

I often feel like reading that to clients who don't understand why it pays to invest in good copy.

### **When purchasing is a privilege**

The second is a perfect example of something a brilliant salesman taught me many years ago: it is called “negative sell”:

*The Advanced Leadership Clinic is a unique program designed for exceptionally talented executives actively looking for exponential improvement in performance. It will enable you to smash all previous achievement records and take you to new highs of personal effectiveness. Expect it to turbo-charge your career and take you to a higher orbit of performance and accomplishment.*

*Admission to the clinic is highly competitive. It is only for driven individuals who are so drawn to it that they would, literally, be prepared to blast through brick walls to participate. DO NOT APPLY if you are not ready to disrupt your life considerably for the rare privilege of joining a group of highly talented managers in a collaborative life-changing experience.*

*There is no other program remotely like this one in format, intensity or effectiveness. Expect and be prepared for this clinic to completely take over your life for two months. You will be given, and learn to work with, transformation tools of great power. You will continue to work with them on your own after the formal end of the clinic until you*

*have mastered their use. And you will find your life has altered beyond measure.*

*Read the program details below to determine if this clinic is for you. Pay particular attention to the clear descriptions of who should and should not apply and some of the possible outcomes of this concentrated happening.*

*This is not a program for the faint of heart or for those who are merely curious. The application alone will take you hours and there will be assignments you will have to complete before the first meeting. The clinic will take up virtually all your spare time while it lasts and it will seep into every part of your life. Embrace this intensity. This is what will enable you to make deep changes in your life.”*

Do you see what Srikumar is doing there? He is not saying “Please buy my programme”; he is telling you it will be an honour to take part, and that you are going to have to work at it just to get in. He is making his prospects come to him.

No wonder his programme is always sold out – and no wonder it is the only such programme to have its own alumni association.

Actually he uses exactly the same psychology as when you say an offer is limited – but he is infinitely more subtle in the way he counterpoints big promise against demanding requirement.

So here’s Helpful Idea 30 for you: Try exclusivity: make it a privilege to buy. People fight for privileges.

### Helpful Highlights

- *As the examples above demonstrate, good marketing copy lifts you into another league altogether, in which people are not merely interested but inspired to act.*
- *If you can elicit powerful desire, you will turn the tables from “Please buy this” to “Would you like the privilege of buying this?”. You – not your customer – are now in control of the decision.*

### What now?

- *Can you present the acquisition of your product as a rare and exclusive honour? A good writer can – and you’ll be beating customers off with a stick.*



## How to be the star of your show

---

*But first, make sure you understand why so many PowerPoint speeches don't work.*

More people than you might imagine dread dying less than speaking or presenting in public. Yet the fate they should really fear is Death by PowerPoint. It comes in many guises and we have all witnessed its grisly toll. With a little study you can avoid the worst pitfalls. But above all, remember that the value of what you say is always more important than the way you say it.

Here's something that could do more for you than practically anything I can think of. It has given me free holidays all over the world – plus at least £250,000 in revenue. Yet I never dreamed I could do it, let alone do it well.

This question will give you a clue:

What do you fear more: death – or speaking in front of an audience?

A few years ago a survey revealed that people preferred the former to the latter – they'd rather die than speak in public. I have now spoken in 42 countries. But when I started I was more frightened than you could ever be. It took tranquillisers and alcohol for me to summon up the guts to face an audience.

Yet it's hard to get ahead without being able to speak or make presentations. (And a lot of those who have done well bore the pants off their audiences without knowing it.) So I'm going to give you a few hints about this subject.

Somebody has now done research that shows PowerPoint presentations can do more harm than good – and literally

put people to sleep. There are many other reasons why they fail, and I have listed some of the most common below.

### **Seven ways to get it wrong**

PowerPoint presentations often fall flat. Here are some common reasons why:

1. The audience is torn between looking at you and looking at the slide.
2. If you have lots of words on the slide, they'll look more at them than at you.
3. Words are not as interesting or as memorable as pictures.
4. Most speakers start by talking about themselves or their firms – deeply boring to the audience (just as it is in printed copy or websites).
5. By the time they do start talking about benefits, the audience has given up.
6. Most presentations lack a logical structure – and are too long.
7. People worry more about style and delivery than content: what the audience will be able to do better as a result.

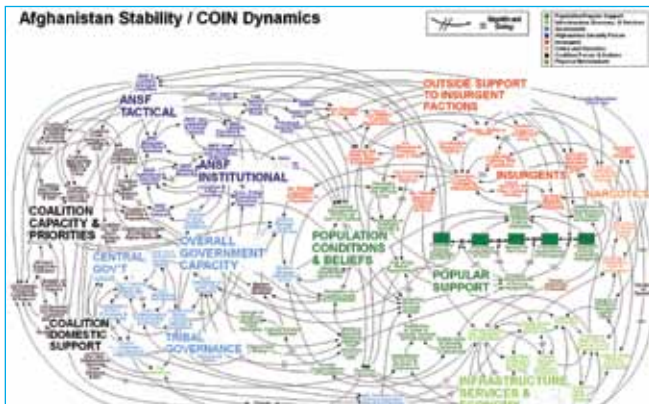
### **Actual death by PowerPoint**

The baleful influence of PowerPoint knows no borders and is currently thickening the fog of war in Afghanistan. *The New York Times* reports that military personnel, bogged down in the production of endless slide sets, are increasingly restless. “Some problems are not bullet-izable”, complained one. Others refer to “Dumb-dumb bullets” and the dangerous “illusion of understanding and control” that PowerPoint

presentations convey.

Military people know they need to take action, which is why they are particularly suspicious of the paralyzing effects of a 30-slide briefing.

Confronted with the spaghetti-like slide shown below, General Stanley McChrystal, then commander of US forces in Afghanistan, remarked, “When we understand that slide, we’ll have won the war”.



“WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THAT SLIDE, WE’LL HAVE WON THE WAR”

Of course, saying that PowerPoint is useless would be just plain wrong. Words and pictures working together are more memorable than words alone, and PowerPoint can be a great “crib-sheet” for your presentation.

But PowerPoint still has its many pitfalls. They have been well enumerated by a friend I learned a lot from called Andy Bounds. Andy’s book *The Jelly Effect: How to Make your Communications Stick* is good, gloriously simple – and mercifully short.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Dread it though you may, public speaking is pretty much essential if you want to get ahead.*
- *PowerPoint has its pitfalls; it's a good idea to study them well before you start making any slides.*
- *Power corrupts. PowerPoint corrupts absolutely.”  
- Edward Tufte*

### What now?

- *Don't let style triumph over content. Pay more attention to the results of your presentation than to the presentation itself.*

## “Search the world and steal the best”

---

*From automobiles to zoo supplies, clever marketers around the world are selling the same products to the same people as you are.*

Toiling as we do in the windowless sweatshops of marketing, it’s easy to forget that there is a host of equally talented people out there who have already done what you’re doing now, quite probably with better results. You’d be silly not to beg, borrow – or steal – their winning ideas.

You may have formed the impression that my great hero is David Ogilvy, which is largely true.

I am not alone, either. A survey some years back revealed that more people had been influenced to go into advertising by reading or hearing David than anyone else.

But I have other heroes.

One is Murray Raphel, a brilliant and inspiring speaker – and a most excellent marketer. If you see any of his books, buy them (there’s one on our Reading & Resource List, page 205). They’re all good, practical, down-to-earth stuff, mercifully free of meaningless jargon.

*Mozart said, “I never tried to be the slightest bit original”.*

This is hardly surprising because his family ran (and for all I know still runs) a retail business in New Jersey. That’s a bit like direct marketing. You know the next day if your efforts have worked. Murray once said something I have never forgotten, and I offer it to you as Helpful Idea 32:

“Search the world and steal the best”.

I do this all the time. And I advocate it for two reasons.

1. I can never have enough ideas, but they are hard to come by. So I belong to the W A Mozart School of creativity. Mozart said, “I never tried to be the slightest bit original”.

2. Contrary to what many – maybe most – imagine, what works in one country very often works in another.

So wherever I go, I look out for ideas I can steal and transfer – particularly in America, where customers have the most money and the most highly paid people trying to take it from them. I see many examples in all sorts of places. Some have been transferred; some haven't. And I am just amazed at how poorly multi-nationals exploit this potential synergy.

### Good ideas travel well

One instructive case was a few years ago when I was running (or at least failing to screw up) the Ogilvy & Mather Direct American Express account. One of my main objectives was to move good ideas around the world.



THIS MAILING FOR INTEL RAN ACROSS AUSTRALASIA. REMEMBER: PEOPLE LOOK AT PEOPLE THAT LOOK LIKE THEM

We were selling an accident insurance policy with a pack that was doing OK in the UK (sounds like a song title, doesn't

it?) and they had another doing as well in the US. Both were typical long-copy sells. Then I saw some copy at our Singapore agency. A client had the idea of letting people have the policy for a month at no charge, after which they could decide to keep it or stop it.

The mailing looked like crap – and pulled like crazy. (Moral: good ideas matter more than fancy execution.)

We tried it in Hong Kong. It worked there. Then in Spain. It worked there too. Then in London – and so on. It was always hard work getting local markets to accept ideas from elsewhere because of the not-invented-here syndrome, but it made a lot more sense than starting from scratch.

The golden rule to bear in mind was laid down by Confucius: “Men’s natures are alike; it is their habits that divide them”. If there is no cultural reason why something won’t work, try it. Don’t change things except where absolutely necessary.

I never mess with a winner, believe me. Only if it doesn’t work will I try something else.

### Helpful Highlights

- *The best ideas know no borders. Give or take superficial cultural differences, human nature is a constant, so the marketing appeals that touch people of every race are broadly similar.*
- *Cross-pollinating ideas between countries and markets is strangely overlooked, yet full of potential.*

### What now?

- *Keep an eye out on your travels for marketing brainwaves that are getting results. Chances are they'll do the same for you back home.*
- *Not invented here? Who cares, if it works – and it probably will.*



## A surprisingly successful idea

---

*Once you have a something interesting to say, try to make it unexpected too.*

Inspired thoughts are hard enough to come up with. Now I'm suggesting you aim even higher – for messages that are not only interesting and beneficial to your audience but also unexpected and remarkable too. Get all those elements right and you'll give your marketing communication a clear advantage, right from the start.

Here's another little quiz for you. What do all these messages have in common?

- “The lazy man’s way to get rich. (Most people are too busy earning a living to make real money.)”
- “17 ingenious (but perfectly legal) ways to avoid paying your debts.”
- “It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken.”
- “Cash if you die, cash if you don’t.”
- “Quite frankly, the American Express Card is not for everyone.”
- “Drive it like you hate it.”
- “They laughed when I sat down at the piano – but when I started to play.”
- “How much should you pay...  
...when you’re planning to steal the ashtray?”

Did you guess what it is, besides the fact that they all made an awful lot of money for the people who ran them?

Well, just in case you didn't, let me tell you it is a special quality which I believe distinguishes marketing messages that are remarkable from those that are just good.

That quality is relevant surprise. And my Helpful Idea No 33 is: Once you have a good idea – try to make it surprising, too.

But don't be tempted to commit two grievous sins:

1. Putting forward ideas that are surprising, but utterly irrelevant.
2. Putting forward ideas that are neither surprising nor relevant.

I gave you an example of the irrelevant in Helpful Idea No 15: the case of a fatuous commercial for Barclays Bank featuring the famous financial expert Samuel L Jackson and a pig.

Actually, banks are very good at fatuous. I recall that when First Direct started out, they thought it a clever idea to make a TV commercial featuring a half-witted businessman waving an umbrella and splashing about in some fountain, plus ads featuring dead fish and Wellington boots. Surprising, maybe. Relevant, hardly.

No wonder it took them about eight years to break even.

I saw a good example of the second sin when I arrived at Heathrow the other day. It was a poster for Vodafone which said "Make the most of now". A prize to anyone who can tell me how the hell that meaningless drivel is going to make anyone choose or stay with Vodafone

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *Having a good idea is one thing, and not so easy, either. Making it really stand out is another – and takes a special sort of talent.*
- *When you know how to express your message in a surprising yet still relevant way, you can transform a merely good idea into a remarkable one.*

### **What now?**

- *Beware irrelevant shock-tactics: it's the equivalent of dropping your trousers in public. You'll get attention, but then what?*

## Think before you sloganize

---

*A snappy catchphrase is no substitute for thoughtful, believable words about how you help people.*

Here's a good slogan: *Meaningless mottoes are easy, thinking is hard.* That's right, make the effort to figure out what distinctive benefits your product or service offers first. Then you can build your slogan – if you really need one – on the sure foundation of the truth.

In 1977 I went into business with two talented partners. One, John Watson, went on to build Europe's biggest direct marketing agency – WWAV. The other, Glenmore Trenear-Harvey, became an intelligence expert. (A bit of a stretch for somebody in direct marketing, I know, but every now and then I see him on TV talking about Iraq or the Russians and such things with impressive authority.)

The three of us had one or two minor problems – like no clients, no money and no office – but we survived. Eventually the other two had had enough of me and left, and I went on to build an agency that I sold to Ogilvy & Mather – but that's another subject.

Glenmore knew an amazing number of people, which was one reason I went into business with him. He was (and still is) great fun, too, which was another.

One day he and I had lunch with the head of advertising for British Rail who told us he had just chosen a new agency. He didn't reveal much save to tell us the slogan – “This is the Age of the Train” – which he loved.

Since at that time, and pretty much ever since, this has been the age of the car and airplane, I thought that a pretty silly

line, and I guess the public agreed, for after a while the agency tried another: “We’re Getting There”. This was if anything even more unwise as, most of the time, people weren’t. They were sitting in dirty carriages wondering if they would ever get anywhere. (Nothing changes.)

The moral is, don’t boast and don’t lie. If you’re selling a very ordinary Peugeot, don’t talk about “The Drive of Your Life”. I guess if you’re selling a Ferrari you might get away with it – unless people think that Lamborghini or Bentley are better.

### **Slogans: Because it’s easier to say it than do it**

I don’t know why marketers are so obsessed with slogans, but they are. Multi-million pound advertising accounts move on the basis of little more than a few snappy words. So before you make any dodgy decisions I want to warn you here about some of the pitfalls.

The most important thing to remember is suggested by the quotation from the gent below. Shakespeare’s Polonius, otherwise a rather foolish busy-body with a walk-on part in *Hamlet*, gets it right for once in an immortal piece of advice to his son: “This, above all: to thine own self be true.”

If you really want to have a slogan (and plenty of firms have done perfectly well without) let it derive from the truth – from reality – rather than what you would like to be the truth.

You must ponder deeply what you really offer that makes you better; and if the answer is “nothing”, that may have the happy result of prompting you to improve things until you do.

Too many slogans reflect what makes those who run them – the creative people and the client – feel good, rather than what will sell. Our friend at British Rail was a good example. He would have loved it to be “The Age of the Train”. He

wanted to believe they were “Getting There”.

Just one catch: neither hopeful assertion was true.

### **Wise words from a master of the art**

I’m now going to quote from yet another friend who unquestionably knew more about this subject than anyone else in the world. Timothy R V Foster created an excellent website called Adslogans.com, which is still running. His successors offer a valuable service that, among other things, checks if the line you’re considering is being used by anyone else.

Take a look at Timothy’s article “The Art and Science of the Advertising Slogan”. In it you can see what a slogan is supposed to do – which far too few people know – starting with a definition from someone else.

*In his book Creative Advertising, Charles L Whittier says a slogan:*

*“...should be a statement of such merit about a product or service that it is worthy of continuous repetition in advertising, is worthwhile for the public to remember, and is phrased in such a way that the public is likely to remember it.”*

*To which we add:*

*The purpose of the strapline (slogan, claim, endline, signature, etc...) is to leave the key brand message in the mind of the target. It is the sign-off that accompanies the logo. It says “If you get nothing else from this ad, get this..!”*

Timothy pointed out that slogans are called different things in different countries, ending with a witty and relevant comment.

*In the UK, they are... end lines, endlines or straplines.*

*In the USA, they are... tags, tag lines or taglines.*

*In Germany, they are... claims.*

*In Belgium, they are... baselines.*

*In France, they are... signatures.*

*In the Netherlands and Italy, they are... pay-offs or payoffs.*

*To the unimaginative, they are... rip-offs or ripoffs. The bland leading the bland.*

He goes on to give the 25 things a slogan should and should not do. They are all relevant, but some matter more than others, especially that they should:

- *Be original (For example, don't tell me you're going to give me "more" – everyone else does.)*
- *Differentiate the brand (For example, "It's Independent. Are you?")*
- *Include a key benefit (For example, "Visa. It's everywhere you want to be".)*

Read them all and learn, before you write or approve your next slogan.

You know it makes sense.

### Helpful Highlights

- *The best slogan distils the truth about the brand, not its unsubstantiated claims or hopeful aspirations.*
- *Slogans can too easily take on a life of their own, ringing melodiously in the ears of their owners while striking a fatally false note with everyone else.*

### What now?

- *Try to include a real benefit and/or genuine differentiation in your slogan – rather than an empty or unrealistic catchphrase.*
- *If in doubt, consider the possibility that you don't actually need a slogan at all.*



## What is your customer worth?

*How a simple calculation can put an end to marketing budget guesstimates.*

How much do you spend on marketing? How much should you spend? Or is it “invest”? And are you even asking the right questions? Relief for puzzled marketing folk comes in the shape of customer value. Calculate the revenue that he or she will bring to your door while they remain your customer. That much, less your profit, is how much you can afford to invest during that time.

Let’s talk about money. Specifically, what your marketing costs – and what you get in exchange.

And let’s talk about the meaning of words. Because the way we describe things to an extent determines what we do. Thus, if you talk about “junk mail”, you’re more likely to produce it.

I apologise if you’re familiar with what follows – but I find that many aren’t; and of those who are, a surprising number don’t act upon its important implications.

Some people talk about marketing “spend”. Others talk about marketing “investment”. You’ll probably agree that those who see it as cash spent are more likely to make it one of the first things they cut down on when times are hard. Those who see it as money invested are less likely to do so.

Well, marketing is an investment – and a wise one. Firms that spend more on it are, on average, more profitable than firms that spend less.

What’s more, firms that keep spending

*Don’t just think about making an immediate sale, but also about the long-term value of making and keeping a customer.*

when times are hard tend to emerge even stronger than before – for a simple reason: they have a greater “share of voice” when an industry is spending less as a whole.

Of course, many firms may talk about marketing as an investment – but not mean it. They wish only to sound as though they’re thinking intelligently about it. In fact, most firms manage their marketing to suit their internal needs, which is crazy. Because they should think in terms of the real commodity in business, which is not actually money, but people.

Take the subject of what you lay out and what you get. How do people work it out? In many ways.

Some take a percentage of turnover or overhead as the right marketing budget. Many, though, are led by expediency. Recognise any of the following?

- “We need more sales volume; let’s spend more money.”
- “We have to send more profit to the US. Spend less on marketing.”
- “Last year we had a good year. Put up the budgets!” (Or vice-versa.)
- “Our new CEO wants to change the world. Increase marketing spend.” (Five years later, “Our big-mouthed CEO hasn’t changed the world. How can we get better figures? Slash marketing budgets.”)

Professional direct marketers (many are not professional, unfortunately) think first about what they are really investing in.

It is not advertising or direct mail: it is gaining and keeping customers. In fact, Helpful Idea no 35 amounts to this: Remember – the currency of your business is customers – and act accordingly.

## **Your customers will tell you how much to spend on them**

If you're with me so far, you'll see that the big marketing question is not "How much should I spend?" but "How much is my customer worth to me?"

The answer's not hard to find. When you've been in business for a while, you can measure quite precisely how long customers stay with you, and how much profit they provide in that time. Given that figure, you can then use it to determine how much you can afford to invest in recruiting and retaining a customer while still making a profit.

(It is true that some sales are not repetitive, but in those cases you can often, if not always, cross-sell other products.)

The importance of customer value came home to a client who sold what they call an fmcg (fast moving consumer goods) product here – and packaged goods in the US.

He asked me, "If the gross margin on one sale is 80 pence, how can I afford to send out direct mail at 100 pence a time?" I asked him if he knew the average value of a customer over time – not just one sale. He said he'd never given it a thought.

And I said, "You can easily afford it if you know your average customer buys 200 packs a year and stays with you for five years. Don't just think about making an immediate sale, but also about the total value of making and keeping a customer".

He became my largest client.

The same principle applies if you work out how many cars you can sell to a customer over a lifetime. In all probability you'll find that you can afford a series of very expensive direct communications – DVDs, books, lavish mailing packs and so forth.

It all starts by thinking in terms, not of expenditure, but return on investment, and taking a lot of trouble to try and assess what each of your customers is worth.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Marketing budgets are often driven by short-term and essentially irrelevant factors, many of which fall under the heading of “Quick – do something!”*
- *Simple business logic, however, suggests that you can – and should – set your expenditure to match the amount you expect to get back.*

### What next?

- *Take your eye off immediate sales for the moment and look instead at the long-term value of your customer. You may be pleasantly surprised to discover how much you can afford to lavish on their continued custom – and still come out ahead.*

## Worried? Nervous? Anxious?

---

*Play on people's insecurities – but kindly – and make the most of your own.*

If you answered Yes to my headline, that's good because nothing succeeds like the fear of failure. Equally to the point, there is huge business potential in spotting your audience's most common insecurities and proposing a solution to them. Get this right and you'll earn not only their undying gratitude but also a lifetime share of their wallets.

I'm a lazy sod, given half a chance, so I thought I'd let an old friend do a bit of work.

Christian Digby-Firth was one of my creative directors years ago at Ogilvy & Mather and has a very neat turn of phrase. Good writing is always a good thing to note if you want good people, since as Dr. Johnson observed, "Language is the dress of thought".

Here's something Christian sent me:

*"What is it about airport ads? They're breeding grounds for some of the most fatuous copy lines in the biz. "We know what it takes to be a Tiger", "In business people are good together", "Hello", etc, etc – and all the others too crushingly dull to recall.*

*"International committee work, I suppose.*

*"Make the most of now" is Vodafone's anxious strategic imperative writ large: i.e. 'Please use your mobile phone to do all sorts of things that are pointless to you but profitable to us, and do them now because we don't make anything on your boring old voice calls'."*

Now, I have to confess that though I agreed with almost everything in that hilarious little note, I didn't share Christian's opinion about the Tiger Woods campaign. It was very cleverly aimed at executives with small pricks and even smaller minds who want to feel like they're big bold business marauders. People who are gullible enough to believe that Accenture – in exchange for absurdly large sums of money – would help them succeed without actually having to think.

(Of course, we now know in rather more detail what it takes to be a Tiger; Accenture clients weren't the only ones being screwed left, right and centre.)

### Worried people = great customers

But there is an important point I want to make (besides one I made in Helpful Idea No 8, which is that emotion beats logic, even in business).

It's Helpful Idea No 36: Playing on people's inadequacies is a very smart thing to do.

Take a look at any successful self-help ad, and you'll see what they do. Maxwell Sackheim – the man who wrote “My



SYMPATHISE WITH THEIR INSECURITIES –  
AND OFFER HELP

First 60 Years in Advertising” – wrote an ad entitled, “Do You Make These Mistakes In English?”. It was aimed at selling English courses to immigrants who felt unsure about their English. It ran successfully for 40 years.

Here it is.

Lillian Eichler, another near-genius copywriter from this era, wrote an ad

with the heading, “Again She Orders – ‘A Chicken Salad, Please’” – to sell a book of etiquette to people who felt socially inadequate.

It took three writers to produce an ad headed, “Here’s an extra \$50, Grace – I’m making real money now” – that sold correspondence courses. This is one of my favourite headlines ever.

Now, I hope you’re not going to give me that bleeding heart stuff about playing on people’s fears. If you do I will tell you one thing I know for sure, in fact I bet on it once..

### **Worried people = great achievers**

I was speaking at Manchester University, and the celebrity speaker was a famous chef. I was discussing what motivates successful people with a lady at my table. I said, “It’s fear of failure – and I bet this man is no exception”.

The chef’s speech began almost word for word with what I’d said. He revealed how he feared not living up to his father’s expectations.

People who achieve do so almost always because they fear to fail. And people who fail usually do so because they’re cocksure – they are not worried about failing, and so don’t they try hard enough.

By the way, there is a thin line between recognising how people feel and providing a solution, and being downright insulting. Use your best judgement to be upfront without causing affront. The ad below got it wrong:



INSULTING YOUR AUDIENCE NEVER PAYS, YOU TWERPS

Interestingly enough, when I show this (very unsuccessful) ad in seminars, most of the audience love it. A lot of humour derives from other peoples' misfortunes. But unless you're selling laughs, very few ads can work on that basis.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Social insecurities and embarrassments are ever-present. Helping people overcome them – with sensitivity and understanding – can be a rich market opportunity for you.*

### What now?

- *When, where and why do your customers feel inadequate? What can you offer them to feel better, more confident?*
- *Remember that you're dealing with people's often-undisclosed anxieties: tread carefully to get the tone of your messages just right.*



## Don't be fooled by digital drivel

Getting a “digital marketer” to write your copy is like having a software programmer write the ads for a new computer.

What's in a word? Sometimes, not a lot – or at least not as much as the self-styled experts would have you believe. Thus, “digital marketing” is marketing. “Digital copywriting” is copywriting. Two fingers, then, to the drivelling digerati and let's remember that, whatever the medium, communication is and always will be about one person talking to another.

My Aussie partner Malcolm Auld was one of the first people to talk sense about marketing on the Internet, and has written a couple of good books on the subject.

Here's an example of Mal's splendidly clear-eyed bullshit detection, expressed in his usual subtle style:

*All sorts of outrageous claims are being made by digital agencies in an attempt to lure unsuspecting marketers to their digital lairs. One such claim is that you need specialist digital copywriting skills for the Internet.*

*What a load of old bollocks.*

*There is only one skill you need to write copy for the Internet. It's the skill known as copywriting.*

Beware the digital voodoo. Experienced copywriters in all media, not just in the digital space, will get you much better results, without the mumbo jumbo.

*What has binary code got to do with copywriting and communications?  
Nearly every digital agency or consultant I've heard make the specialist claim is not a copywriter. They've never*

*written copy in the real world, only the virtual world and then it's rather ordinary, just like most copy written in traditional media by people who aren't copywriters.*

*One of the biggest shortages in the marketing industry is talented and experienced copywriters. In particular, direct response and retail copywriters, which are what you need for digital advertising and content. The Internet is a pure direct marketing channel, every ad and much of the editorial content seeks to get you to click-through and respond in some way.*

*The skill of the copywriter is to adapt the content to the medium. Because web pages and e-mails are more likely to be scanned, (miraculously in the same way printed newsletters, mail, press ads and articles are scanned) the writer must use headlines, cross-heads, subheads, indents, bold type, bullet points, layout and other techniques to attract the attention of the reader.*

*If you subscribe to any professional copywriters' newsletters you'll discover that many of them produce their newsletters in text format – and they are many pages long. They do this because they've conducted tests. They discovered that text can often work better than HTML for newsletters and e-mail messages.*

*Ask any alleged digital copywriter about testing and you'll likely receive a blank stare – they've never done any tests and haven't a clue what you're talking about.*

*Why do digital marketers perpetuate the claim they possess amazing black magic skills that simple analogue marketers don't understand? The skills most digital marketers possess are usually related to binary code – they produce ads using slightly different software to those who produce ads for newspapers or television for example. Much of this digital skill, such as HTML programming,*

*is taught in high school these days...*

*So beware the digital voodoo. Look for people who are experienced copywriters in all media, not just in the digital space – you'll get much better results without the mumbo jumbo.*

If that sounded like sense to you, I strongly recommend you read Malcolm's books *E-Mail Marketing and Direct Marketing* – see Reading & Resources on page xx for more details.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Writing for digital media is not the rare and exotic skill that the voodoo merchants want you to assume. It's writing, pure and simple, calling for exactly the same combination of talent, experience and willingness to learn that applies to pen, paper and laptop.*

### What now?

- *Refuse to be dazzled by the digerati. The Internet adds – not a whole set of new problems – but an unlimited new dimension to your marketing resources.*
- *And you don't need digital gurus to make that work for you.*

## Who do you think you're talking to?

---

*Before you start worrying about what to say, be sure you've singled out who's to hear it.*

A harsh message for even the most eloquent communicators and brilliant copywriters in the business: if you're addressing the wrong person, you're wasting your breath. But the good news is that when it's the right one, then whatever you say – within reason – is going to hit home. Moral: check your aim and don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes.

You are doubtless entirely sane, but my mind works so oddly that sometimes I think I should seek psychiatric help.

I don't so much have a train of thought as a sort of demented relay race. Here's an example.

Did you hear the nauseating broadcast by that world-class creep Alec Baldwin, who decided it was appropriate to apologise to all America for being a thoroughly unpleasant bully to his 10-year old daughter?

Like many actors, I guess he's marooned so far up his own *derrière* that it would take an entire search party to find the real him. But I suppose some oily PR person suggested this nasty little stunt, which can hardly have reassured the poor girl. Could there have been worse advice? Millions of people who had never heard about the affair in question now have.

### **Know your audience**

What, you may reasonably ask, has Alec Baldwin and his dirty washing to do with our business. A few years ago I tried

to define why I thought anybody with any sense would think direct marketing a good idea.

I came up with three reasons:

1. Why speak to everybody, when you only need to speak to somebody?
2. Why guess, when you can know?
3. Why not spend your money where it does most good?

Baldwin's pathetic behaviour called the first reason to mind. His daughter was the one he owed the apology to. But maybe he found it easier to act the whole thing out in front of his no longer quite so adoring public.

Anyhow, that reminded me of Claude Hopkins' maxim:

*“Your message should single out your prospect like a bell-boy paging a man in a crowded hotel lobby.”*

Which in turn came to mind when I saw a poster for BUPA on a metro tram in Manchester.

“Are you made of the right stuff?” it asked, showing a dummy made of newspaper in front of a lot of modern buildings. Then there was a paragraph of copy.

I thought it rather an odd way to suggest I get a check-up, but then I actually read the copy. It was nothing to do with that at all. They were looking for staff. But what possible chance was there that you'd think that's what BUPA was offering? And boy, were they throwing money around in the attempt. In that one tramcar alone there were four of those posters. Multiply that by the number of tramcars they were on – and wow!

They'd probably get better results handing out leaflets outside their own health centre.

### **Aim before you fire**

Helpful Idea No 38 is: Spend plenty of time on any message

considering how to single out your prospect first.

Here's another prime example of how not to do it:



THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR SAID THIS AD'S OBJECTIVE WAS NOT TO SELL. WE CAN BE SURE IT SUCCEEDED.

The campaign of which this is part appeared all over the place. It is what they call “who gives a shit?” advertising.

If I were a client of St. James's Place, the people who paid for it, I would be giving my position serious thought. If this is what they're doing with their money, what will they do with mine?

No doubt the people who sold it to the client came out with a lot of pretentious tripe about building a brand – but as I quoted Raymond Rubicam earlier, “the only purpose of advertising is to sell. It has no other justification worth mentioning”.

By the way, another technical term for this kind of advertising, which I also mentioned earlier, may come in handy one day, so I'll give it to you. It is called creative masturbation. Less polite people use another word that rhymes with banking – highly appropriate when you look at most banks' ads.

By contrast, here's one of my favourite examples of going straight for the prospect and making a clear promise:

*If you have piles and you have a dollar*

*Give me your dollar and I'll get rid of your piles.*

*Or you can keep your dollar and keep your piles.*

With which tasteful work of art I will conclude.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *Blunderbuss or sniper rifle? Choose your weapon.*

### **What now?**

- *Craft your message and display it where it reaches those, and only those, in your sights. Anything less accurate is both wasteful and expensive.*
- *With the cross-hairs firmly on your target, fire with confidence – and expect a kill.*

## Meaning what, exactly?

*When something sounds good, ask for the details.*

Politics and marketing have a lot in common. Both are heavily populated by plausible scoundrels. Both seek to bedazzle you with the supposed benefits of their propositions, while staying curiously mute about their shortcomings. And both trade in slick phrases devoid of substance. Your only defence against the chancers in either field is to demand to know what their fancy language actually means.



HAROLD WILSON –  
“PHONEY AS HELL”

Let’s talk about politics, starting with the old fraud below.

It is, of course, James Harold Wilson, Baron Wilson of Rievaulx, KG, OBE, FRS, PC (11 March 1916 – 24 May 1995).

Wilson emerged as prime minister after more general

elections than anyone else in the 20th century.

- He was a brilliant debater – perhaps even better than Tony Blair, because he could speak proper English
- He was one of our youngest-ever prime ministers
- He was as phoney as hell: smoked cigars but always produced a more working-class pipe for the camera
- He made lots of wonderful but vague promises, the most famous being to forge a new country in the “white heat of technology”
- And of course, because words are cheap but actions are



hard, he made a total mess of things and his reputation has never recovered.

During Wilson's time I wrote an article – since lost – called “The slickness of the phrase deceives the mind”. I recalled this when a client rang to say they had decided not to go ahead with some work we were about to create for them, as they had decided to “go the brand-response route”.

**Lawyer or unprincipled rogue? You decide.**

I wrote copy for the Tories under Margaret Thatcher and John Major, and then for Labour under Tony Blair.

“What an unprincipled rogue this man Bird is”, you must be thinking. So let me explain.

The Tories asked me first, and said, “By the way, are you one of us?” I said, “No. I read *The Spectator*, which was very critical of them, even though broadly conservative.

When Labour asked me in 1996, they put the same question. Again I said, “No. I am like a lawyer. You pay, I plead. And you're going to win anyhow.”

I don't actually know what “brand response” means in their context, but I have a shrewd suspicion it was a neat way out of having to answer a long list of questions we had sent them about how their offering compared with those of their competitors. By “in their context” I mean that they are one of the most famous names in their field, so they hardly need to build a brand.

But people love the phrase “brand response”. One very talented person who worked for me wrote a book about it; another, even more talented, built and sold a very good agency on it.

But it is a dangerously seductive phrase, and it calls up my Helpful Idea No 39: When something sounds good, get an exact definition.

Perhaps more importantly, once you have got a definition, ask precisely how the benefit described will be achieved.

### **Beware the silver tongue**

To revisit the political analogy, if you say you're going to be "tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime", then work out exactly how you will get more police off their arses and on the streets, and exactly how you will get more kids in school – and off the streets.

In other words, don't let fancy language get you off the hook.

In the case of "brand response" the big danger occurs when one half of the idea – the response bit – doesn't come up to scratch. This means the ads don't pay for themselves, but you persuade yourself it doesn't matter because your brand is being built. Which, I can promise you, is what your agency will try to persuade you. And they may convince you of it right till the moment you wake up and realise:

1. When people are persuaded enough to reply, that is "building your brand"
2. If they aren't, it is probably money down the drain.

Oh dear.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *There's an inverse relationship between slickness of phrase and reality of substance.*

### **What now?**

- *Cultivate an instinctive distrust of voguish expressions that are not immediately understandable – they're an infallible sign of intellectual vacuum.*
- *When in doubt, get a precise, unambiguous definition of what is meant. If it's not forthcoming, walk away.*

## A modest proposal

---

*Start with the truth, not what you wish to be the truth.*

Many would say that truth in advertising is an oxymoronic phrase akin to *military intelligence or political principles*. Whether or not you agree, you can turn that perception to your advantage by the simple expedient of being transparently honest. That's right: stick to the honest facts about your brand's advantages (there are some, aren't there?) and you'll stand out like a good deed in a naughty world.

This Helpful Idea is so brief and simple, I'm tempted to apologise for troubling you with it. But as I have pointed out before – and it could be the watchword of this entire book – the obvious is too often overlooked.

It is: Start with the truth, not what you wish to be the truth.

Far too many people seem unaware of the importance of this suggestion, which is prompted by something I read in a *New York Times* obituary in 1984.

*“Honesty is not only the best policy. It is rare enough nowadays to make you pleasantly conspicuous.”*

This is not only funny; it is very good advice. It was given as an example of the wit of the man below:

His name was Charles H Brower and he was chairman of the big advertising agency Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn – a name the great W C Fields said sounded like a man dragging a heavy trunk down a flight of stairs.

When Brower took over BBDO it was in a mess, and he was the architect of its renewal. Today it is one of the world's

three biggest advertising agencies.

### Tell it like it is

All too often, people say what they would like to be the truth rather than what it actually is. It always catches up with them.

Unless you are a most remarkable organisation, you aren't perfect, and admitting this wins you big brownie points with your prospect. When you admit to your shortcomings, people are far more inclined to believe other things you say.

*When you admit to your shortcomings, people are far more inclined to believe other things you say.*

Sometimes telling the truth can get you out of a tricky situation. For example, years ago I was writing copy for a slimming product when the law changed, and you had to say in your ads that such products had to be used in conjunction with a calorie-controlled diet.

My client was very worried. Now losing weight didn't sound nearly as simple and easy.

I just revised the ads, putting at the start the following:

*“Doctors agree: you can't lose weight without having a calorie-controlled diet.”*

I believe the ads did just as well or better, because most people don't believe in miracles. The mention of doctors did no harm, either.

The principle of accepting and even capitalising on your shortcomings is well worth considering. Here's another – something we wrote for a client about a year ago.

*“To be honest, you may find a slightly lower interest rate if you hunt around. That's because the loan industry is in a price war. But will there be a guarantee it will never go up? 6.8% APR is one of the lowest rates around (in fact we are committed to being amongst the very best value providers for every product we offer).”*

In other Helpful Ideas, I've given you quite a few examples of cases where people don't tell the truth, and of course criticism is easy. Whereas finding a claim that is true and differentiates you is not easy.

Waitrose's tagline – "Quality food, honestly priced" – may not seem very creative, but it is good because it is plain and honest. As is John Lewis's "Never knowingly undersold". No surprise, then, that both companies regularly score top rankings for consumer confidence and trust – and remain robustly profitable through good times and bad.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *No person or organisation is quite so disarming and engaging as those with the confidence to speak the unvarnished truth.*
- *Because relatively few marketing communications are based on honest facts, here is an easy way to be memorably different.*

### **What now?**

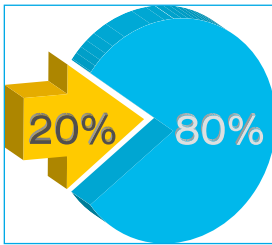
- *Interrogate your brand (that phrase again) until you uncover the real advantages of what you offer. Then speak out with all the conviction that truthfulness confers.*

## Look beyond the numbers

*Two important points about marketing statistics: 1: Study and understand them. 2: Know when to think for yourself.*

Peopled as it is with far too many indolent know-nothings, our business has an unfortunate reputation for ignorant amateurism. Planning, testing, measuring and analysis are all far too much like hard work – except, of course, for you, dear reader. However, those who are prepared to study should heed a simple word of warning: statistics can mislead. Look at the numbers, by all means. But also know when to see *beyond* them.

It's time to raise the intellectual tone of these Helpful Ideas. So let's discuss things like Fractal-Based Point Processes, which I stumbled on when looking up one of my two favourite statisticians. (You have two, Drayton?)



REVOLUTIONARY IDEA  
THE 80:20 RULE

I was going to put his extremely hirsute picture in here, but decided that a chart would be more fun and less terrifying.

Vilfredo Federico Damaso Pareto was born in the year of revolutions, 1848, and worked for the Italian Railways for much of his life. His principle – one application of which is shown above – is very useful for marketers. It stated that 80% of personal income in Italy went to 20% of the people. Pareto's 80:20 Principle applies, though not in exactly the same ratio, to almost anything you can name. For instance,

a very small proportion of you who receive these ideas read all of them – and about half of you read very few.

But Pareto can also be highly misleading, which brings me to my other favourite statistician.

Here he is: Dr W Edwards Deming. Most people have no



A PROPHET NOT HONOURED IN  
HIS COUNTRY

idea who he is because they don't study enough. However, he may have had more influence on business than anyone you can think of.

For instance, one reason why General Motors and Ford have been in such a mess is that their Japanese competitors followed his thinking, and they didn't. (Another is that they understand pathetically little about the impact of constant discounting – but that's not today's topic.)

After World War II, Deming, who had been with the US Census Bureau, was sent to Japan to help rebuild their economy. In 1950, he gave some lectures on quality control that made him a hero in Japan and influenced firms like Toyota to institute Total Quality Management (TQM).

### **Lies, damned lies, and all that**

One of Deming's "Seven Deadly Diseases of Western Management" was "Running a company on visible figures alone" because, he said, many important factors are unknown and unknowable. It leads me to today's Helpful Idea No 41: Look beyond the numbers.

I have quoted Professor Andrew Ehrenberg before – and will again.

Discussing the Pareto Principle, he told me that one temptation was to stop selling to the lower, least profitable, tranche of people, followed by excluding the lower tranche of those left, and so on. You end up with a very small number



of highly loyal customers – but far too few.

However, when looking beyond the immediate figures, it's worth remembering that some of your most valuable customers require lots of service, while some of the ones who spend less require little or none. So, apparently valuable customers may be far less profitable than you think – and vice-versa.

That's enough statistics for now, I think you'll agree. But my message is essentially this: simple measurement is not enough. A little thought helps.

### Helpful Highlights

■ *You cannot hope to succeed in marketing without taking a keen interest in statistical theory and research. Those too lazy to do so are condemned to flounder about in unproductive guesswork.*

■ *Having said that, the intelligent marketer knows when to take her nose out of the figures, survey the wider picture and apply my favourite professional modus operandi – commonsense.*

### What now?

■ *Study the greats for the principles and practices that have brought overwhelming success to their businesses through the power of systematic thought. Then consider carefully how to apply them to yours.*

## Never forget why you're here

---

*If selling is a dirty word to you, you're in the wrong job.*

Somewhere there's a website listing 34 different phrases that include the word "brand" – from brand awareness to brand zeitgeist. Yet there's really no other word for "sales". Probably because those who sell spend their time doing just that, instead of dreaming up yet more self-glorifying gobbledegook meaningless to customers if not to its own authors.

A while ago we wrote an e-mail for a firm selling investment advice. They took forever to get the damn thing out and never told us how it did, but one day they asked us to adapt it to go out to another firm's list with whom they had a deal.

We saw two interesting things when they did this.

One was an internal message saying our e-mail was outdoing anything before – which would have been nice to know. The second was a note from the other firm saying their new marketing chief was more interested in "brand values" than response, so could we make our e-mail shorter and less aggressive.

This reminded me of what the smartest guy with the biggest brand in the world said about marketing. Sergio Zyman, whom I have already quoted, was chief marketing officer of Coca-Cola. Over the course of five years, at a time when few people thought Coke could sell any more than they did already, he and his team increased its sales by 50%, and the share price quadrupled.

You couldn't imagine anyone less like a direct marketer than someone who sells Coca-Cola. Or anyone you might think more dedicated to brand values.



SERGIO ZYMAN – COKE'S  
NOT-SO-SECRET FORMULA FOR  
SUCCESS

But this man can teach a lot of direct marketers who fall for quasi-intellectual tripe about such matters. In his excellent (and funny) book *The End Of Marketing As We Know It*, Zyman says that marketers should be “the ultimate stewards of return on investment in assets”.

That is why my Helpful Idea No 42 is: Never forget why you're here.

And what are you here for? Not piffle about brand values. You may recall that I also quoted Zyman's wonderfully down-to-earth definition of the aim of marketing: “To get more people to buy more stuff more often at higher prices so the company makes more money”.

He says a lot in his book about marketers' lack of intellectual discipline, and the way they fail to set exact targets, talking vaguely about “more” sales, “more” market share, but never putting a figure on the increases – stating precisely how much more.

“Get more people to buy more stuff more often at higher prices so the company makes more money”.

As I always say – though I probably stole it from someone smarter than me – if you aim at nothing, you usually hit your mark.

### About your ads too, the customer is always right

Sergio Zyman is particularly critical of the way marketers get into the boardroom and then start being more interested in what goes on there than in their customers.

One of his best stories tells how he showed his first Coca-Cola ads in 1993 to his boss Roberto Goizueta, who reacted,

“I don’t like those ads”. “Look, Roberto,” Zyman replied, “If you’re willing to buy 100% of the volume worldwide, then I’m happy to do the advertising that you like. Otherwise I’ve got to keep doing it to those damned consumers.”

But my favourite quote on this topic comes from one of the great businessmen of the 20th century. The architect of Sears, Roebuck’s rise to become the world’s greatest retailer was Julius Rosenwald. As I mentioned in Idea No 22, he once remarked, “My ambition is to stand on both sides of the counter at once”.

I doubt if Rosenwald ever used the phrase “brand values”. He just knew that, no matter how important such things may be, “Nothing happens in business until something gets sold”.

Who said that? Thomas J Watson Jr of IBM.

Strange how the best people tend to come up with the same idea, isn’t it?

### Helpful Highlights

- *If you’re a marketing person, your prime task is to sell things. All your other activities are but means to that end. I do hope you realize that.*
- *In the immortal words of David Ogilvy (who began life as an ace door-to-door salesman), “We sell, or else”.*

### What now?

- *Never forget that the most important person in your marketing career is not your boss but your customer. Why? Because he or she buys your product. Without their continued willingness to do that, we’re all out of a job.*

## Where to get ideas

---

*Creative people swear by many different routines. Most of them amount to just getting on with it.*

Whatever will you think of next? More to the point: how will you arrange to think of it in the first place? Many a forest has been felled in search of an answer to the second question, many a magic formula proposed. But the reality is that ideas are everywhere and yours for the taking. All you need is a pair of open eyes – and perhaps (for some of us) an inspirational dram or two.

I once went to see a client who asked me where I get the ideas for these effusions.

All sorts of places, is the answer. But the question stimulated me to think a bit further about my sources of inspiration.

I love history, so I'll start with Vincenzo Lunardi, a Neapolitan who in 1784 was the first person in England to ascend in a balloon. They say that 200,000 people watched him, including King George III through a telescope from St James's Palace. Afterwards, the intrepid balloonist wrote to the King describing his adventure. Besides a dog, a cat and a pigeon, which escaped – the pigeon, I mean – Lunardi took with him a leg of chicken and a bottle of wine, admirable chap.

Sr Lunardi's bottle of wine reminds me of an old film I saw of David Ogilvy talking about how to get ideas. He said a bottle – then corrected himself: half a bottle – of good claret helped. Since I know that a whole one was more his mark, I suspect he edited the truth so as not to drive young writers and art directors to drink before their time.

I do not entirely recommend booze as the high road to inspiration, but it can be. I once drafted a mailing to get legacies for Save the Children while distinctly squiffy. It worked well for many years.

And I was completely potted when I wrote perhaps my best mailing. Professor Derek Holder, founder of the Institute of Direct Marketing, had come to show me a letter inviting potential sponsors to the launch of his new venture at the Barbican.

With the refreshing candour a truckload of wine confers, I said it was lousy because it was too impersonal, but I would revise it. Gathering my addled wits, I dictated something, edited it, and off went Derek into the late afternoon sunshine. I didn't hear from him until he asked if I was coming to the event. There was a full house. The letter had got over 70% response and Derek never looked back.

I don't know what happened to that mailing – I wish I had kept it. But I always feel pleased to have contributed, despite my unsteady condition, to one of the most beneficial things direct marketing has seen.

### **Just do it**

A professional tip: one reliable source of ideas is called “getting on with it”.

There is such a temptation to look at that accusing blank screen or sheet of paper, and then do something else. But the mere act of writing gets you going.

Trollope used to rise very early every morning – I think at 5:30 am – and write for three hours before leaving for his job at the Post Office.

Richard Strauss would be led to his study by his domineering wife with the admonition “Richard, go and compose!”. Sheridan had not written the last act of *The Rivals* on the Friday before it was due to open. They locked him in

a room with paper, ink and bottles of port until he did so.

But as I said, the demon drink is neither the ideal nor the only way to get ideas. Many people find exercise helps. I have had many of my better thoughts when riding my bike or walking my dog. Beethoven also enjoyed long hikes. Mozart liked to play billiards.

Not exactly exercise, but some years ago a French businessman lamented the growing practice in France of taking showers rather than baths, which he believed better for getting ideas.

My old client Victor Ross, former chairman of The Reader's Digest Europe and responsible for some of the most effective direct marketing innovations, had a theory about all this. He says these methods encourage circulation of the blood to the brain. Another example he gave is shaving. Many people report having had good ideas when shaving – most of them men.

In the film I mentioned earlier, David Ogilvy, with one of his wonderfully frank and old-fashioned turns of phrase, said that things sometimes came to him when “at stool”. That's a form of exercise, too. Come to think of it, it's also where I was when I had the idea for this. I guess you could call it straining for ideas.

### Helpful Highlights

■ *Great ideas can and do come from anywhere, anyone, any time. Your task is to be eternally curious, cast your net wide and know when you've landed a prize catch.*

■ *Most writers find that the best cure for a block is to write – anything. Get the ink flowing and the inspiration will surely follow.*

### What now?

■ *Note where and when your brain seems to think at its best – and expose yourself to more of it. Good news if your muse is a bottle, less good if it's an early-morning run.*



## Know what brands are about

---

*Plagued by pretentious and ignorant waffle, branding is nonetheless an essential ingredient of successful marketing.*

One regrettable consequence of the epidemic of corporate gibberish is that it has sullied one of the most important concepts in marketing: the brand. As a result the saner members of our industry, on hearing the B-word, tend to reach for their revolvers. Yet to recognize and exploit the properties and power of branding is vitally important. Let's just try to talk about it in plain English.

I fear that that, from time to time, you may find me disrespectful, even sacrilegious. “Dear, oh dear, Drayton. You're not being rude about brands are you?”

The answer is No – just about people who want to build one but don't understand anything to do with them.

Brands are hugely important. And my Helpful Idea is that you should understand them properly or you will waste a fortune finding out the hard way. This is going to be pretty heavy stuff, so fasten your seatbelts. But it will be worth it because I shall drag in Kate Moss (doesn't everyone?).



JAMES WEBB YOUNG – BRANDS ADD VALUE NOT IN THE PRODUCT

A good definition of what a brand is and does came from this man:

Jim Young was an early (1917) creative director of J Walter Thompson in Chicago – and a very successful mail-order man.

He wrote two good books; in one – *How To Become An Advertising Man* – he defined five distinct functions of advertising. I discuss these at greater length in Helpful Idea No 48, but it is the fifth function – “To add a value not in the product” – that concerns us now.

This is really about building a brand. Research shows that a significant number of people admit they will pay more for an identical product because it is a well-regarded brand – even though they know it is no better in itself.

In a talk I have given in several countries, I suggest that a brand confers the following valuable business benefits:

- You can profit more by selling more items at the same price; or by selling the same number of items at a higher price.
- You get more repeat purchases and customers stay with you longer. This means that their lifetime value (how much profit you make while they remain a customer) is greater.
- In addition, if you make and sell more, economies of scale mean you may undercut and eventually kill the competition. You can invest more to get or keep a customer, and out-gun your competitor at every turn.
- Lastly, people forgive your mistakes more easily. They trust you to put things right. The strength of the Virgin brand is one reason why they’ve got away with such dire train services without anyone being lynched.

You do not build a brand by endlessly parroting some vacuous slogan. You build it by thinking – and acting – consistently on what you have determined by thinking.

### **Awareness helps - but only so far**

The lowest level of brand-building is awareness. We prefer to deal with names we know. Even ones we have merely heard of, somewhere.

If you know absolutely nothing about what you are buying you will probably choose the name you have heard most. But awareness alone does not guarantee sales. Everyone knew who Adolf Hitler was – but they didn't all buy his proposition.

Often the only things of real value in a takeover deal are the customer database and the brands. When Volkswagen bought Rolls-Royce, the brand alone (not the products or factories or people) was valued at \$260 million.

In many markets, the brand is critical because your products and services are virtually identical to all the others. They have become commoditized. But the time to start building a brand is before that happens – not after.

And although I don't intend to go into this now, Professor Andrew Ehrenberg of South Bank University, whom I've already mentioned twice in these pieces, discovered with his colleagues that as a rule the brands with the most customers are the strongest ones.

So what I have quoted before from Sergio Zyman, about selling more things more often to more people, is more relevant than what people wrongly imagine builds brands – which is lots of image advertising.

### **Assume the position**

Everything begins with establishing the right positioning. And that starts with you and your thinking.

What is positioning? In my book *Commonsense Direct Marketing* I quote the philosopher William James, who said “There is very little difference between one man and another; but what little there is, is very important.”

Positioning reflects your brand's “personality”. This in turn

derives from how you do what you do – and how you communicate.

Positioning is finding your unique place in customers' minds. Then you do all you can to reinforce that. And your brand derives from that. Your brand will prosper only if you act and communicate in a way that matches your positioning.

Another way to think about positioning is to ask what goes through people's minds when they think about buying from you.

- Do I like this firm and its people?
- Do I like the way they do things?
- What is different or better about them?

People like to be associated with success – with famous people, with personalities – and famous brands. “What does this firm and its products say about me when I do business with them?”

Why did a 15-second appearance by Kate Moss fill half Oxford Street? That is why.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Brands and branding matter, despite the confusion and doubletalk that often surround them.*
- *A well-positioned and well-communicated brand helps you sell more, raise prices, cut costs and corner markets.*

### What now?

- *What is your place now in people's minds? What would you like it to be?*

## How do I look?

---

*It's a noisy, cluttered, look-at-me world out there; you had better dress to kill.*

Unless you sell whale foreskins or tickets to Mars, you're probably not on your own. The shelves in your marketplace groan with enticing alternatives to whatever you offer, so that your first priority is merely to be noticed. One of the best ways to do that is to make things easy for your customers, many of whom secretly want you to decide for them. With the right look for your brand, that's a wish you can readily grant.

Talking about brands, one of the simplest, most important factors in building a brand is recognition.

People are lazy and drowning in choice. They hate having to think or decide, especially about things that don't really matter. No wonder, when even if you want to buy something as simple as toilet paper in a supermarket you have a whole wall of options to consider.

I have noted frequently that anything that makes things easier or quicker is almost bound to succeed.

Good examples go back as far as Kodak in 1904 – “You press the button, we do the rest” – and are as recent as price comparison services on the Internet.

Making choice quick and easy starts with the name. For instance, have you read a paperback called *Air Babylon*? Not a great work, but enough to make you worry the next time you fly. And – once you realise how easily they can get their own back – to be very nice to the cabin attendants. (I particularly recommend the part on the deeply unpleasant

things they may do to your food if you're not nice, but am too well-bred to go into detail about the farting in the customers' faces technique.)

This book is part of a series with the Babylon name – *Fashion Babylon* and *Hotel Babylon* are two others. When you choose one of these titles you know what you're going to get: sex, sordid revelations, lots of chuckles and a few things to worry about.

### First impressions count

The name may matter, but the look is perhaps even more vital. That's because visual things are in one way more powerful than words. Remember what pops into your mind if I say "rabbit"? The word? Or an image of a little furry animal?

A picture will rarely say more than a thousand words, but it will speak faster and remain in the memory longer. You doubt me? Then imagine you have just picked up your post. Now glance at the envelope below for a split second – as you would when picking it up – then stop looking:

Now, what did you notice about that envelope?



Unless you are unusually observant, when you looked at it that fast you saw the border which says it's from overseas. And you may have thought it had a nice stamp.

Now look again. It's not from overseas, is it? And the stamp was one we designed, not a real one.

Incidentally, my friend the fabled copywriter Bill Jayme said the envelope is like “the hot-pants on the hooker”. It aims to make its contents stand out and give you a clue about what's inside.

The envelope I showed above did the trick for a mailing I wrote which did well here and in the US. Surprisingly, the response rate in both countries was almost the same – surprising because American customers get several times more direct mail than we do.

### **The rules, and when to break them**

But to return to my point, since visuals are so powerful it is vital that your messages have a consistent look. This makes things easy for your customers. Ideally, messages should be recognisable even without the brand name. (True of, for instance, Volkswagen ads.)

The look should not be a strait-jacket, however – which is what many “brand guidelines”, produced by vastly expensive design firms, offer you. Those excessively prescriptive rules can have disastrous consequences by, for instance, obliging you to use a typeface in letters that makes them look cold and unlike proper correspondence.

Years ago when I handled Xerox, their design manual insisted that the brand name appear at the top right of every ad – which happens to be precisely the last place the eye goes to naturally.

Be consistent, by all means – but don't be rigid.

### **Marketing on a wing and a prayer**

*Talk of rules brings to mind something called “Rules*

*Of The Air*”, from Australian Aviation magazine. As it was very funny, I sent it to my ex-partner Glenmore Trenear-Harvey, who was ejected from the RAF when young for doing something naughty in a jet over the M1. Then I noticed how many of the rules apply to our business (or any other, come to think of it).

For instance, Rule 1 is “Every takeoff is optional. Every landing is mandatory.” In other words, you’re not forced to try that bright idea, but if you must, make sure you do it right. The same thought emerges from Rule 3: “Flying isn’t dangerous. Crashing is what’s dangerous.”

I like Rule 9 which suggests a little study – so rare in our industry: “Learn from the mistakes of others. You won’t live long enough to make all of them yourself.” A similar thought underlies Rule 16: “You start with a bag full of luck and an empty bag of experience. The trick is to fill the bag of experience before you empty the bag of luck.” That’s a bit like Rule 20 which I always thought was invented by Walter Wriston, former CEO of Citibank: “Good judgment comes from experience. Unfortunately, the experience usually comes from bad judgment.”

I could go on about these brilliant little gems, so I will:

- Rule 12 – “Never let an aircraft take you somewhere your brain didn’t get to five minutes earlier” – endorses planning.
- Rule 13 suggests caution: “Stay out of clouds. The silver lining everyone keeps talking about might be another airplane going in the opposite direction. Reliable sources also report that mountains have been known to hide out in clouds.”
- Put no faith in easy answers, says Rule 15. “There are three simple rules for making a smooth landing.



Unfortunately no one knows what they are.”

- And as Rule 22 wisely states, “Keep looking around. There’s always something you’ve missed.”

I don’t even drive a car, but with the help of *Australian Aviation’s* shrewd advice I can see myself as a latter-day Biggles. I already fly by the seat of my pants for much of the time, as it is.

### Helpful Highlights

- *In a world of limitless consumer choice, the first challenge for your brand is to be recognised.*
- *A distinctive name can help, but even more powerful is your look. A vivid, unique and memorable visual identity makes it easy for your customers to remember you – and choose you.*

### What now?

- *See that your brand speaks loud and proud – but even more importantly, that it does so with a consistent appearance and tonality wherever it touches its audience. No-one trusts a social butterfly.*

## You get what you pay for

---

*If you want results, give people the time and money to deliver them.*

If I didn't know good copy can make big money, I'd take up drinking full-time. But the fact is that successful copywriters are among the highest-paid individuals in any business. Why? Because enlightened clients realise the value of their work and pay them out of the profits they generate. Which, when you think about it, makes far more sense than shelling out peanuts for worthless crap.

How d'you like the sound of this? I read it and wept.

*“At a 5% royalty, my income from a single ad often exceeds \$1,000,000. How long does a winning piece of copy take me to write? Less than two weeks.”*

The man who wrote that is Ted Nicholas, who may have been the highest-paid copywriter in America. One or two others lay claim to the crown - Clayton Makepeace, for instance - but who's arguing when it comes to that kind of money?

Now contrast those words with what I heard recently from two highly competent English writers I know.

*“20 years ago I was getting £2,500 for a mail pack. Now I'd be dancing in the street if I got that.”*

*“People are moaning at paying more than £1,000 for a mail pack.”*

Well, as more than one person has observed, if you pay peanuts, what you end up with is a lot of monkeys - and very

few Shakespearean masterpieces.



INFINITE MONKEYS + INFINITE PEANUTS DO NOT A SONNET MAKE

But having delivered myself of that bit of waggery, let me make a serious point.

### **Virtuous circle vs vicious circle**

Ted Nicholas makes big money because he gives people what they want: results.

They are so keen to get them that they pay royalties – a common practice in the US. So Ted can afford to spend two weeks on a mailing. It's a virtuous circle. If you have enough time, you're more likely to create a winner. The more winners you create, the more people pay, the more time and money you get – and so on.

But some people in this country do get fancy money for creative work. One agency less than half a mile from my offices was charging £15,000 for mailing packs five years ago – and if you see their gorgeous offices, you know they need the money. What might surprise you is that their work was so disastrous that even their big client's board noticed it eventually and fired the marketing director.

How do people like this get away with it? I'll tell you.

Because strangely enough, results are not what some people want. I don't just mean those impressed by smart offices or

who like a lot of entertaining.

It's more complicated than that.

One marketing man with a huge company told my partner that good results meant their budgets were cut. And you may recall my story about the marketing director whose love of brand values far exceeded any trivial concerns about response.

And here is the start of a vicious circle. People are chosen for reasons other than results. Then those on high decide, quite reasonably, that direct marketing doesn't work. So next time it's harder to get the DM budgets.

What this Helpful Idea amounts to is: If you want results, give people the time and money to deliver them.

#### **Virtue unrewarded**

Here's another reason why I sometimes cry into my beer.

For over two years, the control mailing and door-drop for our biggest client, who sends them out by the million, have both been ours.

They keep testing them against other people's efforts; nobody has ever beaten us. Their second-best producer is also ours and it looks like their third-best will be, too. If only we were on a royalty!

That is what I call a return on investment. But you won't get it for £1,000 – or £2,500, for that matter.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Good copywriters (the ones whose words get results and sell your products) are hard to find. Once you have, grapple them to your bosom with hoops of steel.*
- *When you invest – yes, invest – in good copy, you get your money back in spades. Cut corners and you will spend less; but every penny will be money down the drain.*

### What now?

- *Would you shop for a brain surgeon on price? Nor would I.*
- *Clever, effective people in any field have invested time and money in the skills they offer you. Now it's your turn.*

## Imitate, don't innovate

---

*Until you know how to do better, trying to be different for its own sake is a dangerous game.*

Original! Creative! Brilliant! These and other insults are justly heaped on much of today's advertising effusions by those few who properly understand the profession. Those few who know that the pursuit of original creative brilliance wins worthless awards in precisely inverse proportion to bankable profits.

If you study this business (you do study it, don't you?), you are probably aware that one of the most influential advertising campaigns ever was for Volkswagen in the 1960s, created by Doyle, Dane, Bernbach in New York. It was remarkable for two reasons.

- First, at a time when Americans all drove big gas-guzzlers, it sold a small car.
- Second, because it treated readers as intelligent, fairly sophisticated people.

These two things made Volkswagen a hit among a select number of Americans – those who were, or saw themselves as, intelligent and fairly sophisticated.

The rest just kept buying big cars. Anyhow, here is perhaps the most famous VW ad of that long-running campaign:



TINY CAR, HUGE IDEA

Few people understood why DDB's Volkswagen advertising was so good. They just noticed it was original.

As a campaign, it was enormously successful and sold thousands of the rather clunky, old-fashioned Beetle cars. As an example to marketers, however, it also inspired far too many people to think that the secret of success was to seek originality at all costs – to be “creative”. This led to an outpouring of irrelevant tripe that afflicts us still.

In fact, every time you see an incomprehensible TV ad, you know who to blame.

As Bill Bernbach himself noted, “All this talk of creativity has me worried. I fear lest we keep the creativity and lose the sell.”

The art director responsible for the famous ad above – and many others – was Helmut Krone. One day he asked a young

copywriter “What do you think is more important? To copy – or do your own thing?”

“To do my own thing,” was the predictable reply.

Krone’s immediate response was probably unprintable.

*“All this talk of creativity has me worried. I fear lest we keep the creativity and lose the sell.”*

Rosser Reeves, who devised the concept of the Unique Selling Proposition, said, “Originality is the most dangerous word in the

advertiser’s lexicon”.

So let me borrow Helpful Idea No 47 from what Helmut Krone eventually advised: Until you know how to do better, copy.

This applies not only to creative ideas but also to business generally. When you are trying to do something – anything – start by looking at what other successful people are doing. Put your store in a similar spot. Run your ads in the same media. Offer the same level of service.

Then try to improve.

This is not always true; nothing ever is. But a good saying applies: “The cowboys got the arrows; the farmers got the land”.



### Helpful Highlights

- *You've heard it before and you'll hear it again, at least from me: the sole purpose of advertising is to sell. Whether it's original, creative or indeed brilliant is simply not the point.*
- *Park your pride and consider this likelihood: someone has already had the best idea you're ever going to have.*

### What now?

- *Your competitors can be your own (free) business test lab. Take a good look at where they have succeeded and where they failed – you'll profit by their experience.*

## Ever asked yourself why you advertise?

---

*Before you invest your millions, it makes sense to be clear about what you aim to accomplish.*

This book contains many an impertinent suggestion on how to market and advertise your brand. But here's a more profound question: why do you do it at all? There are numerous possible answers, some of them detailed below. The trick is to identify the ones that apply to your campaign because, if you don't know what you want to achieve, you certainly won't achieve it.

You may have noticed that I love quotations. They are distilled wisdom – or points of view, perhaps, since they often contradict each other. Two examples are, “Out of sight, out of mind” and “Absence makes the heart grow fonder”.

Consider the things you buy.

Does absence make the heart grow fonder? Absolutely! When I went to Shanghai a friend asked me to bring some English tea – a bit of a joke when you consider that China is where tea originated.

And is out of sight out of mind? Absolutely! That's why



WILLIAM WRIGLEY JR –  
HIS IDEAS ARE ALSO WORTH  
CHEWING OVER

reminder advertising matters. Its importance is illustrated by a story told about William Wrigley Jr, the chewing gum man. Here he is, looking remarkably smug for a man responsible for littering the world's pavements with sticky

gloop – and quite young for a 62-year-old.

Someone on a flight once asked him how important advertising was. He replied, “What do you think would happen if the engines on this plane fell off?”.

That’s one thought for you: those who tell more, sell more.

Look around and you will notice that the successful firms are those that advertise most – if by advertising you mean any method, such as public relations or product placement, that promotes you effectively. And that line I just thought up, though someone else undoubtedly said it before – “Those who tell more, sell more” – applies to content very often, too, as I’ve already pointed out. Say more, more often.

#### **“Opportunity favours the prepared mind”**

William Wrigley Jr’s father made soap, and his son sold it in Chicago. To get business, young Wrigley offered premiums. One was baking powder. It seemed more popular than soap, so he switched to the baking powder business.

Then one day in 1892, he got the idea of offering two packs of chewing gum with each can of baking powder. Once again the premium seemed more promising than the product. So he switched to chewing gum.

The moral was well put by Louis Pasteur: “Opportunity favours the prepared mind”.

It is also worth reflecting on the kind of advertising I mentioned earlier – reminder advertising – and returning to a man I have written about many times before, James Webb Young.

In a column I once wrote for *Marketing* magazine I poked fun at whoever had decided to invest in a barrage balloon over the Thames near where I live in Chelsea with the word

MasterCard on it.

I said that if a single person who could see that balloon didn't know the name MasterCard, I would be astounded. MasterCard's job was, and remains, to tell people why they should choose MasterCard rather than Visa – not merely to “create awareness”. They already have that. Stupid.

When Wrigley advertise they don't just put their name in lights; they remind people of the reasons for buying.

So Helpful idea, No. 49 is this: Consider why you are advertising.

Let me remind you of the five advertising functions James Webb Young listed:

- To familiarise
- To remind
- To spread news
- To overcome inertia
- To add a value not in the product

I have already discussed familiarisation, which we nowadays call building awareness, and the last, which is brand building.

Let us consider the others.

### **To remind**

Reminder advertising is important for things like soft drinks, snacks and, yes, chewing gum.

Small money is involved, but people buy them frequently. That's why in the UK, marketers talk about FMCG – Fast Moving Consumer Goods.

If we are reminded at the right time, or reassured that we're making the right choice, or given an extra reason for buying, that can be all it takes to make a sale or persuade us to pay a little extra.

Good examples of reassurance are advertising by people

like Heinz or Gillette. You can see a good example of being given another reason for buying every time you see people drinking Coca Cola at breakfast. That was not an obvious idea until it was promoted by them a few years ago.

While familiarising is for new products, reminders are for products that already exist. Reminders become extremely important in-store.

### **To spread news**

Here's something from Stanley Resor, who built up the J Walter Thompson agency:

*“It is the function of the advertising agency to gather and disseminate and distribute commercial news just as the press does”.*

Owen D Young, founder of RCA, asked, “Does the advertisement make the reader a better informed buyer?” You, the advertiser, know all about what you sell – but does your customer?

People use newspapers, magazines, TV and radio largely to get news. The last research I saw said 92% of Internet users log on for information.

John Caples found that the second most effective type of headline gives news – only those that focus on benefits do better. So ads with news of a benefit usually do best.

### **To overcome inertia**

We know we should do many things – but we don't:

- We should work harder
- We should save more for our old age
- We should buy new tyres for our cars
- We should buy insurance
- We should study more

- We should eat or drink in moderation.

In overcoming people's reluctance to act, a strongly negative approach doesn't work. Frightening and lecturing depresses and annoys them.

So it is not enough to say "If you don't get new tyres you'll crash" or "How much profit is your business losing?" – a very common approach. Equally counterproductive are "If you don't save you'll die destitute" or "You'll have a heart attack if you don't exercise".

The trick is to combine the fear with a strong dose of benefit. Not easy. I sometimes suspect that's why most of my clients are in financial services, especially insurance.

### Helpful Highlights

- *Good advertising works. More of it works even better.*
- *One of its most important functions is to remind your customers why they should buy your brand, each time they make the choice.*

### What now?

- *Ask yourself precisely what you need to say in your ads. "Raising awareness" is usually a cop-out, meaning "We haven't a clue".*

## “Help for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing”

---

*Tempting though it is to distract yourself with side-issues, your focus should be on getting your core business right.*

For some people and their organisations, talking about a job is infinitely preferable to actually carrying it out. Less work, more glory. Yet customers want precisely the opposite: a simple task done properly. It's a testament to the proliferation of self-regarding corporate puffery that such a straightforward thing is now vanishingly rare. On the other hand, what a gap in the market for those prepared to deliver – in every sense of that word.

Just kidding about the headline – you'll see why in a minute.

Recently, after scrupulous research over many months, my partner Marta decided to buy a new flat-screen TV, which she did through Amazon. Amazon used Parcelforce – “Proud winners of Business in The Community's Healthy Workplaces Award 2006” – whose organisers also seemed rather excited because “Hitwise have recognised our online developments this year”.

It's good to know that all these people are slaving away on our behalf, in such splendid environments and with such immodestly-phrased success, (though you may wonder what “on-line developments” actually are).

It was their touching attention to things that don't really matter to most of their customers that prompted my heading.

If you want to talk to them there is even a text phone number for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

But what if, like Marta, you simply want to get a TV set delivered?

What if they're so useless they can't tell you even vaguely when it is likely to arrive – just any time between 8:00 am and 6 pm on a certain day?

And what if they couldn't even get the day right – so you spend 10 hours waiting and it still hasn't arrived?

*Hey, guess what,  
Parcelforce?  
I don't want  
Internet advice.  
I want you to  
deliver things.*

Then, what if the much-praised on-line developments tell you it's just arrived at 7:34 pm – which you know is a lie because you and two other people are looking out of the window?

And what if, after you (eventually) get a reply from somebody on the phone, during a call you're paying for, they confirm that they do indeed only deliver – or in this case fail to deliver – between 8 and 6?

What then?

Well, you hang around the next morning till it does arrive.

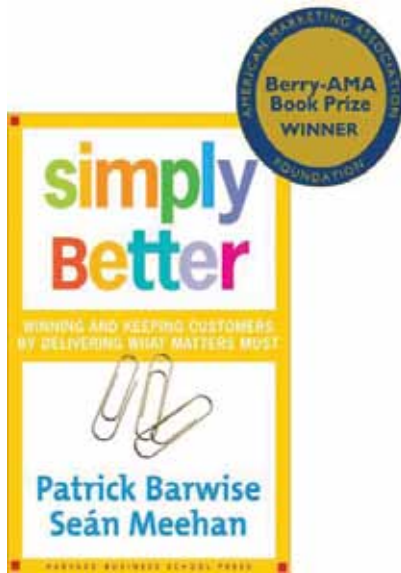
Then you get an e-mail saying “Thank you for using our website” with an apology, kind regards and of course details of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing phone number I mentioned, all signed by an “Internet Advisor”.

Hey, guess what, Parcelforce? I don't want Internet advice. There are plenty of people screwing me around on-line already, and they need no help from you.

I want you to deliver things. That's all you have to do. That's why Amazon (mistakenly, it seems) use you.

I'd like to sue the useless layabouts for taking Marta away from what she does extremely well and gets paid for – write copy. But instead I'll just mention the book below.





BACK TO BASICS – AND GET THEM RIGHT

*Simply Better* has a modest proposal to make. Try and do a proper job before you do anything else or blether on about your irrelevant awards and your pleasant environment. How hard is that to understand?

Oddly enough many years ago Parcelforce were clients of mine, but they were then called Post Office Parcels.

They changed their name and spent a lot of time, money and executive angst over their new image. I used to wonder whether they should have invested it in doing a better job.

Now I have no doubt.

### Helpful Highlights

- *It's seductively easier to spend time and talk on anything but the mundane practicalities of simply getting the job done.*
- *Yet if you focus relentlessly on the quality and delivery of your product or service, you will stand out from the rest and profit accordingly.*

### What now?

- *Put yourself in the place of your customer – yes, that old saw – and you'll soon realize what really matters to them. (Hint: it's unlikely to be your latest industry award or your passionate commitment to staff welfare.)*

## Keep it real

---

*Using everyday analogies to formulate your marketing plans can help keep your feet securely on the ground.*

The parallel universe that is Marketing is so inflated with big talk and hot air that it's all too easy to drift comfortably amidst abstract notions that bear ever less relation to how things actually are. Which might all be very entertaining but for one inconvenient truth: your customers live in the real world.

Before I begin, I want to revisit Helpful Idea No 10. It was about the importance of the word “you”.

I felt almost apologetic when writing it, as you might think that any good marketer knows you must talk about customers' interests, not your own.

But to be honest, I don't feel too apologetic now, because since then I have looked at a selection of the websites run by companies that readers of my various effusions work for.

The overwhelming majority focus on the company, not the customer.

They almost all base their approach on that deadening phrase “About us” and the content of most welcome pages is inward-looking and boastful: “We are the leaders in...”, “Award-winning performers at...” – that sort of stuff.

Now, I realise this may not even be your area, that it makes the people who run it feel good, and that it is often suggested by website designers who know less than the square root of \*\*\*\*–all about marketing. I also realise people want to be reassured that they're dealing with a sound firm – but only after they've been sold on the benefits you offer.

## It's not about you

Just think how most people come across your website. Nowadays it's the first place they go after you've attracted their interest – when they're wondering whether they want to go any further.

Here's a good way to look at it.

When you go to a site, it's as though you've just walked into a store. You look for a helpful sales person. How would you react if you said, "I'm looking for a widget" and got this reply:

*"We're wonderful. We're the best store in Oxford Street. Would you like to read our mission statement? The board loves it. Would you like to meet our management team? Like to read their biographies? See their pictures? How about the chairman's report?"*

Crazy, or what?

Well, I'm sorry, but that's what many of you are doing. If your company has money to burn like this, please send it to me. I'll turn it into profit for you. But to be serious, this leads me to this Helpful Idea: Try to find a real-life comparison with what you are doing

Don't look at marketing as divorced from the real world – which is all too easy to do if you spend a lot of time sitting in meetings talking about strategy. Try to imagine an analogy with real life, just as I did a few moments ago.

To make my point clearer, here are another two examples.

1. Suppose someone does you a favour. What do you do? You say "Thank you". That's why thank-you letters – which I mentioned in a previous Helpful Idea – make such sense.
2. Or suppose you throw a party. What would you like to know? You'd like to know if people enjoyed it.

That is why questionnaires after events can be a good idea.

Like so many other things in life, marketing is simple – if you allow it to be.

### **Helpful Highlights**

- *An excellent way to clarify your thoughts is to look for a parallel to your marketing activity out in the everyday world.*
- *One major benefit of doing so is to be reminded of what your customers actually want from you – as opposed to what you may be inclined to give them.*

### **What now?**

- *Step away from the abstract notions and high-falutin concepts that infest our business and back into the real world. What makes sense there, makes sense in marketing – commonsense, in fact.*

## Don't talk. Act.

*These Helpful Ideas are worth nothing if they don't prompt you to improve your results.*

If you're not given to reading books backwards (as I am), this is goodbye for now. I hope you have found a few of these many words helpful, as promised by their somewhat presumptuous title. Writing them has certainly reminded me how to do marketing better. But I have one parting Helpful Idea for you, a single last entreaty, and it is this: put down this book, square your shoulders and get doing.

The poet, artist, film-maker and all-round *enfant terrible* Jean Cocteau once began a speech by saying: "I have said this many times before, but nobody listened, so I will say it again".

Like Cocteau – who, incidentally, looks here how I feel most of the time – I spend my life repeating things that seem obvious to me yet go on being neglected. In that spirit, this may be a good moment to mention three of the topics I've covered in this book – then offer you my closing Helpful Idea.

First, let me reveal what the three most popular Ideas seem to be, based on which were most opened when sent out as emails. They were, in order:

- Helpful Idea No 2: "Salesmanship in Print", which offered a PDF of Claude Hopkins' book *Scientific Advertising*.



JEAN COCTEAU SEEMS TO HAVE EVERYTHING IN HAND

- Helpful Idea No 1: “Keep at it until they give in”, which suggested you take five minutes a day to think up new reasons to talk to your prospects and customers.
- A third Helpful Idea (not included in this book) which offered creative work at half-price to the first five people who replied.

Did you notice that two of the three Ideas feature incentives, reinforcing the truth in the old phrase “What’s in it for me”? That’s especially interesting as the other was the very first of these Ideas, which I guess people would naturally open more keenly than later ones.

But Helpful Idea No 1 was about something I consider so important that I’m going to reiterate it now. It addressed the need to do things rather than sit around thinking about them.

In that piece I told a true story of two firms we did some work for. After we wrote a mailing for one, they took six months to do nothing except have meetings. Who knows, maybe they’re still yacking away.

The other firm gets on with things. I’ve seen them put mailings out in under one week. They are the leaders in the field. The others, the slothful one, are big – but they won’t stay that way.

People waffle on about the “entrepreneur” society. They idolise people like Richard Branson – with whom I had some contact, with a few lessons I’ll recount on another occasion.

But they don’t act like Richard Branson.

Most people prefer talking rather than doing. And the bigger the firm, I find, the more they talk and the less they do.

*If you do one significant thing better each year you have a fair chance of outdoing your competitors. If you do two, you almost certainly will. If you do three, you’ll wipe the floor with them.*

I suspect this is because nobody can be fired for something that never happened. That's why most businesses don't improve. It's also why most people are employees, not employers. Yet if you do one significant thing better each year you have a fair chance of outdoing your competitors. If you do two, you almost certainly will. If you do three, you'll wipe the floor with them.

You don't have to be a genius to beat the competition. You have to act. Or as I quoted Woody Allen saying, "Eighty percent of success is showing up".

I have no idea which three of the Helpful Ideas in this book made the deepest impression on you. But please do me a favour.

Read them again, perhaps. Think about them, by all means. Talk about them, even.

But above all: act on them.

Today, if not this very minute.



## Reading & Resources

---

Are you a marketeur? I hope not – that’s my word for an amateur in our business. As I trust this book makes clear, your success in marketing depends on knowledge, not hunches – facts, not fancies – and that means doing your homework.

But there’s good news here. First, there are all sorts of excellent books and articles for you to choose from, the best of which I have listed below. Many are a rattling good read. Some of them are by me. All have invaluable lessons to offer. You’ll learn, as I did, in a few hours what their authors took a lifetime to discover and perfect.

I have also recommended a selection of websites that I believe you will find exceptionally useful. I do.

The other welcome news – to bear in mind when the prospect of studying the literature rates a poor second to sinking a few beers – is that you are rapidly transforming yourself into that rarest of creatures: a professional, well-informed marketer. Your projects will outperform those of the amateurs by many orders of magnitude. Your efforts will be richly rewarded by clients who profit by your results. And your career will go from strength to satisfying strength.

Or your money back.\*

\* See your 100% Money-back Guarantee, page xx.

## Reading list

---

*Books by Drayton Bird:*

*Commonsense Direct and Digital Marketing* Kogan Page 2007

A practical yet entertaining guide to the intricacies of direct marketing. “If you read no other book on direct marketing you should find the time to read this one” – *Direct Marketing International* “Read it and re-read it. It contains the knowledge of a lifetime.”  
David Ogilvy.

*How to Write Sales Letters that Sell* Kogan Page 2002

Anyone involved in writing business communications will benefit from this valuable text whether you’re selling your services to customers and prospects, or just writing internal correspondence. Practical examples, tricks, tips and techniques to get better results from your mailings. “I guarantee that anybody reading this book and acting on any one of its many telling lessons will recoup the price many, many times over” – R. Heller, founder, *Management Today*.

*Marketing Insights and Outrages* Kogan Page 2000

A collection of articles first published in *Marketing*, Britain’s leading magazine for the advertising and marketing community. “Much is talked and written about strategy. At length. My simple strategy would be, buy this book, heed its lessons and gain yourself a little competitive advantage in the process” – Barry Jenner, General Manager, Marketing, Gallaher.

### **Drayton Bird recommends:**

*Broadcast Direct Marketing* Alvin Eicoff, McGraw-Hill  
Contemporary 2001

The late Al Eicoff was the man when it came to direct response TV. When he wrote this he had already been responsible for over 20,000 radio and TV commercials. The book doesn't just give you some good examples, it explains things that fey creatives tend to ignore blissfully - but which are far more important than profit and loss. Full of good stuff.

*Confessions of an Advertising Man* David Ogilvy, Southbank Publishing 2004

There is considerable overlap between this early work and *Ogilvy on Advertising*. Nevertheless this has probably had more influence on more people than any book written on this subject, probably because it is part instruction manual and part success story. After 40 years, I can still turn to almost any page and be reminded of something worthwhile.

*The End of Advertising as We Know It* Sergio Zyman,  
Wiley 2004

This book, with its companion – *The End of Marketing As We Know It* – is a real tonic for those nauseated by the pretentious drivel which passes for thought in the advertising and marketing business. Zyman took Coca-Cola at a time when no-one thought it could do better and in six years helped quadruple its share price and boost its profits by 50%. Here, with no perfunctory bows to politeness, he analyses what's wrong with the industry - and how to get it right.

*The End of Marketing as We Know It* Sergio Zyman,  
HarperBusiness 1999

*The Great Brain Robbery* Ray Considine & Murray Raphael,  
Rosebud Books 1987

Murray Raphael is a brilliant and inspiring speaker – and a most excellent marketer. This is good, practical, down-to-earth stuff, mercifully free of meaningless jargon.

*How to Advertise* Ken Roman, Jane Maas & Martin  
Nisenholtz 2005

My old boss Ken Roman, with two associates, had the splendid idea of covering something so obvious that it had been overlooked as far as I can see by everybody for the previous 60 years. In this book you discover what you should do and what you must know if you wish to commission, run and evaluate advertising successfully. Who else, for instance, will tell you such practical things as how many words there should be on a poster and how to evaluate a television script properly?

*How to Write a Good Advertisement* Victor O Schwab,  
Wilshire Book Co 1985

“Schwab and Beatty” was one of the truly successful direct response advertising agencies of the 1930s and 1940s. The advice given in this book, which is clear and concise, is as relevant now as when first written because – as John Caples observed – “Times change; people don’t”. You will benefit as I did from reading and re-reading the list of 100 tested headlines in the book, which I still refer to when looking for the starting point for new ideas.

*The Jelly Effect: How to Make your Communications Stick*  
Andy Bounds, Capstone 2010

The many pitfalls of PowerPoint presentations are well enumerated by a friend I learned a lot from. Good, gloriously simple – and mercifully short.

*Million Dollar Mailing\$* Denny Hatch, Bonus Books 2001

Einstein said “Example is not just the best way to teach; it is the only way to teach”. This book illustrates and analyses the most successful mailings in America. That is, those mailings which have been unbeaten in tests for the longest period. Better still, it analyses the characteristics which leading direct mail experts believe made the mailings successful. This is the book I probably refer to more than any other.

*New Maxi Marketing* Stan Rapp and Thomas L Collins, McGraw-Hill 1996

The first edition of this book was sent to me by David Ogilvy for comment. Its importance can't be overstated: it was the first intelligent attempt to point out that the business of getting responses and of building a brand should not be separate but complementary. Since then a number of people have prospered by promoting this idea, though to this day the great empire of the ignorant continue to imagine that the two have nothing in common.

*Ogilvy on Advertising* David Ogilvy, Prion 2007

There is no better book on the subject of advertising and certainly none better written. It is full of memorable and amusing examples. Anybody who hopes to succeed in this business is making their life needlessly miserable and frustrating if they fail to read

and refer to it frequently. You can pick it up and turn to any page sure that you will find a striking example, a witty observation or laconic put-down.

*Profitable Direct Marketing* Jim Kobs, McGraw-Hill  
Contemporary 1991

Jim Kobs was one of the pioneers in modern direct marketing. This book explains simply how to start, run and improve a direct marketing programme. In some ways the part of the book I find most valuable is an analysis of campaigns by 11 successful direct marketing firms. A very good book for beginners in this business.

*Scientific Advertising*, Claude Hopkins

Blissfully short, easy to read and to the point, full of gems. All the modern giants of advertising – and particularly the US Internet gurus – swear by this book. David Ogilvy claimed it changed his life, and that “nobody should serve in any advertising function until they have read this book five times”. A must-read for anybody serious about marketing or advertising.

For your free download of *Scientific Advertising*, visit [www.draytonbirdcommonsense.com](http://www.draytonbirdcommonsense.com), register your details and download *Scientific Advertising* and other valuable material, free of charge.

*Secrets of Successful Direct Mail* Richard V Benson,  
McGraw-Hill Contemporary 1990

If all you ever read are the 31 rules which the author says he found through painful experience always apply, and you use that knowledge, your investment in this book will probably be repaid a thousand-fold.

Benson's most famous statement, which others lay claim to, is always worth remembering: "There are only two rules in direct marketing. Rule 1: test everything. Rule 2: Refer to Rule 1".

*Simply Better* Patrick Barwise & Sean Meehan, Harvard Business Press 2004

Professors Barwise and Meehan remind us that spending more time on practical improvements that customers might like, rather than superficial tinkering, will serve you much better. A bloody good, readable, sensible book in a world of smoke and mirrors.

*The Solid Gold Mailbox* Walter Weintz, Wiley 1987

They may have lost their way recently, but many once regarded The Reader's Digest as the university of direct marketing. Walter Weintz was one of the creative forces behind their success and if you want to understand his mind and learn from his achievements, this book is an excellent investment.

*Successful Direct Marketing Methods* Bob Stone & Ron Jacobs, McGraw-Hill Contemporary 2001

Long regarded as the bible of direct marketing and how to go about it. I cannot say it is full of laughs. It contains something much more valuable: wisdom and the fruit of a long, influential career in the industry.

*A Technique for Producing Ideas* James Webb Young, McGraw-Hill Professional 2003

This early creative director at J Walter Thompson, Chicago deserves to be far better known. His is the only book I know of which explains how you can get better ideas. Since I find getting any idea a pain, it is

difficult to overstate its value. Where others divide the subject simplistically into “Awareness” and “Brand-building” with the occasional nod in the direction of direct response, James Webb Young looks at the subject in a far more sophisticated and intelligent manner.

*Tested Advertising Methods* John Caples, Prentice Hall 1998

David Ogilvy told me, one night over dinner, that he and Rosser Reeves – who first formulated the USP concept – agreed that Caples was the person whose work had influenced them most. I used to read this book every year for a while. I would probably be doing a better job now if I reverted to that practice. Full of interesting and wise observations on what works and what doesn’t creatively.

*Writing that Works* Ken Roman and Joel Raphelson,  
Collins Reference 2000

Amongst the greatest barrier to happiness in business is the inability of almost everybody to write coherently, confronting us instead with mountains of ill-thought-out, poorly expressed, illiterate drivel. This is the best book I know of which tries to guide people in the direction of clarity, brevity and effectiveness – for, after all, business writing aims to get results, not just communicate.



## Resources

---

*How can we help you?*

*Drayton comes in several varieties.*

**Drayton Bird Associates** helps you get a measurably better return

*on every marketing penny you spend.*

*This is mostly through advice, analysis, improving your creative work - and training which educates and inspires.*

*Clients and individuals from many countries report improvements in their businesses or careers that are both immediate and lasting.*

*See [www.Draytonbird.com](http://www.Draytonbird.com).*

*Drayton Bird is also the founder of EADIM, the European Academy of Direct and Interactive Marketing – [www.Eadim.com](http://www.Eadim.com).*

**EADIM** runs an annual event which one Marketing Director said was the best time he had spent since he learned to read and count. It is followed up by monthly online courses.

*We also offer on-line training and advice through [www](http://www.Draytonbirdcommonsense.com).*

*[Draytonbirdcommonsense.com](http://www.Draytonbirdcommonsense.com).*

*You can reach Drayton at [Drayton@draytonbird.com](mailto:Drayton@draytonbird.com). He aims to reply to all messages personally.*

**The Gary Halbert Letter** [www.thegaryhalbertletter.com](http://www.thegaryhalbertletter.com)

*Gems of genius from one of the best copywriters ever.*

**Gary Bencivenga's Marketing Bullets**

[www.marketingbullets.com](http://www.marketingbullets.com)

*A great resource for copywriters.*

**Ken McCarthy** [www.kenmccarthy.com](http://www.kenmccarthy.com)

*Ken ran the first seminars about marketing on the web.*

**Perry Marshall** [www.perrymarshall.com](http://www.perrymarshall.com)

*Everything you want to know about Google Adwords, and much else.*











## 51 HELPFUL MARKETING IDEAS

Offers a dazzling portfolio of straightforward direct marketing advice that, in author Drayton Bird's own words, "may seem so obvious, it's ridiculous".

The deceptively simple, practical and effective ideas in these pages are all too often overlooked. Many think they know them; few put them into practice. Yet any one Helpful Idea could easily repay your investment in this book many times over.



Brimming with hard-won, down-to-earth wisdom, illustrated by telling examples of marketing triumphs and catastrophes, and laced with a wickedly irreverent wit – 51 Helpful Marketing Ideas is the next best thing to having the man who "knows more about direct marketing than anybody else in the world" sitting at your desk.



Indeed, so sure is he that his ideas will help you and your business do better, that Drayton offers an unusual guarantee: your profits must increase by 100 times the price of this book or he himself will refund your money – "gladly, if a little puzzled".

Long awaited by his legions of admirers, Drayton Bird's 51 Helpful Marketing Ideas will be seized upon by marketers, brand owners, copywriters, students and all who value outstanding business writing.

### PRAISE FOR DRAYTON BIRD



"Extraordinarily good at understanding products, identifying what motivates prospects and, above all, getting more of them to reply and to buy. All I can say is Thank God for Drayton Bird."

**Alex Davies, Marketing Director, Hargreaves Lansdown**



"Drayton Bird loves his trade, which is why he has nothing but ridicule for its poseurs and impostors"

**Jeremy Bullmore, Former Chairman, J Walter Thompson and Director, WPP**



"Drayton Bird is the best Direct Marketing man in the world."

**Michael Ball, Chairman, The Ball Partnership**