

## Lessons From Legends

What the classic copywriters and marketers can teach us today!

We ALWAYS need to be studying, learning, and educating ourselves on our craft. For many of us, our "craft," the thing we need to be best at, is Marketing.

I read dozens of newsletters and trade magazines every month just to stay current on what's going on in the marketing world. There's a lot of information we need to keep up on!

The one area of study that often gets missed is taking an in-depth look at the marketing legends from the past. Yep, taking a look at what worked 40, 50, or 60+ years ago.

Many of our marketing strategies today come from something that was done in the past. So, I've Created this report to help you take a look at marketing greats like John Caples, David Ogilvy, Robert Collier, and Claude Hopkins.

I've highlighted their key marketing strategies and tips. In the following articles you'll learn about:

- The Rolls-Royce Effect (David Ogilvy)
- The Value of Testing (John Caples)
- If You're Going Fishing, You Need Bait (Robert Collier)
- Getting It Down to a Science (Claude Hopkins)
- How to Produce Advertising That Sells (David Ogilvy)
- How to Increase the Selling Power of Your Copy (John Caples)
- When It Comes to Direct Mail, Emotions Pay! (Robert Collier)
- Laws for Writing Copy That Sells (Claude Hopkins)
- 18 Miracles of Research (David Ogilvy)
- Surprising Ways to Test Your Advertising (John Caples)
- The Six Essentials - Plus That Extra Special Ingredient (Robert Collier)
- More Laws for Writing Copy That Sells (Claude Hopkins)

So, be sure to sharpen your pencils and take notes from what we can learn from these marketing legends.

## **The Rolls-Royce Effect**

Lessons from the legendary David Ogilvy

David Ogilvy was a renowned advertising executive who was often called "The Father of Advertising." Time Magazine dubbed him "the most sought-after wizard in today's advertising industry." That was in 1962, after he'd been in the business for 24 years and had revolutionized the way copywriters created ads.

Ogilvy wrote about his approach to advertising in *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, first published in 1963. Some people believe this served as the model for *Mad Men's* Don Draper, and indeed, if you look at pictures of Ogilvy, he was just as dashing as the TV character.

Ogilvy's work followed four basic principles:

**Creative brilliance:** Copywriters needed to come up with brilliant concepts that not only caught readers' attention, but that sold them on the product. He was a proponent of what was called the "big idea."

**Research:** Ogilvy did not believe in "blowing smoke." His copy was meticulously based in fact, and he did the necessary research to uncover the one amazing fact around which he could build an entire ad campaign.

**Actual Results:** Ogilvy was a strong believer in the same principle that I always stress, and that is judging the quality of an ad by its success at selling something. Always test the outcome of an ad, and if it isn't selling, make whatever changes are necessary to make it work.

**Professional Discipline:** Advertising executives were not to be dabblers in the creative realm. They needed to hone their craft and develop programs to train the next generation of advertisers.

### **The Most Famous Headline in Advertising History**

Ogilvy wrote many famous ads during his career, but the one that is said to have been the most famous headline in advertising history was the one he created for Rolls-Royce. The headline read:

*"At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock."*

This groundbreaking ad illustrates all the principles that made Ogilvy's work so great.

The headline itself was a wonderful example of the "big idea." No one had ever seen a headline like that before. It intrigued people and pulled them in to read the rest of the ad.

The body of the ad was made up of 13 facts that were interesting, and clearly explained why the Rolls-Royce was so unique, and worth its sky-high price.

And of course he tested the ad in a number of venues before launching the nation-wide campaign.

You might think that copywriters just sit around waiting for inspiration to come, but that's not the way it actually works. In describing the process he used to write the Rolls-Royce ad, Ogilvy said he started out, as he always did, by doing his homework. He claimed this was a tedious process, but a necessary one.

He said that as a copywriter you had to study the product and find out as much about it as you can. The more you know about a product, the more likely you are to be able to come up with the big idea. When he got the Rolls-Royce account, he spent three weeks reading about the car. In the process he came upon this statement: "At sixty miles an hour, the loudest noise comes from the electric clock." That became the headline, which was followed by 607 words of factual copy.

In a sense, Ogilvy didn't even write the world's most famous headline; he took it from a report. But his genius was in recognizing the power of the statement to work as the lead-in to the rest of the ad.

Of course the rest of the ad pulled its weight too. Each of the carefully crafted 13 points raised and then answered a question the reader might have. It even addressed the issue of price in a clever way, stating that the Bentley, manufactured by the same company, was exactly the same except for the grille, and a much reduced price. People could buy a Bentley "if they feel diffident about driving a Rolls-Royce." This would subtly appeal to Rolls-Royce buyers, who would never see themselves as being diffident about anything.

## **Lessons for Advertisers Today**

I think that Ogilvy brought a modern touch to advertising that really made his work stand out - and also made it tremendously effective.

Many of the copywriters I work with do just as he said; they spend time researching before they ever start writing. Very often the facts themselves give rise to the big idea that will really sell the product. It's the perspiration of research that gives rise to the creative inspiration.

We should also remember to always deal in facts. Especially today, consumers are wary of empty claims that seem to have nothing to back them up. In advertising your product or service, give fact after fact that explains why you're the best.

And as we always say, test and test again. That's the only way to arrive at the best ad or longer sales piece that will get you the best results.

## **Some David Ogilvy Quotes**

I just want to finish with some of my favorite quotes from David Ogilvy. They really sum up his philosophy that advertisers would do well to follow today:

"The more informative your advertising, the more persuasive it will be."

"In the modern world of business, it is useless to be a creative, original thinker unless you can also sell what you create."

"It takes a big idea to attract the attention of consumers and get them to buy your product. Unless your advertising contains a big idea, it will pass like a ship in the night. I doubt if more than one campaign in a hundred contains a big idea."

"Never stop testing, and your advertising will never stop improving."

"A good advertisement is one which sells the product without drawing attention to itself."

[And here's one that I just like.]

"Develop your eccentricities while you are young. That way, when you get old, people won't think you're going gaga."

## **The Value of Testing**

Lessons from the legendary John Caples

John Caples was a dominating force in the world of direct-response advertising for most of the twentieth century. His legendary career had its big start in 1926 when he wrote the fabulously successful (and often copied) headline, "They Laughed When I Sat Down at the Piano. But When I Started to Play! -"

The key word in the above sentence is "successful." The ad was successful because it received a tremendous response from buyers, and measuring that response was what John Caples was all about. Caples was a proponent of measurement in advertising to prove, scientifically, whether or not an advertisement worked.

He thought it was ridiculous to spend good money on advertising just because you thought the copy looked clever, or you personally liked it. That was just opinion, and opinion that wasn't backed up by facts was worthless - and potentially costly. He believed there was only one way to decide whether to continue to use a specific ad or whether to change it, and that was to measure the number of responses it received in terms of inquiries or actual sales.

Caples advocated a three-step approach to creativity. First you have to create ads that capture prospects' attention. That means using headlines, pictures, or whatever it takes to get prospects to notice you. Second, you have to maintain prospects' interest so that they keep reading and get the entire message you're trying to convey. Third, you have to move prospects to favorable action. Unless the ad is able to convert interest into action, it is a failure. And testing is the only certain way to determine the success of an ad.

**LALALAL . . .**

Caples outlined a three-step approach to testing the effectiveness of advertising.

Step One: Accept nothing as true about advertising until you've tested it yourself. This is the essence of "scientific" advertising. So when you first undertake a campaign, you should do initial testing. Prepare more than one direct mail package, and split test them against each other to see which does best. That means, divide your mailing list in half and send a different piece to each half.

Step Two: As you test the results of each ad, use what you learn to create an improved version, and then test that. In this way you build upon your success to create better and better ads (as measured by response rates).

Step Three: Every new ad is a test of what worked before. Constantly check results to see what's true - even if it means admitting you were wrong about what you believed was true. The formula Caple's suggested was the LALALAL . . . rule:

Learn/Adapt/Learn/Adapt/Learn/Adapt/Learn . . .

Following this rule really can pay off. Caples reports a case where one mail order advertisement sold 19-1/2 times as much merchandise as another ad. Without actually testing, you'd never know by looking at the ads that there would be such an extreme difference. Both ads occupied the same space in the same publication. They were both illustrated with photographs. They both had carefully written copy. The main difference was that one made the right appeal, and the other made the wrong appeal. And you'd never know just by looking at them which was the better approach. Only testing them revealed which was built around the better idea.

Caples understood that there may be times when, because of limited budget or the one-shot nature of a particular ad, it might not be possible to pretest. In that case, he suggested it would be wise to learn from advertisers who had tested different aspects of ads, and then apply their findings to your own ads. In his own books Caples presented the results of rules he'd developed over time, for example, important elements in headlines, that could be applied by any ad writer.

To give you an idea of Caples' findings, let's look at what he had to say about headlines.

### **The Most Important Part of an Advertisement**

Caples found that the most important part of an advertisement was the headline. As an example, he tested the following two headlines that were placed on essentially the same ad. One was a great success, while the other one was a failure. Can you guess which was which?

Headline 1: Are You Afraid of Making Mistakes in English?

## Headline 2: Do You Make These Mistakes in English?

The second headline pulled many more orders and inquiries. And the reason was the word "these." "These" promised that a helpful list of common blunders was included in the ad copy. This appealed to readers because they would be getting valuable information free. Plus it aroused their curiosity and self-interest. And since many people think their understanding is superior, it promised they would get a good laugh by seeing the errors of others. In any case, the headline made them want to read the sales piece, which allowed the sales piece to do its job of selling.

Without a good headline, you can have the best copy in the world, but the chances are no one will read it, so the entire ad is a waste. Caples found that there were four important qualities of a good headline:

1. Self-interest
2. News
3. Curiosity
4. Quick, easy way

Of these, self-interest is the most important. But overall, the more of these elements contained within a headline, the more successful it likely will be. And then he added one additional point: believability. If a headline isn't believable, people won't bother to look further. He offered the example of a headline promising someone could make \$9,000 that actually pulled better than one promising someone could make \$100,000. People couldn't imagine making \$100,000. The idea seemed ridiculous and the ad looked like an exaggerated sales pitch. But \$9,000 seemed reasonable but still attractive enough to get people to respond.

### **Caples' Five Rules for Writing Headlines That Work**

After years of testing ad headlines to determine which worked best, Caples came up with the following five rules for writing effective headlines:

1. The first rule is to appeal to the reader's self-interest. This is the first and foremost task of the copywriter. Give the reader a reason to look through the rest of the piece. This should seem obvious, but this rule is violated again and again.



2. If you have something new to report - a new product or a change in an old product - make sure to put that fact in the headline. Any news should really be played up in the headline.
3. Do not merely try to provoke curiosity in a headline. Curiosity can be powerful, but only if it's combined with self-interest and/or news. A headline that is merely clever may please the copywriter, but it will not capture readers.
4. Wherever possible, avoid headlines that only present a gloomy or negative picture. Always add a positive angle.
5. If your headline suggests that there is a quick and easy way for readers to get what they want, that can be very appealing. But do make sure the headline is believable. Caples gives the example of a headline that was tested by a correspondence school:

To Men and Women Who Want to Work Less and Earn More

The ad was a bust because it seemed too good to be true.

### **Caples' Rules Work Today**

Times change, but people don't. I'm sure you'll find that all of Caples' rules would create great headlines today for the types of products we sell today.

But the more important point is his overall rule: *Test everything.*

Don't take anyone's word or opinion on any aspect of your advertising. If you want advertising that you *know* works for you, become a scientific advertiser. That's the legendary lesson to take to heart.

## **If You're Going Fishing, You Need Bait**

Lessons from the legendary Robert Collier

Robert Collier was a fabulously successful direct mail marketer who ruled the field during the first half of the twentieth century. He is believed to have written sales letters that brought in upwards of one hundred million dollars during the 1920s and 1930s. In today's dollar that would amount to a billion dollars.

And how did he do it? Just by writing sales letters for a wide variety of products - letters that were sent out across America and brought back tons of orders. He sold sets of Great Books, face cream, tractors, pipes, winter coats - there was nothing he couldn't sell.

Collier was a bit of a philosopher and psychologist, as well as an advertising executive, so it is not surprising that in writing his letters he started not so much with the product he was selling, but with trying to understand the person he was trying to sell it to.

In his classic treatise on letter writing, *The Robert Collier Letter Book*, he opened with the question, "What is there about some letters that makes them so much more effective than others?" It wasn't their finished style, their diction (use of language), or their adherence to rules. The answer came in something so basic, it could be expressed in a simple illustration ...

### **The Secret to Advertising - in a Fish Story**

Two people are fishing off a dock. One is a sportsman, decked out with all the latest equipment. The other is a ragged urchin holding a branch with a string attached. (This was probably a more common sight in the 1920s than it is today.) The sportsman is having no luck at all - not even a bite. But the urchin is pulling in fish after fish.

Why the difference? It all comes down to the bait they're using. The boy knows what the fish will bite on, and that's what he gives them. The clueless sportsman is using high-tech lures that aren't fooling anyone - least of all the fish.

Collier said that with all the books written on fishing over many years, their main idea could be boiled down to the following: "What bait will they bite on?"

And he believed that the very same principle worked when it came to writing sales letters that brought results. To be successful at it, you had to understand the prospect. As he put it, you had to know, "What is the bait that will tempt your reader? How can you tie up the thing you have to offer with that bait?"

Collier knew that every one of us has something we want. Whether conscious to us or unconscious, that desire is the thing that is uppermost in our mind. It directs our interest and determines what will appeal to us.

The art of the copywriter was to discern that desire, and then prepare a sales message that somehow tied together that desire and the product being advertised so that the reader felt certain that obtaining that object would get him closer to fulfilling his desire. Or that not obtaining that object would make it more difficult to fulfill his desire.

Doing this required that you, the writer of the letter, knew your prospects' deepest wishes and how to appeal to them. You also had to understand certain things about human nature so that you could approach your prospects the right way.

### **The Right Approach**

Collier asked copywriters to put themselves in the place of their prospects. He said, what if you were deep in conversation with a friend about something that was very important to you. Along comes a stranger who slaps you on the back and tells you he has a coat he wants to sell you. Would you drop everything and examine the coat? Or would you push him away as a rude annoyance? Probably the latter.

It's the same when a prospect receives a sales letter. He is (and this is one of those remarkable insights Collier drops throughout his books), "deep in a discussion with himself over ways and means of getting certain things that mean a great deal to him." In effect, your letter interferes and tells him to stop thinking about what *he* wants to think about, and start thinking about what *you* want him to think about. The response will not be a good one.

Is there another way to approach him that will get a better result? The way is to make the letter more about *him*, and less about *you*. Going back to the coat salesman, a better approach for him would be to hang back, listen to the conversation, get the feel of it, and then join the conversation on a related topic. Then he could gradually bring the discussion around logically until what he wanted to discuss seemed like the perfect next step.

It's the same with writing a sales letter. There are certain thoughts that are generally part of the deep discussion people have with themselves. This is where the copywriter starts so as to get the reader's attention. This is the bait.

But every fish requires a different kind of bait. So the copywriter must study his prospects to "find a point of contact with his interests, his desires, some feature that will flag his attention and make your letter stand out from all the others the moment he reads the first line."

A letter selling a baby carriage to a new mother might start by appealing to her love of her baby, and moving on to how the baby deserved every advantage, including a new baby carriage in which he would be admired by the world.

A letter selling insurance against burglary and theft to a home owner might start by talking about the increase in crime, giving the scary statistics, and then saying that a good insurance policy would be a cheap investment.

Collier concluded that whatever you were selling, you had to start with the right bait. "Find the thing your prospect is interested in and make it your point of contact, instead of rushing in and trying to tell him something about *your* proposition, *your* goods, *your* interests."

First written in 1931, Collier's words still hold powerful lessons for us. Successful advertising is not about the product. It's about the prospect. Get to understand what your prospect wants and build your campaign around that. It really is timeless wisdom about human nature and what moves people to act.

Should we copy Collier's ideas today? Not only should we, but he wanted us to. In the preface to *The Robert Collier Letter Book*, he said that he wrote the book for the purpose of providing inspiration to others. He said, "We are all imitators. We all get many of our ideas from others." Then he explained how he had

adapted many others' ideas in some way to make them his own. He concluded "It is my hope that you may be able to do the same with the letters in this book, and thus through them make your own letters even more successful."

We would be wise to accept his invitation.

## **Getting It Down to a Science**

Lessons from the legendary Claude Hopkins

Claude C. Hopkins was an advertising pioneer from the first part of the twentieth century. His highly influential book, *Scientific Advertising*, published in 1923, introduced the world of advertising to principles like test marketing, coupons and free samples, key coding ads, and copy research. These are all standard practices today, but they were all invented by Hopkins.

Hopkins referred to all advertising as "salesmanship." Any company with a team of salesmen could measure and compare all their results to see who was doing the best job. And it should be the same with each piece of advertising.

For each of his ads Hopkins measured the cost per customer and the cost per sale. These were the yardsticks by which he compared his results so he could fine-tune his ads with each campaign. Then he turned his findings into principles that he applied, and tested, in other campaigns for other products.

The next generation of advertisers placed a high value on his contributions to the field. One of the greats who followed Hopkins, David Ogilvy, said, "Nobody should be allowed to have anything to do with advertising until he has read this book (*Scientific Advertising*) seven times. It changed the course of my life."

### **The Secret of Success: Learn From Your Mistakes**

How was Hopkins able to have so many successes for his clients? It was the result of hard work. Hopkins attributed his success to the fact that he made so many small mistakes, and he learned from every one of them. He never repeated a mistake. Along the way he was able to come up with some great advertising principles that endured. But it was the tedious making of small mistakes and learning from them that was the foundation of his development in the field.

This is reminiscent of the great inventor, Thomas Edison, who after failing 10,000 times to find a filament that would work in his light bulb, said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." He wasn't daunted. He was further along the path to ultimate victory.

Hopkins said that no one can depend on his personal judgment or experience to determine the right way to advertise a product. This is a field where many factors that we don't understand come into play. That's why it's so important to test, correct, test, and correct. This is what Hopkins meant by "scientific advertising." This was advertising built upon fixed principles and carried out according to fundamental laws. The copywriter had an obligation to be guided by actual data or the client would be throwing money away.

Another favorite Hopkins principle is that he directed every campaign to an individual member of the vast majority. He did not consult with managers or boards of directors on how to advertise their product. Hopkins felt that their viewpoints were distorted. Instead, he submitted his ideas (that is, tested them) on the "simple folks around me who typify America." They were the customers he was trying to engage, they were the ones whose behavior would make or break a campaign, and therefore, "Their reactions are the only ones that count."

Hopkins held no truck with "theories of advertising" that were not proved with hard data. Most of these were based on exceptional cases and limited experience. Theories based on chance like this, are likely to mislead other advertisers who try to follow them. Hopkins mostly worked on ads in publications, but he also worked on mail-order advertising, which he said gave the most exact data about what worked in an ad and what didn't.

### **The Sale Is in the Details**

When it came to writing ads themselves (which would then be subjected to the strictest testing), Hopkins believed it was important for the ad writer to gain detailed and full knowledge of the product being written about. And the reason for this was that his research showed again and again that the more reasons an ad presented for why the prospect should follow the call to action, the more likely it was that the prospect would follow through.

A great example of this was his campaign for Palmolive Shaving Cream. Hopkins knew that men tended to be loyal to their brand, and the challenge was to win them away to a new brand. No one knew what men wanted in a shaving cream, so there was no basis upon which to build an ad. Research was required.

Hopkins sent out a team of researchers to interview hundreds of men and find out what they most wanted in a shaving cream. Then he took his findings to Palmolive's chief chemist and said to him, this is what men want. What can you tell me about Palmolive Shaving Cream that specifically answers these points? It didn't matter that other competing shaving creams probably did the same thing. Palmolive would be the first to address these issues, and so would seem unique. As Hopkins said, "We were the first to give figures on results. And one actual figure counts for more than countless platitudes."

Hopkins did the work so he could substitute "actual figures for atmospheric claims." As a result, within 18 months, Palmolive Shaving Cream dominated the field.

### **Some Things Never Change**

Even back in Hopkins' time, people were saying the world was changing, and that advertising had to change and come up with something new. Hopkins acknowledged that fads and fancies change, and styles of advertising change, and new campaigns require new key-notes. Imitators would not be successful. "But," he said, "human nature does not change." He stated that the principles he set down in his book "are as enduring as the Alps."

Hopkins also agreed that advertising was getting more expensive, and therefore posed more of a risk to the advertiser. In addition, the competition was much stiffer. This just meant there was an even greater need for scientific advertising.

Reading Hopkins' ads today, we may find that they have a quaint feel to them. That's understandable. Many of them were written in the 1910's and 1920's. Products were different then. The way people spoke was different.

But the principles Hopkins used to write those ads are as up-to-date today as you'd find in ads for smartphones and frozen dinners. In today's multi-billion dollar world of advertising, Hopkins' principles of scientific advertising still rule.



## **"How to Produce Advertising That Sells"** Lessons from the legendary David Ogilvy

David Ogilvy, the advertising genius who some believe was the model for *Mad Men's* Don Draper, was widely heralded as "The Father of Advertising." In 1983 he wrote about his experiences with a number of famous ad campaigns and commented on different aspects of the business in his book *Ogilvy on Advertising*. In Chapter 2 he gave a rather lengthy list of qualities that he believed were essential to creating a successful ad campaign. He called it "How to Produce Advertising That Sells." Let's look at just some of the main points made by this master advertising legend, as I think all of them are still on the money today.

**Do Your Homework:** In order to create advertising that sells, you have to do your research first, and then let that guide the way you write about your product. First you have to find out everything you can about the product itself. What are its features? Its advantages? What are some interesting facts about how it is made, or the ingredients that go into it? Knowing all this can help you hit upon the "big idea" around which you'll build your ad. It was this kind of research that helped Ogilvy come up with one of the most famous ad headlines of all time: "At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock." And he didn't even write it himself. It was an actual line from a company report.

Next, you should to check out the advertising of your competitors. He said this would give you your bearings.

Third, you should do research by questioning consumers of the product to learn how they think about it. Find out the language they use when talking about the product, what aspects of the product matter the most to them, and what kind of promise you could make about the product that would most appeal to them.

You can't guess at any of these things. You have to get the facts.

**Positioning:** Ogilvy's definition of this "curious verb" was: "what the product does, and who it is for." You decide who the audience will be, who your ad must appeal to, and what advantages you will stress about your product based on what will appeal to that audience. The example Ogilvy gives is that he could have positioned Dove soap as the perfect cleanser for men's dirty hands. But the better positioning, which he used,

was as a moisturizing soap for women with dry skin. This was highly successful and is still the basis of their ads today.

How could you position your product? Consider who your best prospect is and gear your ads to that person. Don't try to please everyone. You can't. Decide who will be your best bet and run with it. A dress shop might position itself as the trendy place where teenagers and young women in their 20s shop, or a sophisticated store for upwardly mobile professionals, or the place where mature matrons of a certain income level buy clothing for special occasions and cruises. Your advertising should be positioned to reflect the kind of business you are.

**Brand Image:** When you think of brand image, you may think of classic advertising figures: the Marlboro Man, the Schweppes Man, Orville Redenbacher, Queen Latifah selling Cover Girl, or Andie MacDowell in ads for L'oreal. The idea is to have some image associated with your product that supports its positioning. It's often a person. But it can also just be the product itself, like Coca Cola, which is a brand image recognized around the world.

Many direct mail marketers associate their product with a person who seems to be writing the sales letter. Ken Roberts and his image were very much at the center of all the advertising for his financial home study courses. Dr. Mercola or the Mayo Clinic make heavy use of their images to sell their publications and supplements.

Could you, or someone else at your company, represent and speak for your products and services? It needs to be an appealing and/or authoritative figure. You could set this person up as the recognizable face of your company. Done correctly, it could increase brand loyalty and boost your business.

**What's the Big Idea?:** Sometimes through genius, or just plain luck - often based on tons of research that laid the groundwork for the "aha" moment - someone comes up with a big idea. Ogilvy's Rolls-Royce ad was an example. Representing Pepperidge Farm baked goods with an old-fashioned bakery wagon pulled by horses. The Jack-in-the-Box clown as a business executive in a suit. These are all brilliant ideas that worked for decades selling their products.

Ken Roberts always wore a cowboy hat in his promotions, and he put pictures of cowboy hats on all his literature. It was the perfect, and highly recognizable representation of his maverick

style. Maybe you can come up with something like that to represent your business. Ideas like this don't come along every day, but if you ever get one, keep using it.

**"The Positively Good":** It would be great if you could prove that your product was significantly better than anything your rivals can provide. But that's not always possible. Sometimes you all produce an equivalent product or service. But that shouldn't be a barrier to your advertising. You don't have to convince customers that nobody else on the planet can rival you. You just have to convince consumers that your product is "positively good." If they are convinced that you are good, and they're not so sure about your competitors, they'll give you the business.

Just tell prospects how good you are. List in detail all your great qualities. Create confidence in the value of your product. You don't have to compare yourself or mention your competition at all. Just focus on what you provide with confidence.

**Repeat Your Winners:** If your advertising is working well, keep repeating it until it stops working. There's no need to keep reinventing the wheel. At the same time, you don't want to be caught up short if it suddenly stops working. You should always be testing alternatives. But as long as your control piece is out-pulling anything else, keep using it. When a new piece out-pulls the old one, then you can roll out to a bigger campaign with the new one.

**Word of Mouth:** Ogilvy said that sometimes advertising campaigns enter the culture. People go around humming jingles or repeating ad slogans. Sometimes they'll be parodied on Saturday Night Live! This is great free publicity.

The opportunity for word of mouth advertising is even greater today with the growing importance of social media.

You never know when something will take off like this. Ogilvy called it "manna from heaven." You can't create this kind of buzz, but you can encourage it by suggesting your customers share information about you with their friends. And if it ever happens that you do find yourself "going viral," stay on top of it and take advantage of it. It may not last long, but it can put your business on the map.

## **How to Increase the Selling Power of Your Copy** Lessons from the legendary John Caples

John Caples was a master of direct-response advertising who first became known in 1926 when he launched the now classic headline, "They Laughed When I Sat Down at the Piano. But When I Started to Play! -"

But Caples was more than a great writer. He was also an advocate of testing every aspect of an advertisement to make sure you, the advertiser, were getting the most bang for your buck. In his book, *Tested Advertising Methods*, he gave specific advice on issues such as how to write headlines that drew the reader's attention, and how to use illustrations in ads. What made this advice so powerful is that it was based on years of testing with actual ads. He was not just giving his opinion. He was reporting on his results from the field.

Today, I thought it would be interesting to look at some of Caples' findings when it came to writing effective sales copy - copy that really sells. He offered a list of 20 methods that he found really increased the pulling power of his ads. Most, if not all of these methods, are completely relevant for copywriters working in 2014. Whether you're writing ads, or in a position to decide whether a writer's ad copy will work for you, see if you can glean some valuable insight from the following points which I selected from Caples' full list. I thought these would be especially useful:

**Use Present Tense, Second Person:** When we read an ad, our favorite word is "you." When we see "you," it means the writer is talking directly to us. We picture ourselves with the product. There may be times where it's right to use the third person - for example when talking about "those people" who don't have the finer taste or understanding that you do, or when explaining the faults of the competition. But in general, try to stick to "you." And also, speak in the present as much as possible, not about the past or future. So . . .

Don't say: Buyers will experience vibrant health with a daily dose of aloe vera juice.

Do say: You experience vibrant health with a daily dose of aloe vera juice.

**Use Subheads:** Caples found that every page of mail order advertising should have three subheads. I think this may have been necessary when ads were dense with copy and illustrations were not as sophisticated. Today you may get away with fewer if you have a huge headline, color illustrations, and a lot of white space.

The value of subheads is that they allow people to get a summary of your pitch even if they don't have the time to read all the copy. And an intriguing subhead may get someone to dig deeper into copy they might have otherwise skimmed over.

**Use a Simple Style of Writing With Simple Words:** The idea of your ad is to sell a product or service, not impress the reader with your great writing. Also, you want your writing to carry the reader along, without any roadblocks along the way. If your writing is dense, flowery, filled with complex images the reader can't relate to, or loaded with long, pompous words that most people don't understand, you are going to discourage your reader from moving forward. It's just too much work.

Make it easy on your reader to read the ad, get the message, and want to follow your clear call to action.

**Give Free Information:** To get something, you have to give something. To get your readers' attention you have to give them something to make them think it will be worthwhile to read your sales letter - and one thing you can give is free information. Tell them something right at the beginning that will inform them. You can even write it in editorial style, rather than like you're trying to sell them something.

Another method is to promise at the beginning that they will find valuable information later on ("Keep reading for the list of 10 foods to avoid if you suffer from heartburn.")

Whatever you do, make readers feel it will pay them to pay attention.

**Make Your Copy Specific:** Especially today, we are so accustomed to seeing wild advertising claims, that we don't really believe them anymore. But apparently it was even true back when Caples was writing. He said that saying that "97,482 people have bought one of these appliances" was much stronger than saying "Nearly 100,000 of these appliances have been sold." The first statement sounds like a fact. The second sounds like copywriting bluster.

If you go through 123 steps to create your high quality furniture, that would be a great fact to give. And don't just say you're better than your competitor. Say your product is 29% more effective. Of course, that's hard to do because you must have the research to back it up. But if you can get it, use it.

**Write Long Copy:** Caples' research found that longer copy sold more than shorter copy. The usual objection he heard was that no one would want to read long copy. Caples agreed that no one would want to read long copy that was printed in dense, small type. But if it were laid-out attractively it was always more effective. He suggested you could get the best of both worlds by using headlines and subheads to create a smaller, quicker-to-read piece within the longer piece. Then you would appeal to the skimmers while still providing plenty of sales talk to those who were interested and wanted more information.

He also offered this tip. Copy gets better when you cut it. It gets tighter and more to the point. So Caples suggested writing more copy than needed to fill the space, and then refine it down.

**Avoid Helping Your Competitors:** Don't spend a lot of time talking in general about how great a type of product is. Home in on your own product.

Let's say you're selling a home cleaning service. If you spend most of the sales letter describing how nice the homeowner's life will be with someone else doing the cleaning, he or she might agree, go online to see who else was offering cleaning services in the area, and could end up engaging someone else! Instead, use the letter to focus on the great features of YOUR cleaning service and how you are so much better than anyone else out there.

**Make Every Advertisement a Complete Sales Talk:** Put your complete sales pitch in every sales piece. Don't assume your reader has ever read anything else about you or knows anything about the advantages you offer. Don't talk about half the points that make you stand out, with the intention of talking about the other half in another sales piece. For all you know, you will have just this one shot to make this sale. Always make the most of it.

**Urge the Reader to Act:** I'll finish with this point that is so crucial, and one that I always harp on whenever I talk about essential features every sales piece should have. You must have

a clear call to action: Act now! Call today! Order while supplies last! You've spent your entire sales piece getting your readers' attention and explaining why they should want your product. Now, put the bow on the package. Tell them what you want them to do. And if you can add a sense of urgency by telling them it's a limited time offer, supplies are limited, or these special prices can't last long, all the better.

So there you have it. Some tested copywriting principles from the great John Caples. They are as useful and relevant today as they were when he used them to run hugely successful campaigns so many years ago.

## **When It Comes to Direct Mail, Emotions Pay!**

Lessons from the legendary Robert Collier

Robert Collier was one of the star copywriters of direct mail sales pieces back in the last century. And his discoveries and insight into human nature, and how he used them to manipulate interest in his products, are of tremendous practical use to copywriters today. If we will make the effort to learn what he had to tell us in his classic work, *The Robert Collier Letter Book*, we can increase the effectiveness of our own pieces.

In this article I want to focus what Collier had to say about emotions and motivation, and how our understanding of these two qualities can help us write sales pieces that sell.

### **Strike the Right Emotion**

Collier said that before you started writing a sales letter you had to ask yourself what emotion you wanted to arouse in your reader. And basically you should have just one goal in mind: to be able to make the reader *want* to do what you are asking him to do. You must bring readers to the point where they feel they *must* do what you want, or that they won't be able to rest easy until they have taken the action you propose. A letter that just aims at the intellect won't do the trick. You have to go for the emotions if you're going to be able to inspire readers to take action.

What kind of emotions? Love, obviously. Don't just sell a child's bicycle. Sell a bicycle that will bring joy and confidence to a beloved child.

Shame is another. Don't just sell a box of greeting cards because they'll be convenient to have at hand when you need one. Sell a box of cards that will enable readers to keep up with all those acquaintances they feel so bad about ignoring for so long.

And vanity is a great emotion to appeal to when trying to sell something. You might sell a limited amount of face cream with a description of all its natural moisturizing ingredients. But you'll sell a lot more by saying the cream will make the reader look ten years younger, and that all her friends will be envious of her youthful appearance.

This quote from Collier says it all: "Appeal to the reason, by all means. Give people a logical excuse for buying that they can



tell to their friends and use to salve their own consciences. But if you want to sell goods, if you want action of any kind, *base your real urge upon some primary emotion!*"

It may sound cynical, but if you really believe in your product or service, you will see the truth and the value in it. You know that what you're offering will improve your prospects' lives. It's the job of your sales piece to convince them of that fact. That means you have to find the right emotion and appeal to that.

For example, if you're a dentist, just listing all your degrees and saying you use advanced techniques and have a newly appointed office will not necessarily get people to try your services. But you might describe how you specialize in painless techniques and that your patient rooms are designed with comfortable chairs, ear phones, heated blankets, and every amenity to allay anxiety - all of which speaks directly to the emotion of fear and how you go out of your way to relieve it.

Think of the emotions that will get people to use your product or service, and build your sales pieces around those.

### **Get People Motivated**

Collier also talked about the motives that make people buy. He called it "exercising persuasion," and here again, his direct way of explaining what he meant is worth repeating: "What is persuasion? Nothing but finding the motive that will impel your reader to do as you wish, then stirring it to the point where it is stronger than his inertia, or his economical tendencies."

Collier advised letter writers to put themselves in the place of their readers and try to determine which are *their* prime motivating factors (and not consider only what would motivate the letter writer himself). He said there were basically six motivations: love, gain, duty, pride, self-indulgence, and self-preservation. And the motivations often occur together. So, readers might be motivated by pride when considering buying a new car, but to appeal to pride alone would be too limited. You should throw in a dash of love (it will be safer for the family), and gain (you'll be saving a fortune on repairing your old clunker), and of course, some self-indulgence (all the luxury features of the new car).

In writing the letter it is necessary to turn that motivation into a motive to take action right away. The old car is putting

the family in danger now. The special reduced price will only be available for a limited time. Driving the old clunker diminishes the reader in others' eyes every day. Now is the time to act.

Make it clear what readers have to gain by taking immediate action, and what they may lose by not taking action. You build readers to take action by showing them how their lives will be improved by doing what you say. Spell it out very clearly so people are impelled to act.

Going back to our dentist today, you might explain that taking care of your teeth will improve your health and well-being in many areas. That the cost of good tooth maintenance now will save money and pain down the line. That by taking advantage of your special assessment and cleaning for new patients - only available for a limited time - they can get started on a new program of health for the entire family, at a very reasonable cost. This is the best time to get started on a healthy future. And so on.

To quote Collier again, "bring home to him the advantages that will accrue to him from doing as you wish, in so effective a way that he wants these more than anything of any trouble they may cost him."

These basic rules for selling effectively are age old. I'm sure the vendors hawking products in ancient bazaars used these same principles. Collier showed how we can adapt these rules in creating sales letters today - sales letter that really work.

## **Laws for Writing Copy That Sells**

Lessons from the legendary Claude Hopkins

Claude C. Hopkins was a whiz at writing effective advertising copy back in the early part of the last century. But what really made him stand out as a legend was that he tested everything he presented to the public. As a result he knew, for a fact, what kind of copy worked and what didn't.

In his classic book, *My Life in Advertising*, Hopkins had a chapter on "Scientific Advertising" where he laid out some of the basic laws of writing copy that sells based on years of testing different ways of presenting his sales pitch, and analyzing the resulting response rates. Here are just some of these laws that worked back then - and still work today:

**Brilliant writing has no place in advertising.** The novice copy writer writes to impress, and makes the mistake of putting the reader's attention on the copy, instead of back on the reader himself and how his life will improve by using the product in question. The less noticeable the copy is, the better it will do its job. Just present the facts and benefits, and let them do the selling. If the copy appears to be trying to persuade, the reader will reject it out of "fear of overinfluence."

**Language should be natural and simple.** Don't let the writing be conspicuous. As Hopkins put it: "In fishing for buyers, as in fishing for bass, one should not reveal the hook."

**Never try to show off.** The whole point of the sales letter is to sell the product, not the writer. Sincerity, not fancy words, is what is called for.

**From start to finish offer service.** What the prospect wants to know is what you will do for him. Anything that smacks of being self-serving on your part and manipulative of his behavior, will make him suspicious. Hopkins said he had seen many ads ruined by inserting phrases like, "Insist on this brand," or "Avoid imitations." These phrases hint at a motive on the part of the seller that is of no interest to the prospect. Tell prospects how they will benefit by buying from you, rather than warning them against buying from someone else.

**Forget yourself entirely.** In putting together your sales copy, leave yourself out of the equation. Imagine your prospect is standing before you, a specific individual, and think about what

you would say to that person to convince him that getting his hands on this product would be a great thing for him personally. Imagine what a good salesman, talking to the prospect in person, would say. That's what you should say in your copy.

**Do not boast.** You may be tempted to say that your operation is the largest in the county, but that's really not of any interest to the prospect. It's just a boast, and as Hopkins reminds us, "Boasting is repulsive." Don't tell prospects how great you are. Tell them how great they will be with your product.

**Aim to get action.** You have to put something in your ad that will inspire people to take action. One way to do this is to include some kind of coupon that signals people that they should place an order. This is especially useful in print ads, allowing people to clip out the coupon and then keep it as a handy reminder. This can also work well in direct mail ads, and this is certainly something I would test with direct mail ads today. Even if people call to order or go to a website, just seeing the coupon is a powerful cue to action. Limited time orders are also very effective. If people are afraid an offer will soon go away, they may act quickly. But if they feel time is not an issue, they'll defer action until later, and then more than likely will forget about it. Adding a sense of urgency increases response rates and this should be carefully built in to your sales pieces.

**Frivolity has no place in advertising.** Hopkins felt that advertising was serious business and should not include humor. For Hopkins, money represented life and work and asking people to spend their hard-earned money should not be taken lightly. We must realize, however, that much of Hopkins working life occurred during the depression when money was indeed a very serious subject for many people. I agree that building an entire sales piece around humor would be a mistake. First, it would grow old fast. Second, what one person considers to be funny may just seem weird or stupid to someone else. However, injecting a bit of humor may add something positive to a piece. I think that here we should take a cue from Hopkins and test it out. If you have an idea for something amusing - maybe a joke or a cartoon, see if it improves response. But if it doesn't, be ruthless and cut it out.

**Ads should tell the full story.** Never assume your reader knows anything about you, or has read another ad in a series of ads. Each ad should be able to stand on its own. So, if you're sending out a sales piece followed by additional letters or

emails, make sure you put all the important information in each piece, including your major arguments and bullet points. Perhaps later pieces can be pared down in size, but don't assume that your reader will remember points he may have read in earlier pieces. Also, realize that you put several different appeals in a single sales piece, and some will work better with some prospects, while others will work better with other prospects. Make sure that all the appeals are presented in every piece, or you could be losing prospects who would otherwise buy.

So, that is some of the wisdom Claude Hopkins has shared with us, based on his many years of "scientific advertising." Examine your own sales pieces in light of these laws.

## 18 Miracles of Research

Lessons from the legendary David Ogilvy

David Ogilvy, often called "The Father of Advertising," and the dapper progenitor of *Mad Men's* Don Draper, was "the most sought-after wizard" in the advertising industry of his day (according to *Time Magazine* in 1962).

Ogilvy stressed the importance of working hard to get the information needed to create a really great ad - one that did its job of convincing people to buy. The key to creating such an effective ad was research. He once wrote, "Advertising people who ignore research are as dangerous as generals who ignore decodes of enemy signals."

Of course creativity is also necessary for ad writers (Ogilvy himself was one of the industry's most creative copywriters), but without the research to back them up, their copy just couldn't have the power to be convincing. Ogilvy offered a list of 18 benefits that this kind of investigation offered to advertisers. He called them "Miracles of Research." Let's briefly look at these 18 benefits:

1. Research can tell you where your company stands by measuring its reputation within various communities, such as consumers, newspaper people, academia, the government, etc. If a bad reputation is interfering with your success, you would now know exactly what must be done to polish your image.
2. By applying mathematical models to responses to tests of new product, you can predict sales, how much you will have to spend to advertise it and earn maximum profits, and determine if the cost is justified by potential profits. Ogilvy reported research indicating that 60% of new products fail in test markets.
3. Research can measure consumer responses to new products while they are still in their conceptual state. This can save you a bundle by keeping you from wasting money pursuing a product that no one will buy.
4. By testing a new product against the product your competition is selling, you can see if your version is lagging behind and what you need to do to make it competitive.

5. You can test different formulations, flavors, fragrances, etc., to determine which version of your product will be the most appealing to your target customer.
6. Package design plays a big role in the success of products, and research can help you determine which design will work best.
7. You can use research to determine how best to position your product. Should you offer your new snack food as a yummy treat or a healthy one? Testing will help you discover which approach will sell the most product.
8. It's best to determine your target audience before rolling out a big campaign. For example, you may think your product will appeal to 20-somethings, and advertise to that demographic, when in fact you should be targeting 40-somethings.
9. What kinds of issues do consumers focus on when they think about your product? What language do they use when they describe it? Your research will help you tease out these variables.
10. Once you have a successful product, with an established name, you can use that name to sell related products. But which ones? Ogilvy gives the example of Lever Brothers, who wanted to extend the success of their Dove brand. Research showed them that extending the name to dishwashing liquid would be a winner.
11. Never rest on your laurels. Keep checking to see if consumers continue to see your product as desirable. If your image is slipping, you want to know about it. In many cases this happens when consumers notice that you're using cheaper ingredients.
12. Ogilvy suggests using research to check up on your competitors. What do their test markets tell them? What are their profit margins? How much are they paying for raw materials? The information is out there if you know how to look for it.
13. Every great ad contains a promise. Ogilvy quotes the 200-year-old words of Samuel Johnson: "Promise, large promise is the soul of an advertisement." But, says

Ogilvy, "Advertising which promises no benefit to the consumer does not sell, yet the majority of campaigns contain no promise whatever. (That is the most important sentence in this book. Read it again.)" Ogilvy reports research that advertisements with headlines that promise a benefit are read by four times more people than advertisements without such a headline.

Determining the best promise for an ad, says Ogilvy, is the most valuable contribution research can make to the ad creation process. Using split-run testing is a great way to see which promise works best. A promise that is both persuasive and unique will be the most powerful.

14. An important part of many ads is the "premium" offered - some kind of free gift. Research will show which premium gets the biggest response.
15. You may think you know what your ad is saying, but your prospect may not read it the way you do. You may think you're being funny, but your prospect may think you're being disrespectful. You may think you're describing a great new way to make money, but your prospect may think you're describing something that takes a lot of work. Only by testing your advertising will you know if it's conveying the right message.
16. Ogilvy talked about pre-testing television commercials, and his findings here are applicable to direct mail advertising as well. He said that testing recall of commercials has no relation to their success at getting consumers to buy the product. The more important issue to test is a change in brand preferences. He also said to keep testing ads for "wear-out." Eventually even the best ad will lose its power as people's values change. So even if your ad is working, test to see if its numbers hold up. As soon as they start slipping, be ready with the next big campaign idea (that hopefully you've also been pre-testing all along).
17. In spite of point 16 above (that recall doesn't equate to buying), if people don't read ads at all, they can't be persuaded by them. Research can tell you whether people are reading your ads, and whether they remember them.
18. Finally, research can settle arguments. I love this last point because I can just see Ogilvy sitting around a



boardroom table with a recalcitrant client, pulling out a professional-looking research report to prove that his advice about what an ad should look like disagrees with the idiotic opinion of his know-nothing client. There are bound to be disagreements as people consider different aspects of an ad. Having research available can help you make the best decisions possible.

Marketing is a difficult field. Being successful at it doesn't come from making decisions based on opinion or "feelings." To get people to buy your product, you have to know what they're thinking, what they like, and what appeals to them. The only way to know these things for sure is by doing the research.

So keep this list handy, and look to it for inspiration whenever you wonder if it's really worth the effort to do what I always urge you to do, which is to test, test, and test again every aspect of your direct mail campaigns. It could just help you create your own marketing "miracle."

## **Surprising Ways to Test Your Advertising** Lessons from the legendary John Caples

John Caples, one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most successful advertising men, was not only a great copywriter, but also an avid copy tester. Here was one bit of Caples wisdom that tells the whole story:

"Test everything. Doubt everything. Be interested in theories, but don't spend a large sum of money on a theory without spending a little money to test it first."

Caples and his team spent millions of dollars to learn the answers to questions like, What kind of headlines attract the most readers? And, What kind of copy will be most successful in persuading people to buy your product or service?

He spent millions - but he used his findings to make many more millions. In spite of his success, however, he knew there was no end to the discoveries that could be made. And he encouraged the next generations of copywriters and ad makers to come up with new questions and new sales appeals. But, how would these new ad creators know which of their new ideas were the most effective? They would require testing to make sure advertising dollars were spent where they would bring the best results.

In his classic book, *Tested Advertising Methods*, Caples offered a list of 17 ways one could put an ad to the test. These 17 ways ran the gamut, from simple to complex, and the test one would choose would depend on the type of issue you were looking at, and how much time and money you had to throw at the problem. You might be surprised to see some of the methods that Caples suggested. So, here are some of the testing methods he described in his book:

**Put Your Newly Written Ad Aside Until the Next Day:** As a copywriter, your first, best line of defense is yourself. There are different stages of creating an ad. There's the stage where you're full of enthusiasm, dashing off your brilliant ideas. But when you look at it again the next day, you're a different person - cool and objective. Now you can see where your language can be simplified, where you're missing a clear call to action, where you can bring in the reader more quickly by deleting that opening paragraph that you were so in love with the day before. Always look at everything again the next day and you will find many things that need fixing.

**Ask Somebody to Read Your Ad Copy Aloud to You:** Does this sound strange? Maybe you're thinking, shouldn't you read your copy aloud to someone else? But Caples explains the problem with that is that you know your own copy, so you read it with the right emphasis, and you learn nothing from the process.

When someone else reads your copy cold, you can tell right away where the stumbling blocks are, where the person obviously misunderstands your unclear copy, where sentences are awkward or too long.

Now, use what you learn. If the person doesn't understand something, don't blame him or her for that; look at how you can change the copy. If the person stumbles over your wording, smooth out the wording. This is a very useful way to perfect a piece.

**Opinion Test By Interview:** Now that you've perfected your ad to some degree, you want to get people's opinions of the ad itself. Caples suggests the best opinion tests use people who are actual prospects to use the product. For example, show ads for dog food to dog owners.

Always give people a choice of which ad, headline, illustration, etc., they prefer. If you just show them your ad and ask them if they like it, they'll probably say yes because they don't want to hurt your feelings. But if you show two headlines, and ask which one they like better, you'll get a more honest opinion.

However, be aware that opinion tests by themselves are not enough; they are only opinions. Caples said you should always back up opinion tests with sales tests.

**Sales Tests:** Caples offered a number of different types of sales tests. These included looking at responses to mail-order tests, testing the use of coupons, testing the value of following up coupons with calls by a sales representative, offering samples and free literature, using coupons versus "hidden offers" that were described in the text but not made obvious with a coupon, and split-testing. By testing selected variables in ads against one another, and seeing which produced the greatest response, Caples developed the most scientific approach to creating the most effective ads.

Caples acknowledged that advertising could never be an exact science like chemistry. In a chemistry lab you can have complete

control over all the variable. But in advertising, there are too many unknown variables, and these variables are always changing.

That doesn't mean that there aren't great advantages to running tests. You can never predict with precision how an ad will do. But you can quickly identify ads that don't work at all, and ads that work very well. And then you can improve those ads that work well, to make them work even better.

As Caples said, an automobile manufacturer would never buy a trainload of axles or seat fabric without running many pretests to insure the money was well spent. Why would he buy trainloads of advertising with nothing more to go on than his own personal opinion? Advertising would never live up to its full potential to benefit business until testing was made part of the process.

We'll finish by looking at Caples' "one rule that never changes":

"Test everything on a small scale before you spend money on a large scale. Testing enables you to keep your finger on the public pulse. It enables you to sense trends in advance. It enables you to separate the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats, the winning ideas from the duds. It enables you to multiply the results you get from the dollars you spend in advertising."

I think that says it all, doesn't it?

## **The Six Essentials - Plus That Extra Special Ingredient** Lessons from the legendary Robert Collier

There were few copywriters who were as effective at selling a product or an idea as Robert Collier. He knew how to get people's attention, build a sense of desire in them for the product, induce a sense of urgency, and get them to take action. He understood the process of getting people to take small steps that would eventually lead them to the big step of ordering the product.

To those of us reading his letters today, they may seem a bit stilted and old fashioned. Perhaps we might call them quaint. But we must remember that these letters were appropriate for the audience of the time, and they successfully sold millions and millions of dollars worth of goods, and saved many companies from financial ruin.

In his classic book, *The Robert Collier Letter Book*, he laid out the whole process as a guide for those who would follow in his footsteps. One of the things that was so admirable about him was that while he presented basic rules for copywriters to follow, he understood these were just the basic bone structure of the piece, and it was up to the creativity of the copywriter to flesh out the piece however he or she wanted to do it.

Collier always encouraged new ideas and new approaches. So, while he presented what he called the six essentials of any good sales letter, he also said, "These rules, of course, are for the man or woman who is *studying* the art of writing successful letters. After a time, they come to be almost second nature, so that you weigh each of these features without being conscious that you are doing so." He went on to add that these rules were only the mechanics of the letter, and that real letter writing only started there. So let's first look at Collier's list of the six essentials, and then look at what is necessary to rise above these mechanical rules to create a great letter.

### **The Six Essentials**

You can think of this as Sales Letter Writing 101. Here are the six components that Collier believed must be the basis of every great sales letter - although not necessarily always presented in this order:

1. **The Opening.** This is how you get your readers' attention. Somehow you have to "fit in" with your readers' existing train of thought so that they are immediately interested in and curious about what you have to tell them. A good opening will get people to read the rest of the letter. Without a good opening, readers may cast the letter aside before you get the chance to present your case.
2. **The Description or Explanation.** This is where you lay out your basic proposition, presenting the important features and some of the necessary details. This prepares readers to see things your way.
3. **The Motive or Reason Why.** Now you have to get readers to have a longing for your product. You must impel them to take the action you are going to suggest. This requires that you go beyond merely describing your proposition. You have to get the reader to understand what your product will do for him - all the benefits he'll experience if he takes the action you want him to.
4. **The Proof or Guarantee.** Now you have to make your readers feel comfortable about their decision to respond to your offer. You offer proof that what you are telling them is true (for example, with scientific data or testimonials from other satisfied buyers), and/or you give them some kind of guarantee that they will not lose anything if they take you up on your offer and then are not happy with the product.
5. **The Snapper or Penalty.** This is where you induce a sense of urgency that leads readers to respond immediately. You make it clear that if readers do not respond, they will suffer some kind of loss, whether it be monetary, or some loss of prestige or opportunity.
6. **The Close.** By this time, hopefully, you've got your readers eager to take action. In the close you tell them what they need to do, with complete instructions for how to do it. Make it easy for them to take the final steps to order, request a call by a salesperson, or whatever the goal of the letter is.

These six essentials should be familiar to you, and they certainly make logical sense. But there is one more ingredient that the letter writer must bring to the task if the result is going to be a successful letter that motivates people to take action.

## **Real Letter Writing Starts Here**

According to Collier, "It is getting the *feel* of your message that counts." If you're completely dry, you can't write a good letter. It won't have any life in it. A good copywriter gets excited over an idea.

Collier tells the story of the first sales letter he wrote. He had no training as a copywriter, but he was working for a coal company located in a small town in West Virginia, and he got an idea for what made his company's coal better than what their competitor's were producing for a certain use. I won't try to explain the details to you, but the point is that he became really excited about this idea. As he put it, "I was full of an idea, and it bubbled out all over the letter. And that is what counts." It was his enthusiasm that came across in the letter, and it led to a huge number of orders for the coal from gas companies.

And that's the main point I want to get across - the critical lesson from this legendary letter writer. I think it's what another legendary copywriter, David Ogilvy, referred to as "the big idea." You have to find something that really makes your product or service stand out, something you really feel compelled to tell people about, and make sure that the enthusiasm you feel comes across in the letter. That's what breathes life into it.

So really, there are two critical aspects to the letter writing process.

First, you have to follow the basics and make sure your letter contains the essential elements that we listed above. Without a good close (what we call the call to action) you will lose people at the end. Without what Collier called the snapper or penalty, there will be no urgency to act right away. So do make sure that your sales letters contain all those needed ingredients.

But once you have that framework built in to your letter, be sure to give full attention to the other critical aspect, the feel of the letter, the enthusiasm that you impart for your product or service. That's what really motivates your readers to give your letter the time it takes to read it, and then to act on your offer.

If you're in business, there's something you love about it and what you do. There's something that you believe makes you stand out from your competitors. Capture that enthusiasm in your sales letter, and people will respond.



## **More Laws for Writing Copy That Sells**

Lessons from the legendary Claude Hopkins

Today I want to revisit some of the wisdom from Claude C. Hopkins. Hopkins was one of the greatest copywriters of his day, which was back in the early part of the last century. He was a great believer in the importance of testing ad copy to determine what really worked. Having an idea that your copy was good and just going ahead and using it was no way to run a business. A manufacturer tests every aspect of his materials and processes. By the same token, he should test the effectiveness of his advertising copy at motivating people to take the desired action.

Hopkins laid out some of his basic laws of advertising in his classic book, *My Life in Advertising*. The chapter on "Scientific Advertising" concentrated on his laws of writing copy that sells. He knew these principles worked based on years of testing different ways of organizing his copy, and then analyzing the resulting response rates. I presented some of these basic principles in this report. But he had a lot more. So here are some additional rules that worked for Hopkins in his day, and that are still worth following today:

**Superlative Claims Don't Count:** Your readers know that your copy is trying to sell them something, and they don't put much value in claims like: "The Best in the World." It's an expected exaggeration, so readers won't fault you for saying it, but it does nothing to advance your cause. And it probably makes your readers put less stake in anything else you say. They may just discount all your other claims.

So, what works better than such puffery? Actual figures and facts are what will convince people. Readers know that advertisers cannot make misleading claims, so they figure what you say is either a fact, or a lie, and you are unlikely to take the chance of facing a lawsuit, so you must be telling the truth.

The more specific the facts you give, the better. An indefinite claim leaves an indefinite impression. Hopkins gives the example of selling a tungsten lamp as being better than a coal lamp (which clearly shows how long ago he wrote the book!). If you just say that the tungsten lamp gives more light, no one will be impressed. But, tell them that the tungsten lamp give 3-1/2 times as much light as a coal lamp, and people will be impressed

and will give you the benefit of the doubt that you are telling the truth.

So don't make broad, empty claims. It will devalue your entire sales piece. Make a specific claim, and not only will people be impressed by it, but they will look more favorably on the rest of your statements in the piece.

**Never Advertise Negatively:** This is an issue that copywriters have different opinions on, even today. According Hopkins, we should always present the attractive side of a subject, not the offensive side. Rather than focusing on the ills, we should focus on the greater health and happiness the reader will experience thanks to the advertised product.

I know that many advertisers today use scare tactics (especially financially based pieces when talking about the current economic conditions, health based pieces that talk about illnesses, etc.). I'd be interested to see the results of their own research. Certainly the majority of advertising today focuses on the positive. Hopkins is right when he says, "No toothpaste manufacturer ever made an impression by picturing dingy teeth. Or by talking decay and pyorrhea. The successes have been made by featuring the attractive sides." You can't argue with that. Hopkins tells us that people are "seeking advantages, improvements, new ways to satisfy desires."

I know that sometimes you really do have to paint a clear picture of how bad things are before presenting your own product as the solution. But in most cases the headline should promise the person will discover something of value by reading the piece, and once the negatives of the situation are explained, the piece should concentrate on how the advertised product will change the reader's life for the better.

Of course, everything is an empirical question. So do test this out for yourself. Don't assume you know the best way to position your product. Test to find out what really works.

**Test Your Headline to Find What Appeals the Most:** Hopkins always ran keyed tests that compared one headline with another. If you find that one kind of headline appeals to 25% of readers, and one appeals to 50%, you must choose their use accordingly.

Hopkins said you must understand psychology in creating headlines (and ad copy in general). One writer tries to flatter his readers; another tries to humiliate. One tries to appeal to

readers' self-interest, while another appeals to service. But one can go even further in using psychology by recognizing pride and individuality. And Hopkins said these come from a writer's instincts and can't really be taught. "They come through kindly instinct, through love and understanding, through desires to please and serve. No man out of tune with his fellows can be taught them."

That puts a big responsibility on copywriters, which not everyone can rise to. It says a lot about Hopkins himself, and one would wish that everyone, in any profession, would have such values.

Hopkins concluded that winning ads came from superior science and strategy, but also from knowing more, and being better grounded and shrewder than rivals. As he said, "The only way to that end is to start with fixed principles, proved by decades of experience, from which you never swerve."

Thanks to Claude Hopkins for sharing his discoveries, and making it so much easier for copywriters today to write advertising that really works.

## **Closing**

I hope this report has convinced you of something very important about your business. You can look at the past success of great marketers like John Caples, David Ogilvy, Robert Collier, and Claude Hopkins, and learn "new" ways to market your business following these legendary marketers.

Want to know more?

If you'd like help with your direct mail campaigns and are thinking about working with Simpson Direct, please call my office at 541-956-2160 or send me an e-mail at [craig@simpson-direct.com](mailto:craig@simpson-direct.com).

I'll be happy to send you more information about how Simpson Direct can help you.