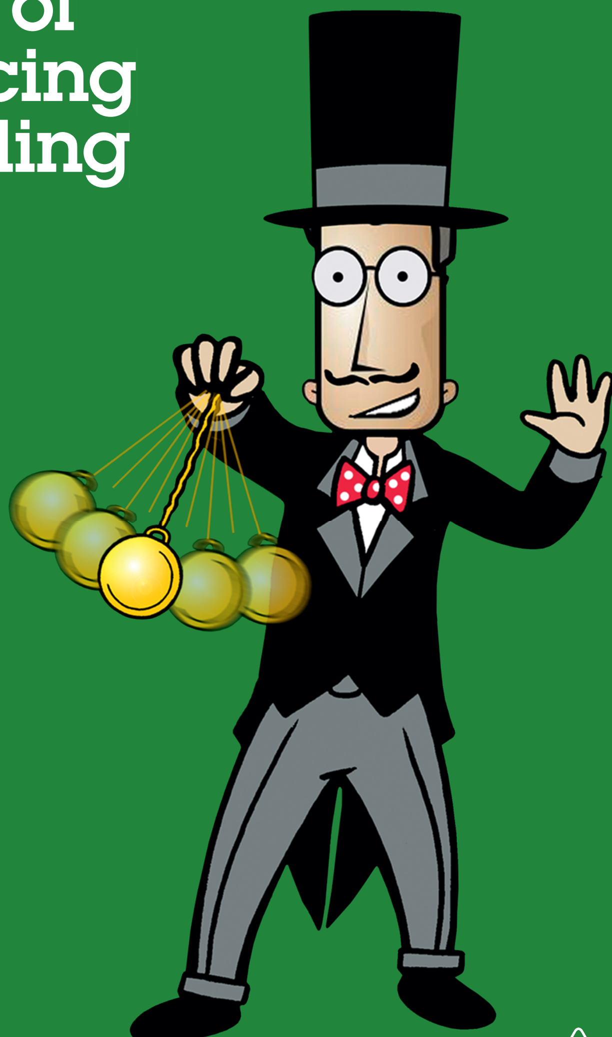
guru in a bottle®

The Art of Influencing and Selling



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Introduction

The art of influencing and selling is neatly summarized by this quote taken from the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by US sales guru Dale Carnegie: 'When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudices and motivated by pride and vanity.' What's fascinating is that this was written in 1953 and well before access to the powerful databases we have today, which contain millions of bits of data on just about every aspect of our lives that it is legally possible to hold.

What Dale Carnegie said then holds true today. If we only operate on a rational basis in order to try to influence our desired customer or client to purchase our product or service, then we'll fail miserably.

It's true that we mustn't ignore logic or the ability of critical argument and evaluation that dominates so much of the way in which we are taught to think and make decisions. Just look at the soap powder TV commercials of the 1950s and 1960s, where consumers were blinded with the power of the technology to make their clothes 'whiter than white'! There was almost a messianic obsession about selling features rather than benefits. And if you think times have changed and that approach is dead and buried along with the cheesy commercials with women restricted to the role of housewives, well I'm afraid it's still alive and kicking amongst some businesses! The problem is that the traditional thinking we apply to today's sales challenges just isn't up to the job any more.

What many of the most successful businesses on the planet have in common is the ability to challenge the conventional wisdom that has for too long dominated the way we think. In essence, these organizations have replaced one-dimensional with multidimensional thinking.

Much of our thinking is done in a disorganized, inefficient way. We often try to do too much at once. Emotions, information, logic, hope, risk and creativity are all mixed up together. It's like juggling too many balls all at once, and some end up getting dropped. As a result of this juggling act, we begin to limit our thinking and make poor decisions. Often, we tend to use only one type of thinking at any given moment. Yet one type of thinking is no longer adequate to cope with today's rapidly changing and challenging commercial environment. Judgement and argument can no longer solve all problems or move us forward. We need a multidimensional approach in order to succeed.

And this is what this book is about. We need to think about influencing and selling in 3D and not just online! We need to be collaborative, focused and directed. We need, in short, to rewire our thinking about how to influence and sell to our desired customer and client segments wherever we are and whatever business we happen to be in. We need to be able to navigate different avenues of thought to build insight, creative ideas and effective sales solutions if we want to be successful in this endeavour.

If you follow the approach we advocate here in this book, then you'll be on your way to creating more sales for your business. And the guru won't just be out of the bottle. The guru will be you!

About this book

Chapter 1: Psychology of selling a product or service or yourself
In this chapter, we'll look at the psychology of influence and the role that you play regardless of the product or service you're trying to sell.

Chapter 2: The sales pipeline and how to ensure it's realistic
In this chapter, we'll show you how to put together a realistic rather than pie-in-the-sky sales pipeline where the chances of success are greater and will keep a smile on the face of your boss!

Chapter 3: Up-selling, cross-selling, cold calling and warm calling
In this chapter, we'll analyse and rehearse the key skills you need to be effective in getting a chance of making a sale with a desired customer or client prospect.

Chapter 4: Effective approaches to prospective customers and clients
In this chapter, having discussed how the tools work and what you need to make a sale, we'll show you how to strut your stuff.

Chapter 5: How to interrogate a database of contacts to get more sales
In this chapter, we'll take a no-fuss look at database marketing without making you glaze over in the process!

Chapter 6: Making an effective sales presentation
In this chapter, we'll take you through some of the best ways in which to make a first impression in a sales presentation by looking at some of the tips and tricks used by seasoned sales presenters.

Chapter 7: How to write effective sales materials
In this chapter, we'll show you the way you should approach having to write sales brochures, newsletters and flyers that are aimed at customers and clients and reduce the chance of them being deleted or ending up in the waste bin!

Chapter 8: The power of business networking
In this chapter, we'll show you how to use the power of online and offline networking, as well as the importance of being recommended by other customers and clients, which could be your most powerful sales weapon.

Chapter 9: How to get senior-level appointments in your diary
In this chapter, we'll show you how to get past the 'gatekeeper' and get that all-important appointment with the key decision maker who can authorize to spend budget with you!

Chapter 10: Closing a sale and follow-up
In this chapter, we'll show you, once you've succeeded in opening a sale, how to close it successfully, as well as what to do after the sale has been made.

1

Psychology of selling a product or service or yourself

In this chapter:

- The art of persuasion
- The big issue
- Trust builder
- Redefinition of selling
- Seeing things differently
- Collaboration is the future of selling
- Hypnotizing the audience to fall under your spell!

The art of persuasion

Shortly after British prime minister Gordon Brown called the 2010 general election, the Conservative Party leader David Cameron took a trip to the Variety bakery in Bolton, England. With shirt sleeves rolled up, the 'prime-minister-in-waiting' stood on a plastic crate to speak to a group of bemused

Warburtons employees. It was a clear clash of cultures: David Cameron with his upper-class vowels addressing a group of about 100 no-nonsense bakers in blue boiler suits. A couple of TV crews were on standby to record David Cameron's blushes.

You could call it a high-risk strategy. Already well ahead in the public opinion polls, David Cameron had much to lose and little to gain from such stark exposure on national television. Yet the Conservative leader's campaign was full of similarly high-risk public appearances and photo opportunities.

After Warburtons, David Cameron visited a west London brewery, a branch of DIY shop B&Q and a Bestway Cash and Carry warehouse. It was a schedule designed to evoke the more prosaic qualities of life. Beer, white bread, DIY – the message was delivered straight into our subconscious: 'I'm more like you than you think.' Well, that was the idea. And of course, after he was elected, David Cameron unveiled his 'Big Society' vision, which became much derided.

But back to life on the campaign trail. All of these photo opportunities raised the one question that was nagging away at David Cameron: could the British public be persuaded to trust him?

This episode is relevant when considering the art of influencing and selling within a business context, and we'll get back to David Cameron in a moment.

The big issue

The biggest issue in business right now isn't lack of lending by the banks, decrease in disposable incomes and the depressed state of the developed economies of the West – although of course all of these issues combine to have an impact on business and the survival of companies in certain sectors.

The biggest issue is trust or, put another way, lack of trust.

Every day, we wake up to news stories about those whom we thought we could trust – bankers, MPs, lords, judges, the jury system, big corporations and business leaders – only to find that individuals and even whole organizations fall far short of how we expect them to behave and as a result can't be trusted any more. When bosses talk of pay restraint required from the workforce and then reward themselves eye-watering bonuses, who can trust them?

From a sales point of view, trust or the lack of trust is a major issue. If people don't trust us, they won't buy from us. It's as simple as that.

In order to build trust we need to be able to communicate, and increasingly that means being not just in 'transmit mode' but more importantly in 'receive mode'. A successful salesperson is someone who listens.

So there's no point shouting ever louder at the top of our voice if no one is bothering to listen to us. And it doesn't win friends or influence people, does it? Worse still, it makes us look ineffective and desperate. Try this simple test: walk down your local high street before Christmas and then return home and write down the names of the furniture stores that had 'SALE NOW ON' signs in their windows. It's likely you won't remember all of them, as we are conditioned now to screen out messages rather than screen them in. It all becomes a bit of a blur, doesn't it?

Trust builder

It follows that selling a product or service is inextricably linked to whether customers, clients, consumers and prospects can trust the person or organization making that offer. This move to the source of the offer rather than just focusing on the features and benefits of a product or service is now core to the thinking of several global brand owners, including Procter & Gamble, Unilever and Coca-Cola, which are now placing much more emphasis on the 'corporate brand' as a key to building trust with their customers in order to drive incremental sales.

The psychology of selling is shifting away from being transactional towards building a meaningful dialogue with customers, clients, consumers and prospects that's built on trust.

David Cameron's attempt to portray himself as a 'man of the people' in the hope that voters would see him as their future prime minister was fuelled in part by his belief that he wanted to be liked.

We tend to be influenced by people who are similar to us. David Cameron, with his Etonian upper-class pedigree and charming looks, is arguably quite different from the voters who live in Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire in Scotland. But his campaign strategy was to break down the perception of disparity.

According to British business psychologist Stuart Duff, David Cameron wanted voters to trust him even though he'd never held ministerial responsibility in his relatively short political career. 'If I can convince you that you're more like me, you'll start to tolerate me more for the things that I do wrong; you'll start to tolerate me more and start to notice the positive things I do rather than the negative things', observes Stuart Duff.

Clearly, David Cameron had thought about the barriers that separated him from the public, and his campaign strategy was to remove those negative stereotypes that surround a person of privilege and power, including their name – hence he wanted henceforth to be referred to in the media as 'Dave' rather than David. What next? Fluffy dice with the moniker 'Dave and Sam' (Samantha is his wife) hanging from the rear-view mirror of his Ford Escort? Such a folksy strategy has long been abandoned. And in any event such a strategy was doomed to fail before it had begun.

David Cameron had received a mixed reception in Bolton. His approach was solid enough, but he muddled his tactics. Starting with a cringe-making joke about bakers, his self-deprecation felt false. He was a politician desperate to be liked, which is a common mistake of leaders, who frequently believe the best way to gain influence is to make themselves likeable.

According to British business academic Steve Martin, likeability as a method of persuasion isn't that effective:

> *We are conditioned to be more likely to say 'yes' to those people who like us and who tell us they like us, because we've been taught that they have our best interest at heart. Leaders seeking to build networks of followers should spend less time trying to be liked and put more effort into highlighting characteristics of followers that they genuinely admire. Most sales training programmes say that the first thing you need to do is to get your customer to like you. That's not true. The first thing you should do is learn to like your customer.*

The transactional approach to selling is far from dead and buried. Evidence of this can be found in the poor sales performance of many businesses struggling to keep afloat in these turbulent economic times as well as on the web.

According to Wikipedia, 'selling' is defined as:

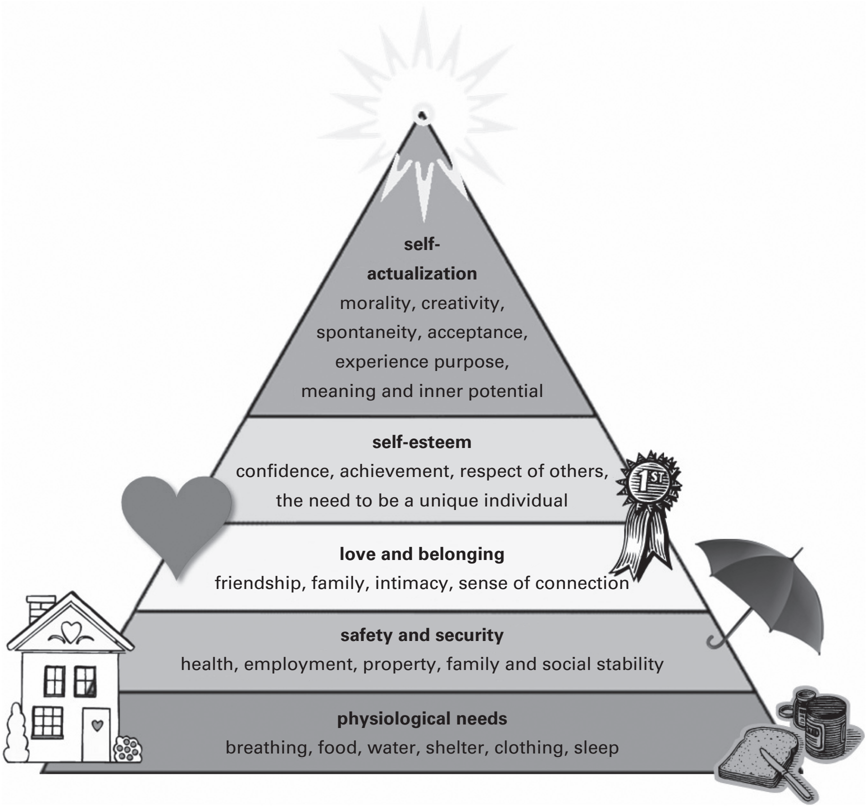
> *Offer to exchange something of value for something else. The something of value being offered may be tangible or intangible. Buying and selling are understood to be two sides of the same coin or transaction. Both seller and buyer are in a process of negotiation to consummate the exchange of values. The exchange, or selling, process has implied rules and identifiable stages. It is implied that the selling process will proceed fairly and ethically so that the parties end up nearly equally rewarded. The stages of selling, and buying, involve getting acquainted, assessing each party's need for the other's item of value, and determining if the values to be exchanged are equivalent or nearly so, or, in buyer's terms, 'worth the price'.*

What the definition doesn't get into is the relative bargaining positions of the buyer and seller – and this varies widely between industry sectors and markets. Not everyone is equal, of course.

Celebrated US psychologist Abraham Maslow believed that all of us strive to satisfy certain basic needs (Figure 1.1), and these needs he placed at the bottom of the hierarchy of needs all of us have.

According to Maslow, once all the basic needs have been satisfied, they no longer motivate individuals in terms of their behaviour. In contrast, more deep-rooted needs, such as self-expression, are self-propelling, and there is a continuous desire within us to 'be all that we can be'. This state is described as self-actualization, and focusing on satisfying the psychological desires of our customers, clients and prospects rather than just their basic needs is likely to result in more sales. The transactional view of selling, exchanging goods or services for money, is now outmoded. Customer, clients and prospects want and expect much, much more! It's time to rewire our thinking and redefine what we mean by 'selling'.

Figure 1.1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Redefinition of selling

In many sales contexts, both parties often struggle to understand complex offerings and so instead end up focusing on price. Part of the problem is that some sales professionals tend to treat everyone the same, with the result that they often fail to close the sale.

There's no such thing as an 'average' customer or client, and we need to shift our thinking from mass to niche if we want to achieve success in our sales and marketing efforts.

As a result, there's been a fundamental shift in our obsession with customers or clients. After all, it's much more profitable focusing on their attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours than our own. If we are prepared to go to customers or clients rather than push product at them in the hope they will open their wallets, then this will create a new dialogue from which we can grow any business. The starting point is the customer or client's point of view (POV).

'Walmartizing' open-heart surgery

Take open-heart surgery. Yes, really! You may not have heard of Dr Devi Shetty, but he's fast becoming a household name in India. He's reinterpreted our understanding of 'medical care' not just in his native India, but the whole world. He runs a 1,000-bed hospital that provides affordable open-heart surgery and other medical treatment for a fraction of the price in other countries – making the family-owned hospital the biggest of its kind in the world.

Devi Shetty has personally carried out over 15,000 heart ops, and calls his approach 'Walmartization', which is a pun on Walmart, the world's largest discount department and warehouse chain.

His critics say that processing patients in such numbers is dangerous. A quick check of the statistics tells a very different story. His hospital reports a 1.4 per cent mortality rate within 30 days of coronary artery bypass graft surgery, one of the most common procedures. That's better than the 1.9 per cent average reported in US hospitals that carry out fewer operations.

Seeing things differently

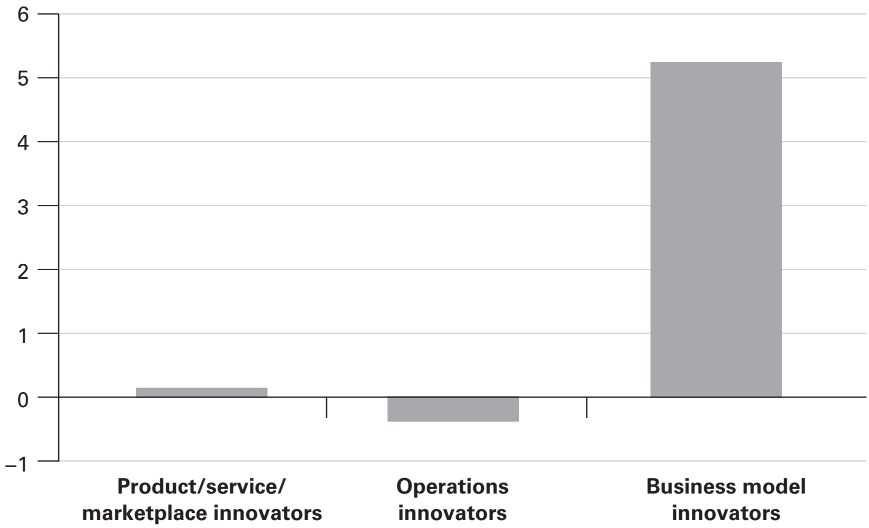
The second thing we need to do as part of our redefinition of 'selling' is to see things differently. British sales and marketing guru Peter Fisk believes that successful organizations 'see things differently and think different things'.

Devi Shetty is a good example of this. He's sympathetic to the needs of patients who are tired of waiting for an appointment for open-heart surgery and who want to get on with the rest of their lives. By carrying out so many operations the hospital is able to reduce its costs because of economies of scale, pass on cost savings to patients, resulting in lower hospital bills, and treat patients on very low incomes free of charge. Arguably, these outcomes couldn't be achieved if Devi Shetty and his family managed the hospital along traditional lines.

Another innovative approach that has turned into a mega-successful sales operation is Zipcars. The company started off as an idea in a bar in Berlin over a decade ago. Today it provides cars for use by the hour and has over 560,000 members and 8,541 vehicles in several cities around the world. In 2010, it achieved a turnover of around US$186 million across all its operations, and a few years ago it acquired its rival Streetcar. The founders didn't understand why people had to buy cars – why not just rent one when you need it?

Customers get a membership card and can find the nearest Zipcar from their mobile phone. The swipe card opens the electronic door and operates the vehicle. Customers are charged by the minute and the miles travelled. The car is already cleared for congestion charge and has petrol in the tank as well as insurance. It's a business model that couldn't have been conceived without the internet and mobile devices, appealing to those who can't afford

Figure 1.2 Compound annual growth rate (percentage)



Source: Judge Business School, Cambridge University, 2010

a car – such as students – and the environmentally conscious, as well as those for whom the economics and the costs of running a private vehicle are now prohibitive.

Research by Judge Business School, Cambridge University has shown that such an approach in business is so much more successful than those that simply make incremental improvements to their products and services with extra 'bells and whistles'.

Businesses that are genuine innovators like Zipcar enjoy a significantly higher compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of five times that of their competitors (Figure 1.2). This study was based on a survey of over 4,000 businesses in 17 countries across Europe, the United States and Asia, so it's a compelling piece of evidence that we can't ignore.

Collaboration is the future of selling

The third thing we must do as part of redefining our approach to 'selling' is to collaborate with our customers, clients and prospects. It's not something that we are naturally good at, so for most companies this is still work in progress.

Threadless (2012)

One of the best examples of collaborative selling is US-based T-shirt company Threadless, which has grown to become an annual US$1 billion turnover business in less than five years since its launch. Threadless gets its customers to design a new range of T-shirts every week, which are sold through its website as well as retail stores. The best designs submitted win a US$2,000 cash prize, which the online community vote for.

T-shirts cost US$3 to produce and retail for US$15, which shows that customers are prepared to pay a premium for collaboration. What's really cool is that they keep coming back for more – as the community of customers want the latest designs. This is a great example of doing things differently – and more profitably.

This may strike you as being a new wave of thinking about how to sell more stuff – but in fact the founding members of iconic rock band the Grateful Dead set out to do just that in their quest to be the most commercially successful band in the world.

Grateful Dead (2012)

Before the internet, bands promoted their new albums by scheduling tours across the United States and around the world. Fans paid top dollar to attend sold-out shows where they were treated to pyrotechnics, light shows and of course music. Concerts were the same every night and included the band's 'best of' songs with cuts from the latest album mixed throughout the set.

The goal of these concert tours was to sell as many records as possible to ensure that an album went gold or platinum. Fans bought the albums at their local record store, where they would find the list of top albums that week taped to the wall next to the cash till. For an album to go gold in 1975, a band had to sell 500,000 records and hit US$1 million in sales. To be awarded the coveted platinum disc, bands had to shift in excess of 1 million units and US$2 million in sales.

Since those days the business model for the music industry has been turned on its head. Whereas in the past bands used tours to promote money-making albums, today albums are used to promote highly lucrative tours, where ticket sales run into hundreds of millions of dollars for bands like the Rolling Stones and U2.

The Grateful Dead weren't a conventional band in any sense way back in 1965, and rather than focusing on selling albums like other bands they generated revenues from ticket sales, merchandising and licensing by turning their shows into a totally unique fan experience and encouraging fans to create their own bootleg copies of their concerts and sell merchandise that they had made themselves using the band's distinctive logo! This radical marketing approach enthralled the Flower Power Generation and rapidly propelled 'official' merchandise and record sales through the stratosphere.

The fans' own enterprising activities didn't dent sales. Quite the reverse in fact, and it's fuelled a continuing interest in the band amongst existing and new audiences for the last 50 years. The result is that the band is the most commercially successful in the world today – a spectacular achievement considering that the band recorded its last album back in 1995.

The Grateful Dead broke almost every rule in the music industry book by encouraging their fans to record shows and trade tapes; they built a mailing list and sold tickets to their shows directly to fans so they wouldn't get ripped off by ticket touts. In short, the band built their business model on live concerts and merchandise, not album sales.

Hypnotizing the audience to fall under your spell!

Selling is incredibly personal and often depends on the ability of the seller, so selling yourself has become much more important – whether in a business-to-consumer (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B) context. Today, selling isn't just about the goods and services those prospective customers and clients are buying. Increasingly, they are buying you.

Communication within a sales context must therefore work at both a conscious and an unconscious level. Increasingly, sales professionals are turning to hypnosis as a strategy for helping to drive sales.

Hypnosis works on influencing the unconscious mind in order to facilitate changes in patterns of thinking and behaviour. When people are under hypnosis they have entered a dream-like state where their mind is relaxed. By unlocking the power of the unconscious mind, a professional salesperson can make suggestions that can have a profound impact on the prospective customer or client.

This is relevant in a selling context, as during the normal course of a day all of us have the capacity to drift in and out of consciousness. It's the brain's way of dealing with information overload! Going into a trance-like state allows people to relax and makes them open to new ideas – something that a professional salesperson would regard as a useful state.

The following checklist is a summary of the key points covered:

- The key to success in selling your product, your service or yourself is to listen to your customers, clients, prospects and fans.
- Try to see things differently and think different things.
- Like the Grateful Dead, cultivate a dedicated, active community, collaborating with them to co-create a lifestyle and give away 'freemium' content.
- Use social media and inbound marketing concepts to help drive incremental sales.
- Consider tapping into the unconscious mind of the prospective customer or client.

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7

How to write effective sales materials

In this chapter:

- Outside in, not inside out
- Content is king
- Sales copy tips
- E-mail
- Web page
- Online newsletters
- Google AdWords
- Sales letter
- Product sales brochure
- International Chamber of Commerce Code (2011)

Introduction

In the 1976 epic *Taxi Driver*, directed by Martin Scorsese, actor Robert De Niro plays Travis Bickle, a mentally unstable Vietnam war veteran who works nights as a taxi driver in New York. Back in his rented apartment, he is shown staring at himself in the bathroom mirror, brandishing a high-calibre handgun.

'You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? You talkin' to *me*? Then who the hell else are you talkin' to? You talkin' to me? Well, I'm the only one here. Who the f*** do you think you're talking to?'

Yes, it's the rhetorical question of a madman staring at himself in the mirror. But we have more in common with Travis Bickle than you may care to realize. How insane is it that we don't stop to think who we're writing for before we invest time and resources in producing a small mountain of sales collateral that could be destined for the recycle bin?

'The problem with a lot of copy is that it isn't talkin' to me. If anything, it's talkin' at me. That's a big difference, because the centre of the universe for that kind of copy is the writer. But who cares about the writer? Certainly not the reader', says British copywriter guru Andy Maslen.

Of course, he's absolutely right. It's highly unlikely that taking such an approach will open a dialogue with the desired customer, client or prospect or indeed lead to closing a sale.

In the world of sponsorship, it's the biggest strategic error made by the vast majority of rights holders seeking financial support for their properties from well-endowed brand owners. Typically, a glossy sponsorship brochure will talk about how great the property is and how successful it's been in engaging with fans and generating media coverage. It will contain a never-ending list of 'benefits' that reads more like a shopping list than a focused piece of copy. The fundamental flaw is that the sales collateral has been produced entirely through the lens of the rights holder, not the intended sponsor who could use those intellectual property rights. And typically no effort whatsoever is made even to attempt to explain how making such an investment would help achieve the brand-building and commercial objectives of the potential sponsor. Doh! It's no surprise that this ends up in the bin in at least 95 per cent of all mailings.

As we've said in other places in this book, the starting point in the journey of making a sale must be the desired customers, clients or prospects. This holds true whether it's up-selling, cold calling, warm calling, making a sales pitch, networking, closing the sale or writing a piece of sales collateral. It's their point of view that counts.

This may sound like a challenge. How could we possibly know everything that intended recipients will be interested in? After all, how do they know they'll want something when they don't know it exists?

In this chapter, we'll explore how such a barrier in our own thinking can be removed if we're prepared to learn to write with our eyes and our ears – something that we weren't taught at school but could be one of the most valuable lessons of our sales career.

Outside in, not inside out

In *The End of Marketing as We Know It*, former Coca-Cola chief marketing officer Sergio Zyman gave a textbook definition of 'seller-centric' communication. He said: 'Convincing consumers to buy your products is the only reason why any company should spend its money on sales and marketing. Buy my product. Period. If what you are doing now doesn't get consumers to do that, try something else.'

His book is more like a polemic on the virtues of getting back to sales and marketing basics. It was written over a decade ago and was a reaction to a time in the 1980s when the global economy was in better shape than it is today and when marketing tended to be about the 'sizzle' rather than the 'sausage'. He was tired of spending millions of dollars on commercials for Coke that made us feel good about ourselves but didn't actually translate into incremental sales of its products.

To be fair to Sergio Zyman, the world of buying and selling is now a very different place, where the accent is on buyer-centric approaches and collaboration rather than the 'buy my product' school of sales and marketing. We're sure his opinion about seller-centric communication would be very different today.

Without doubt, the point of view (POV) of the prospective customer or client is now a highly valuable commodity. As a result, the practice of 'selling' is much more 'outside in' rather than 'inside out'.

Set aside any thoughts about selling stuff for the moment and put yourself in the shoes of today's consumer venturing out on a shopping trip in the space of a couple of mouse clicks. Chances are you wouldn't say no to the following:

- impartial advice on the best baby buggy to buy that can be folded with one hand and stored in the boot of a small car;
- the views of others who've stayed at a resort you're thinking of booking for a fortnight's holiday in the sun with your family;
- visiting a price comparison site in order to find the cheapest household insurance; and
- finding out how to save at least 40 per cent on textbooks you must buy for your course.

Today's sales materials must be created from the POV of the buyer, not the seller. Consumers are looking for sellers that are on their side, helping them to fulfil their hopes, desires, needs and requirements, with the minimum of fuss and at the best possible price.

It goes back to writing with your ears and eyes.

'The thing that really astounds me is that most copywriters really haven't bothered to listen deeply enough', remarked the legendary US copywriter Eugene Schwartz. He used to get into a taxi and start interrogating the cab driver, because that's one way to tap into what the market's saying. He also used to go and watch all the top 10 box-office movies. Even if he didn't like them, he'd watch them anyway because that's what the market was thinking and feeling. This allowed him to write copy that directly appealed to this mindset.

Before rushing to the keyboard or briefing an agency for sales literature it's worth building a psychological profile of the readers to whom the sales collateral is attempting to talk:

- Are they male or female?
- How old are they?
- What do they want more of and less of in their lives?
- Where would they rather be right now?
- What do they want more than anything else out of life?
- What are their values?
- How do they see themselves?
- How do others see them?
- Are they head or heart people?

'Whether you're selling to consumers or people at work, ignore the baser human emotions at your peril. Yes, people will want to rationalize their decisions, so make sure you provide plenty of objective reasons why buying your product or service is a sensible thing to do. But remember that people buy on emotional grounds first', observes Andy Maslen.

Content is king

So said Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, way back in 1996. At that time, he prophesied:

> *Content is where I expect much of the real money will be made on the internet, just as it was in broadcasting. One of the exciting things about the internet is that anyone with a PC and a modem can publish whatever content they can create. In a sense, the internet is the multimedia equivalent of the photocopier. It allows material to be duplicated at low cost, no matter the size of the audience.*

Reading this a decade and a half later (which in internet years is a lifetime!) you're struck by the limitations in Bill Gates's vision. The comparison of the internet with a photocopier rather gives this away. It wasn't long after this that brands effectively turned themselves into broadcasters and selling moved from being all about 'push' to being all about 'pull'. At the heart of this movement was content.

Case study approach

From a sales material perspective, the case study is one of the most powerful forms of content you can create. There can be no better way of getting your sales messages across to desired customer and client segments than by having these delivered by your customers and clients (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Case study template

1	Identify the problem, issue, challenge or opportunity	Describe this clearly and succinctly in business terms.
2	What did the customers, clients or intermediaries do about this?	For example, did they research the market and draw up a shortlist of potential solution providers? Need to explain. Why did they choose your company or organization compared with others? Need to explain this in rational and unemotional language.
3	What did your company or organization do?	What was your company or organization's response? Did your company or organization map out a strategic plan? Did your company or organization scope the problem or issue? Did your company or organization do some initial analysis? What were the findings of this? Did your company or organization undertake a short research study or programme? At this part of the case study you need to create quotes from the customers, clients or intermediaries and quotes from your own company or organization that provide some 'colour' to the story. This is where emotional language can be used.
4	What did your company or organization deliver?	Here you need quotes from the customers, clients or intermediaries. 'The influencer' quote could be from a chairman or someone very senior within the customer, client or intermediary organization, but someone who didn't authorize the contract. 'The specifier' quote could be from a boss within the customer, client or intermediary who sets the framework or direction for the work to be done but who may not personally sign off the invoice. 'The authorizer' quote within the customer, client or intermediary is from someone responsible for the scope of work to be done and who also signs off the invoice.

Table 7.1 *continued*

		It's also important to have numbers or statistics (measurable stuff) that back up and validate what is said that your company or organization has delivered. This is the evidential basis part of the case study and in many respects one of the most important ingredients.
5	Did this work?	This is also evidential in nature. Where possible, it's useful to find an external third party who can give an external and objective perspective or endorsement on the work your company or organization has done. Input from an institute, professional body, recognized university or academic can be extremely powerful and add a level of credibility and authority to the case study.
6	What are the measurable benefits for the customer, client or intermediary?	Need to describe the benefits delivered. Benefits should be from the perspective of the customer, client or intermediary (B2C or B2B or B2B2C). For example, the expression of benefits can be in terms of cost savings, income generation, new product development, security, added value for the end user or opening a new revenue stream. It's also important to have numbers or statistics (measurable stuff) that back up and validate what is said to have been delivered.
7	Within a B2B context, how did this affect the customer or client's own customers?	Here your company or organization needs to get some insight from the customer, client or intermediary that validates the decision to use your company or organization rather than a competitor. This part of the case study is with quotes from the customer or client's own customers or clients and other stakeholder groups. This is often ignored or forgotten in case studies and yet could be the most interesting bit. Using these stakeholders' own quotes will be powerful (and permission from the customer or client will be required).

Table 7.1 *continued*

8	(Where relevant) what can the customer, client or intermediary now do in terms of its own market segment that it couldn't do before?	Where relevant, your company or organization may have empowered customers, clients or intermediaries to be able to do something that is important for them. Explain what this is. This part of the case study is about delivering a competitive advantage to customers, clients or intermediaries or some other advantage that has value for them.
9	(Where relevant) what are the future opportunities for the customer, client or intermediary?	This is a forward-looking bit of the case study. This can be described in terms of competencies, capabilities, market position, market share, new product development, increase in productivity, decrease in risk or other such measurable benefits that link back to the other parts of the case study.
10	(Where relevant) what experience and capability does your company or organization now have as a result of this work?	This is a more 'sales'-orientated type of case study. This bit could be a useful round-up of your own competencies, capabilities, market position, market share, new product development and other meaningful 'sales'-type messaging. This part of the case study ends on your company or organization, so it's much more selling focused. Try to make this bit more future orientated. Include contact details at the bottom.
11	How can all of the above be encapsulated by a photograph, video or film?	There is a need to break away from linear thinking and consider expressing the case study through the medium of photography, video and film and not just through the printed word. This helps to add emotional intelligence in the way the story is told. It is the most powerful way to assist in getting the audience to engage with the case study.

The likelihood of getting every single element of the case study template in place will be a tall order, but even getting 50–70 per cent of it would be a fantastic step forward in creating some really compelling content that can be used as a media asset in both offline and online environments.

Sales copy tips

Failure to plan is a plan to fail

The reality is you can't get going unless you have a plan that you want to follow and execute. Spending time thinking and planning will ensure that the sales copy will work. Remember, you need to shift your point of view to that of the recipient, and that takes some thinking and planning to do.

Look beyond your own 'field of view'

Some of the best sales copy ideas may in fact not be in our own market segment. They may be found in other markets, professions and sectors.

A good example is the impact that salespeople from a retail background have had on the selling of professional business-to-business (B2B) services. Good practice exists in a variety of places – go seek it out, give it a twist and apply it in your field. You could be surprised as to the results you can achieve simply by looking outside your own field of view.

Be authentic, above everything else

There's a lot of wisdom out there about writing great sales copy – often written by those who've been doing it for years both offline and online. On the other hand, you've got to develop your own style. You have to find the voice of your company or organization. Your copy should reflect your company's or organization's personality, to be the best it can be.

Remember, more than ever, it's about being 100 per cent authentic. This is what this chapter is all about. Don't try to be something you're not. Apart from the fact that it won't work, you can damage your credibility and destroy your reputation, perhaps irreversibly.

The oil company BP learnt this lesson the hard way – a huge amount of time, effort and resources was spent globally giving it the 'green makeover'. It even changed its logo in 2000 to one that looked like a sunflower in an attempt to win over environmentally conscious consumers, at a reported cost in excess of US$25 million. Mind-blowing. Then a decade later, in 2010, the company was held responsible for creating the worst oil spill in US history, which turned stretches of the Gulf of Mexico into a lifeless ocean. Heart-breaking.

And it wasn't just a matter of human error, although that did play a part. It was a corporate culture where the interests of shareholder return were more important than saving the environment, no matter what the company was saying publicly about its environmental record. No amount of copy on 'protecting the environment' could reverse the environmental disaster that had its fingerprints all over it. BP had tarnished its reputation, some say to such a degree that it would take a lifetime to put the record straight. Actions will always speak louder than words.

Talk to an audience of one

Forget target audiences, stakeholder groups, target customers or typical buyers, visitors, viewers or listeners. You're not writing for the masses. You're writing for a human being: the reader, the recipient of your communication, a real person.

Remember, it's a conversation, in the first person, so use colloquial language to express ideas, thoughts and information. By paying importance to the tonality of the language you use, you'll be much more effective in getting your sales messages across. And, provided you can write simple sentences in plain language, grammar shouldn't be an issue for your copywriting.

Andy Maslen says:

> *You can write copy that's hard-hitting, persuasive, even entertaining and also avoid thrashing the English language. But maybe there's something that matters even more than correct English, something to do with the fundamental truths about your product or service. Like is it any good? Do enough people want to pay for it? And, ultimately, will your revenues from selling it outweigh your costs in producing and promoting it?*

Mirror and match

This is a technique most commonly associated with body language but can apply equally to creating sales collateral, as pictures of the type of people you're aiming to connect with need to be present visually amongst the words of the copy. The connection has to work on both a rational and an emotional level. Visual images, such as photography, can be immensely powerful if used appropriately.

Call to action (CTA)

In the past, copywriters tended to put the CTA at the end of the sales brochure, sales letter or press advertisement. They'd taken the reader on a journey and at the end of this was 'payback time' – to get something in return. This may have been getting the reader to complete a tear-off strip and stick it in the postbox.

As we said in other places in this book, the art of closing a sale is orchestrating a series of small closes, so there's no reason why a CTA must always come at the end of the sales copy. It could come at the beginning, in the middle or even in the headline. You could pepper your copy with CTAs.

Andy Maslen says:

> *Just as the CTA seems to go last, it often gets written last. But maybe that's not such a good idea. After all, you're tired… and elated… the copy is almost finished. You can go home – just as soon as that pesky CTA is done. So you dash off an 'order now', save and close and you're clear. But this is the whole point of the sales letter, flyer or web page.*

This is where it all comes down to a 'yes' or 'no' from your reader. So it needs the most effort, creativity and precision to get it right.

In an online environment, a call to action isn't as simple as including your phone number in the body of the e-mail or giving the recipients lots of links to click. They need directions and compelling reasons for taking specific actions, particularly if these incur time and money.

It's important that any CTA looks like 'action'. For example, simply stating 'Click here' in the body of e-mail copy isn't likely to get a higher response rate than if you'd said 'Contact us today!'

Words are the building blocks to an effective CTA, and the quantity and type of words you use have a significant impact on the response rate. The most effective way to write a CTA is to start with one or more action words: verbs that propose a specific task that you want the recipient to do (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Verbs that influence the recipient to accept a call to action (CTA)

Call to action	Words that can influence this behaviour
Make an appointment	Sign up, register now.
Contact your company or organization	Call us now! Call toll free now! We are waiting for your call! Call now!
Attend a webinar	Sign up, register now.
Attend event	Register – few places left. Sold out. More dates coming.
Meet you at an exhibition or event	Download a free meeting app. Click here to make an appointment to meet us at our stand.
Open e-mail newsletter	New! Read, look in here. Scroll down.
Complete form	Takes just 60 seconds. We want to hear from you.
Save your e-mail	Do not delete.
Visit web page	Click here. Visit. Give us your feedback.
Make a purchase	Shopping cart. Buy now. Add to shopping cart. Order now! Order now and save money!
Request information	Download, request, learn, e-mail.

Avoid clichés 'like the plague'!

It's a bit like seeing someone with a poorly matching shirt and tie – you know it doesn't work but you haven't the heart to tell him. You just avoid sitting next to him.

If your copy is to be the best dressed in town, then avoid the most commonly used clichés in sales copy (Table 7.3) and rewrite the cliché in plain language.

Table 7.3 Clichés to avoid in sales copy

Let me be honest	Just between us	Step change
Honestly speaking	Let me be sincere	What do I have to do to get you to say yes?
If I were you…	I know	We need to look at this holistically
To tell you the truth	You may have heard this before	This is a game changer
Let me be frank	It's never too late	It's a win–win
Trust me	Paradigm shift	Exclusively for everyone

Avoid emotional adjectives

Poor copywriters leave all the hard work of bringing their product or service to life to the reader by using emotional adjectives like 'super', 'outstanding', 'fabulous', 'important', 'exciting' and 'great'. If you want to tighten up sales copy, it's best to expunge emotional adjectives altogether. Instead focus on choosing the precise noun rather than qualifying vague or abstract ones with adjectives.

A supreme example of the use of language in a precise way is the telegram British prime minister Sir Winston Churchill sent to General Alexander, commander-in-chief in the Middle East, on 10 August 1942: 'Your prime and main duty will be to take or destroy at the earliest opportunity the German–Italian army commanded by Field Marshal Rommel together with all its supplies and establishments in Egypt and Libya.' In the space of just 35 words, he'd packed in an entire campaign, from target to objectives and timescale. As they say, less is more.

Whatever you're selling online, make sure you write copy that engages readers' attention instantly. You don't have time to warm them up. But that doesn't mean all sales copy must be short. Rather, it's about losing a sentence when one word will do.

Length matters

The perceived wisdom is that everything on the web needs to be short, including sales copy, and that long sales copy doesn't work. In fact, any length of sales copy won't work if it's boring and dull and fails to capture and hold the attention and interest of the reader. Flip this on its head, and long copy does work where it's interesting and can sustain interest.

Long copy in a sales letter can be broken down into:

- short paragraphs;
- opening with a direct CTA appealing to the reader's self-interest;
- bullet points and cross-headings that break up the page;
- press cuttings;
- using the first person;
- using lots of specifics; and
- citing lots of benefits.

Like a fine wine, let your copy breathe

Resist the temptation to say absolutely everything possible about your product or service. Leave something for the salesperson to explain!

Overloading sales copy and cramming it into the space of the media you're working in doesn't make any sense. It could look like a mess.

Let the words and images work together in harmony. Give them space and as a rule of thumb allow around 30 per cent of the available space to be blank and design the sales collateral accordingly.

If you're in the luxury product sector, copy tends to be in a classical serif typeface such as Palatino or Perpetua. Use lots of white space and the best-quality paper you can afford.

Use the power of the narrative

A story that brings to life the reasons why someone may want to buy your product or service is one of the most powerful ways of getting your sales messages across to a prospective customer or client. As discussed in Chapter 6, storytelling in the way that Steve Jobs did is incredibly powerful and memorable. All you need is a problem, a hero, a narrative of the journey taken and a happy ending!

E-mail

One of the most significant challenges in using e-mail as sales collateral is targeting recipients with highly relevant content. Get this right and the return on investment is considerable.

Sending print newsletters and direct e-mails has long been a proven method to stay in touch with customers, clients and prospects. According to the US Direct Marketing Corporation, every US$1 spent on e-mail marketing generates US$45.06 return on investment – the highest response rate for all direct response methods.

With the right tool, not only can you create a newsletter within 30 minutes or less, but you can also track:

- who opened your message to find out who cares enough to read what's inside it instead of deleting it;
- who clicked on any of the links that are inside your message to read more or to place an order; and
- which addresses are no longer valid so you can maintain a clean list.

Sue Coakley, senior director, customer contact strategy at Yahoo!, explains:

> *At the end of the day, we all need to drive revenue, but it may not be the sole focus of every e-mail and I would argue it shouldn't be the sole focus of every e-mail that we send. We want to develop that relationship because we know that when we build a relationship people are more likely to respond when we want them to take action and they're less likely to simply tolerate or, worse yet, unsubscribe from our messages.*

Yahoo! (2012)

In order to engage with recipients of e-mail sales and marketing outbound activities, Yahoo! pursues a three-pronged contact strategy (Table 7.4):

Table 7.4 Yahoo! Three-step contact strategy for e-mail campaigns

Step 1: Build on the relationship	Step 2: Keep it relevant	Step 3: Respect recipients' preferences
Why did they start the relationship?	What do you know about them?	Obviously honour their preferences
Why do they use your products or services?	Demographics?	Do all you can to retain them
What's their end goal?	Interests?	Think about frequency
Continue to fulfil on that value	Response behaviour	Avoid permission creep
Surprise and delight	Never assume what you don't know	Consider your message in the larger context
Give your e-mail social legs	Listen – both positive and negative	
	What standard metrics don't tell you	
	Beyond the campaign	

- *Step 1: Build on the relationship.* This involves thinking back to why people started the relationship with you to begin with. It's probably because they had a very specific need. Did they provide the e-mail address and are you building off that? For Yahoo!, it's because somebody signed up for a Yahoo! Mail account. 'We should really start and build that relationship first and foremost before we look at expanding it further', says Sue Coakley.
- *Step 2: Keep it relevant.* This is probably one of the biggest buzz words for e-mail marketers. The starting point for Yahoo! is finding out what it knows about the consumers. Knowing your audience helps you to understand your purpose. In the case of Yahoo! this is done through data that's been provided as well as through behavioural tracking on its site. Another key strategy is listening as well as thinking beyond the campaign.
- *Step 3: Respect recipients' preferences.* According to Yahoo!, you have to do all you can to retain that permission. 'It's really permission to go into someone's inbox and doing that by thinking about things like frequency. At Yahoo, that currently stands at no more than one e-mail per user, week. That seems to be intuitively right, but also in terms of both positive and negative metrics', explains Sue Coakley.

The frequency that you send these messages will depend on your audience's ability to read each message and your ability to keep up with the ongoing workload. As a rule of thumb, if you think you've got a busy audience, don't send too many messages. And if you don't think you can maintain consistency on a twice-monthly basis, then opt to send only one message each month.

Typical uses for e-mail copy

You can use e-mail copy for exactly the same range of goals as you can for a sales letter:

- to generate sales enquiries;
- to generate downloads for a free white paper or research document;
- to generate a free trial of software products over a time period;
- to make incremental sales to existing customers and clients;
- to entice prospects to visit your website;
- to get discounts and special offers;
- to provide a voting mechanic;
- to drive participation for promotions, prizes and competitions; and
- to invite to a conference, seminar, exhibition or symposium.

Response rates

It won't come as any surprise that response rates are much higher when using opted-in lists. E-mail copy is particularly suitable for campaigns where you want to integrate the sales message with a website, for example for sign-ups or registrations for an event, or you want to provide a free demo or download of your software.

Subject line or headline

E-mail copy will live and die on the strength of the subject line or headline. The reason is that the recipients will be looking at your e-mail message in the preview pane and will be making an instantaneous decision to decide whether to read the whole message by clicking it open. Alternatively, they may have selected the reading pane and so will read the top of your message without having to open the whole e-mail.

According to Andy Maslen, it's clear why subject lines work in e-mails: 'They need to appeal directly to the reader's self-interest and promise a benefit of some kind. They should be personal, urgent, practical, irresistible, specific and related to the promise (not the picture if you have one).'

A headline in an e-mail can also be used as a hyperlink to a landing page. It's worth testing different sample subject lines in order to go with the one that achieves the optimum result for you.

The following are known subject lines that could throw your carefully crafted e-mail copy straight into the junk e-mail box:

- vague headlines that look like spam e-mails, such 'Hey you' or 'Check this out';
- a blank subject line (yes, really!);
- symbols in the subject line;
- words with all capital letters (offends 'netiquette' as it's synonymous with shouting at someone); and
- the recipient's first name in the subject line.

For a discussion on the legal restrictions on e-mail copy, refer to Guru in a Bottle®'s *Essential Law for Marketers* (2nd edition).

Addressee of the e-mail

One sure way of getting the e-mail deleted is to address it to 'Dear Sir or Madam' or 'Dear Subscriber' or 'Dear Customer'. It must be personal and have the person's full name. A first-name reference when you don't know that person can come across as disrespectful and over-familiar.

First paragraph

Get straight to the point. Don't waffle. Think of it as your 'elevator pitch'.

Subsequent paragraphs

Again, these need to be succinct.

If the main purpose of the e-mail copy is to promote your products or services then you should consider including descriptions and images that support the promotion and ensure that this is seen through the lens of the customer or client.

Text links

Consider using clickable words and phrases that result in certain actions when clicked, for example connecting to another piece of content or linking to an e-mail address.

Text-only e-mails are preferred by customers and prospects who check their e-mails on portable devices such as a smartphone. To avoid running into technical difficulties, it may be possible to offer users the choice of HTML or text-only versions, so that the integrity of the way the e-mail looks and reads can be maintained.

Most commonly used fonts

The protocol is to use fonts that are easy to read (10 or 12 point) and will ensure that the text displays properly when received (Table 7.5).

Table 7.5 Most commonly used fonts for e-mail copy

Arial	Arial Narrow	Calibri	Comic Sans MS
Courier New	Garamond	Georgia	**Impact**
Lucida Console	Tahoma	Times New Roman	Verdana

Sign-off

Again, keep it friendly, open and personal by using a name rather than signing off as an organization.

Web page

Good copywriting existed well before the web was conceived or direct mail had ever made its way through a single letterbox! In the opinion of Andy

Maslen it all comes down to one thing: 'Good online copywriting must sell, first and foremost. The paradigm may have changed from promotion to education, but the underlying purpose remains unchanged. And that means holding people's attention and stopping them clicking off your site.'

Ideally, copy that will produce results will need to grab the attention of visitors, hold their interest, create desire for the products or services that you deliver, make them comfortable that they can do business with you in confidence and finally lead them to take some action, such as landing on the checkout page in order to complete a transaction.

Headlines

Whether writing copy for a website or a news release, the headline is probably one of the most important – and perhaps one of the hardest – things to get right. A headline is basically the hook for what follows next. You'll quickly lose the interest of readers if the headline doesn't grab them by the throat.

Headlines do a number of really important jobs:

- They encapsulate succinctly the main benefit of your product or service.
- They give the visitor a compelling reason to read on.
- They summarize the story they introduce.
- They stop the visitor from clicking away.
- They serve as a taster for your web page when Google or other search engines deliver search results.

The most effective headlines share a number of characteristics:

- They are short – 15 words or fewer is ideal.
- They focus on benefits.
- They speak directly to the reader.
- They tell a story.

Online headlines are sometimes the only chance to hook your readers before they click off somewhere more interesting. It helps to be really specific. For example, if you have a service that could save home owners money on their utility bills, you could just say 'Save money on your utility bills', but that looks a bit lame. It's much more powerful to add specifics into the headline, such as 'You could be saving $350 a year on your electricity bill.'

You don't need to be a professional copywriter in order to write great copy:

- Write a list of all the ways your product or service makes your customer or client's life easier.
- Rank these benefits in order of importance.

- Pick your strongest, most compelling benefit, which you'd choose if you had only 10 seconds in which to tell the prospective customer or client. This forms the basis of the headline.
- Leaving aside the length or style of the headline, write a sentence that explains how the benefit makes a difference for the customer.
- Now remove as many words from the sentence as possible (called tightening up).
- Check that it addresses the reader directly.

Tone of voice

Tone of voice is incredibly important, as it can dramatically change the emphasis of the words being used. Think of it as the decor of your writing. It's not just about what you say, but also the way you say it.

On the web, it's important to make visitors to your website feel welcomed and reassured and make it easy for them to do business with you. The tone of the language used has a major role to play in achieving this. On the whole, the web is a more informal place in which to communicate. Bear in mind people Skype, IM, chat, blog, twitter and re-tweet – all in a very informal tone of voice.

You need to find your own distinctive tone of voice that's real and reflects your brand personality. The best way to achieve a realistic tone of voice is to write copy the way you would have a conversation with a friend or an acquaintance. It's the style adopted by the Guru in a Bottle® Series, which has gone down extremely well in Europe, Asia and the United States.

Online style

As a general rule, keep it simple! Use shorter words instead of long ones when writing for the web. Keeping sentences shorter – aim for 10 words on average – also improves the readability of your copy. 'Get into the habit of replacing long words with short ones and you'll be writing crisper, punchy online copy that engages your visitors and costs them less time and effort to read', says Andy Maslen.

One area where writing for the web and e-mail is distinctly different to writing for print is in the length of paragraphs that appear on a website. The difficulties of reading online mean avoiding overlong paragraphs that could be overlooked or at worst prompt visitors to leave the page they're on in search of something more manageable.

Relevancy

More important than length of copy is the relevancy of the copy, as once the purple prose starts to take visitors to a place they have absolutely no interest in going they'll soon click off.

It's usually best to avoid hyperbole and keep your writing as factually based as possible – what's known as evidence-based marketing. That way, you can easily avoid making wild, unsubstantiated claims and in turn vastly improve your reputation because you become a trusted source of information rather than trying to push a product or service irrespective of the context that the prospect will be facing.

Doing business with confidence

This is particularly important if the website is expected to take orders – before customers click through to check out, they need to be reassured they can do so with confidence.

Given the numerous web scams, many brand owners treat security as a major part of the customer experience and have clear, express security policies that are prominently displayed, which help to engender confidence for customers to do business with them. There are also data protection requirements that must be observed. Brand owners such as eBay handle this extremely well, and it's worth visiting eBay's website to take a look at how they manage this part of the communication process.

For more information about legal requirements that websites need to comply with, refer to Guru in a Bottle®'s *Essential Law for Marketers* (2nd edition).

Testimonials and case studies

One of the most powerful ways to demonstrate what you deliver – as opposed to what you offer – is through the lens of your customers and clients, and one of the most efficient ways to do this is through a testimonial or case study.

A common mistake is to ask for an endorsement or testimonial from customers or clients and find that (should they agree) it doesn't actually say very much as a piece of communication. Simply saying that the company was 'great to do business with' doesn't tell the website user why. Nor does it deliver some of the key messages that you may wish to communicate to your desired market and customer segments – about quality, service and cost or indeed the way you dealt with problems when they occurred and how these were resolved with the minimum of fuss. All of these elements can help strengthen reputation, confidence and trust, and it's a unique selling opportunity too.

The best way to achieve this is to pre-draft testimonials or case studies – keeping them factual – and get customers or clients to approve them. That way, even if the customers make some amendments, you'll end up with a more powerful and useful piece of communication that's more likely to influence the way in which customers and clients see your organization.

Contact information

It may sound like a small point, but it can be deeply frustrating for customers if they want to talk to someone at your organization but there's no telephone number given. It's all too easy to provide a contact e-mail address or a web enquiry form but sometimes a phone call is all that's required in order to close a sale.

It's also useful to have a link to frequently asked questions (FAQs) near to where the telephone number is communicated on the site, as this may alleviate the need for the call to be made in the first place.

Layout strategies

Research shows that visitors to a website tend to eyeball what's written at the top left of the screen if they read from left to right; they tend to skip banners or what looks like advertising and don't pay too much attention to what's written further down the screen. A key reason for this is that visitors to a website are usually looking for something in particular and don't want to waste time searching for it.

It's worth bearing in mind that not every word you'll write will be read so it's best to help navigate the visitor with clear directional copy positioned in high-visibility parts of the website. For example, using hypertext links in the body of the copy creates more multiple paths for visitors to access the information they're looking for in other places on the website.

It's best to use simple words, short headlines, short sentences and short paragraphs. If you want to convey more detailed or complex copy about your products or services, then think about providing a PDF download or a 'printer-friendly' button so that it makes it easy for visitors to print off a document.

Search engine optimization (SEO)

It's clear that search engines drive the internet and are the key information aggregators for just about any subject under the sun. They are also the primary conduit for customers and prospects who may be searching for a particular product or service and are more likely to find you as a result of a search rather than by typing your URL into the browser.

Search engines use mathematical algorithms to analyse a user's question or search query in order to provide web pages that attempt to most closely answer the question or relate to the search term.

Given that we can't control how search engines work, it's important that all commercial websites are constructed in such a way that web pages are returned first (or on the first results page) for any relevant search, since most users rarely look beyond the first page of search results and as a result you may never be found.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is critical when planning and designing a website. An optimized website will attract more traffic than its rivals because it achieves naturally high search responses and as a result doesn't need to rely on paid-for search results in order to drive traffic to the site.

Even if you're able to hard-wire SEO into your website, the effects of this time and investment may not necessarily come through immediately and may take between six and 12 months to be realized, as a website takes time to register with all relevant search engines.

- Take the longer-term view when engaging with SEO for your website. There are no short-term fixes that will propel your website to the number one spot, and in fact older websites tend to get higher rankings than newer ones.
- Track the number of unique visitors to your website as a result of natural search results. Any half-decent web analytics tool will be able to provide you with this data.
- Track the number of key phrases that are driving traffic to your website.
- Track the number of inbound links to your website.
- Track the number of indexed pages by search engine.
- Try to link traffic data with number of sales successfully transacted on your website (where this is relevant).

Online newsletters

Let's face it. Most online newsletters are nothing more than a glorified advertorial that's nakedly attempting simply to get you to buy something, go to an event or subscribe to something, which will open up another screen that will try to up-sell and cross-sell to you at the same time as asking for your permission to opt in. While all of this activity can be rationalized on the basis of trying to 'sell', it may in fact alienate a large percentage of those potential customers and clients who don't like to be sold to and in fact are seeking insight and knowledge from an online newsletter.

The starting point is what's in it for them. Why would they want to spend any time reading your newsletter as opposed to doing something else on a rainy Friday afternoon?

Value in the communication will sell it, not making it a sales piece

The online newsletter should be 'what it says on the tin' and deliver topical, well-observed, insightful knowledge and practice that demonstrate that your company or organization knows what it's talking about.

It's more about influencing the way that your prospective customers and clients will think in the future – and why they'd want to come and talk to you – that will be the real power of an online newsletter.

Too little thought goes into understanding what outcomes are required from something like an online newsletter, and instead salespeople think it's to be treated like another piece of direct mail.

Typographical considerations

When it comes to the design and typography of an online newsletter, everyone has an opinion but very few learn anything before offering their opinion. Some will say they prefer light blue to light yellow, Times New Roman looks terrible, and underlined words help to provide emphasis. Blah, blah, blah. This level of ignorance makes even less sense given how people like to obsess about style rather than substance.

Table 7.6 provides some general guidance on the use of typography and layout.

Table 7.6 Typographical considerations for the online newsletter

Fonts	Serif typefaces like Times New Roman are readable and are useful where you need to have continuous text. Sans serif typefaces like Arial and **Arial Black** are good for headings. Don't have more than two typefaces on the page – one serif and one sans serif. For continuous text, avoid upper case (although it's acceptable for short headings) and avoid italics, especially with small font sizes. For added emphasis, consider choosing a different font instead. Avoid underlining – it looks ugly in a newsletter.
Aligning text	For continuous text, avoid centre or right alignment. If you justify text, it's a trade-off between look and readability. Don't justify text that is too narrow.
Borders	Don't butt words up to lines, text boxes and cross-heads. Also, make their thickness appropriate to the text they are near – only use thick lines with large fonts.
Headings	Keep these clean and preferably short.
White space	Allow copy and pictures to breathe, and consider space as 'thinking time' for the reader.
Line length	Avoid long lines of text. The eye gets weary reading them on-screen or on a smartphone – a maximum of 12 words is about right.
Line spacing	Use 1.5× spacing for continuous text, smaller spacing for headings that stretch over more than one line, and smaller still for big headings.
Colour contrast	Consider colour contrast in order to create visual interest and also to help the reader navigate through the content of the newsletter.
Navigation	Consider using on-screen turning page technology where the online newsletter mimics the look and feel of a physical newsletter and is easy to flip from one page to the next.

In terms of the actual content of an online newsletter, the following points should be observed:

- Use simple, jargon-free and colloquial language.
- Offer an industry perspective and latest statistics on changes happening in that market segment.
- Signpost the reader to other relevant resources.
- Provide insight on issues and challenges faced by many customers and clients and currently what's being done to meet them.
- Provide one or two case studies and testimonials that deliver key sales messages through the lens of the customer or client.
- Give an update on news, events and views.
- Have a maximum of only 25 per cent of the space in the online newsletter devoted to sales promotional copy.
- Keep the tone of the newsletter open and friendly and invite feedback and sharing of thoughts and ideas with the audience.
- Think of changing the format for subsequent online newsletters to keep it fresh, and consider using mechanics such as prizes, promotions, competitions and awards that help to collect data on a permission basis, provide a reason for the reader to return, and maintain the dialogue with the reader via the online newsletter.
- Consider using info graphics, data visualization, interactive charts, drawings and photographs.
- Include a picture and full contact details of the person with whom readers can engage on any of the material presented in the online newsletter.
- Ensure that there's a statement on data protection that's written in a friendly and jargon-free way.

For more guidance on data protection compliance, refer to Guru in a Bottle®'s *Essential Law for Marketers* (2nd edition).

Google AdWords

Google AdWords are a paid-for advertising product and, as with any other form of copywriting, the intention is to grab attention and influence behaviour. The ads appear as four-line text items on the right-hand side of the Google search results. Google works on the principle of relevance and, depending on what users are searching for, Google only wants to return websites and AdWords that specifically deal with what they're looking for.

Given that you have to bid for the use of certain Google AdWords in competition with other brand owners, you should only bid for the most specific and relevant keywords you can think of, and these must also be included in your ad copy.

The major difference with other forms of online advertising is that the brand owner only pays if the user clicks on the Google AdWords – referred to as pay-per-click (PPC).

Importance of Google AdWords copy

The copy used for Google AdWords plays a vital role in the success of any PPC campaign. There's no guarantee that simply using the best keywords and most compelling sales copy will increase the response rate of any PPC campaign, as the Google AdWords may simply fail to deliver the customers you're looking for.

The following tips will dramatically improve your response rate and chances of reaching your desired customer and client segments.

Google AdWords tip 1: Be specific

Don't write generic ad copy for all your keywords. You should try to be as specific as possible so that your Google AdWords can deliver the right message to your desired customer and client segments.

For example, take men's shoes. If you're retailing shoes and you've different types of shoes in your inventory, you should make a few sets of keywords for each of the different types of inventory that you have and then write compelling Google AdWords for each of those sets. The best way to do this is to have multiple ad groups for your different sets of keywords so that you can easily write specific ad copies for the different ad groups.

Google has several utilities that can help you in this task, including a keyword ideas tool that will allow you to put in the parameters you want, and the tool will suggest keywords on the basis of what the competition are using and the level of global and local monthly searches against those most popular keywords (Table 7.7).

Many brand owners believe that copying Google AdWords of the top-performing advertisers can make their PPC campaign a success. Wrong. Certainly you can take ideas from your competitors while you're writing your Google AdWords copy. But blatantly copying a competitor's Google AdWords makes your Google AdWords insignificant. Many search queries today show near-duplicate Google AdWords with the same title and some minor changes in the Google AdWords body and a different display URL. This is definitely not helping the brand owner, because users get confused when they see the same kind of Google AdWords lined up in a column. Users tend to go for the one that stands out and is different from the rest of the group.

Table 7.7 Keyword ideas

Keyword	Competition	Global monthly searches	Local monthly searches
office shoes	Low	368,000	201,000
vans shoes	High	673,000	201,000
dr martens	High	1,500,000	301,000
hotter shoes	High	90,500	74,000
wedding shoes	High	823,000	201,000
new look shoes	Medium	60,500	60,500
wynsors	Low	49,500	49,500
doc martens	Low	1,220,000	246,000
skechers	High	1,220,000	135,000

Source: https://adwords.google.co.uk (accessed 18 August 2012)

Google AdWords tip 2: Highlight your unique selling proposition (USP)

Given the high degree of commoditization in certain markets, brand owners are often left fighting it out over price. In order to combat this downward spiral, having a USP is a key offensive sales strategy in order to compete on value rather than price.

Consider the following:

- How different are your products and services compared with those of your competitors?
- What makes your product or service unique?
- What benefit would the customer get after buying what you sell?

The Google AdWords chosen must encapsulate your value proposition and ideally shouldn't be capable of being easily replicated by your competitors. They must be unique and something that your customers can relate to and benefit from.

Some examples of popular USPs:

- Olay: 'You get younger-looking skin.'
- Domino's Pizza: 'You get fresh, hot pizza delivered to your door in 30 minutes or less – or it's free.'
- FedEx: 'When your package absolutely, positively has to get there overnight.'

In all of the above examples, all the USPs are pretty straightforward and uniquely describe the value proposition in simple terms.

Google AdWords tip 3: Don't get carried away being too creative in the copy

Advertisers often try to make their Google AdWords copy very creative, but this doesn't translate into a higher return in terms of PPC rates and sales conversions.

Because of the nature of PPC ads, it's very important for you to grab the visitor's attention right at the beginning. Think of a traditional Google search page, for instance – when users perform a search, they're presented with a page full of blue-coloured links on a white background. They're looking for a particular solution to a problem and, even though you offer the solution and you've put up your Google AdWords on the right-hand side of the screen, the user may not be able to spot you. One reason may be that your Google AdWords copy doesn't include the words that users are searching for and as a result this makes your Google AdWords irrelevant to their search.

When you search for a term and you're provided with 10 results, you naturally go with the results that have exactly the same words of your search query on them.

Google by default automatically bolds your searched keywords in the search engine results page (SERP), so when writing your next Google AdWords copy make sure you include your main keywords in the ad headline and ad description so that they're automatically bolded when users include those keywords in their search query.

Having your keyword in the Google AdWords copy also makes your ad more relevant and as a result delivers a better click-through-ratio (CTR).

Google AdWords tip 4: Call to action

Many brand owners forget to include a CTA in their Google AdWords. Having a good CTA can increase your CTR and also increase your campaign effectiveness.

Users need to know what's in it for them if they click on the Google AdWords. They're already in a page full of related links that they were searching for and you're just one of those results. So, if you're going to attract them, you'll have to make sure that they know what they'll get from your page.

For example, if users are thinking of buying car insurance, they need to go to a destination where they can straight away get what they need: an insurance quote. They don't want to end up on a site where they'll receive an endless supply of insurance tips or articles. That's not what they're looking for.

Google AdWords tip 5: Get to the point

You don't have the luxury of a lot of space to write your PPC Google AdWords. Google AdWords allows only 25 characters in your title and 35 characters each in the one or two description lines beneath it, so avoid all the unnecessary words and fluff and include only things that add value to your advertisement.

You'll get only about 5 to 10 seconds before users abandon the page, so you really need to grab their attention the first time they see your Google AdWords. If you're selling a product, you may want to give away the unit price in your Google AdWords copy so that the users who find your product affordable will click on your Google AdWords and the rest won't – saving you some money, as it won't drive traffic that has a very low conversion rate for you.

No matter how good and convincing your sales copy, the conversion rate depends partially on how much money users can afford to pay at that very moment. If they've a maxed-out credit card and your product costs US$1,000, then your offer isn't any good and their click would be of no value to you.

It's always good to tailor your offer according to the user's query. For example, if someone is looking for 'cheap hotels', you might want to highlight the price factor in your Google AdWords copy. On the other hand, if users are looking for 'luxury hotels', you might want to highlight some of your premium facilities such as an outdoor heated swimming pool and an award-winning spa.

So think of some offers and specific details that you can give away right within your Google AdWords copy that will save users their time and your money.

Google AdWords tip 6: Make sure your ad is formatted properly

Typical mistakes include:

- the title is not proper cased;
- everything is written in small letters; and
- spelling errors.

You only get a very small window of opportunity when it comes to grabbing the attention of your customer or client via PPC, so make sure that the user gets a good first impression when looking at your Google AdWords copy. For example, capitalizing the first letter of each word is a common practice that makes your ad copy look attractive. However, you can test with various other methods and use the method that works best for you.

Google AdWords tip 7: Display the URL as part of your ad copy

Another common mistake made by brand owners is to pay little attention to the display of the URL as part of the Google AdWords copy, and yet this is vital for the effectiveness of the ad as well as CTR. You can put absolutely anything in your display URL, provided that the domain matches with the domain of the destination URL. No matter what your domain name is, you can include your primary keyword with a trailing slash in your display URL to 'assure' users that they'll indeed go to the right page.

Try to use keywords in your display URL, if that's possible – the page doesn't even need to exist on your website, as the display URL is for display purposes only. You can choose your display URL to be whatever you want and send users to your choice of destination – provided that both are under the same domain.

Google AdWords tip 8: Make sure that your ad copy and landing page are aligned

In the vast majority of cases the landing page will be prepared first before you get on to write your ad copy. But sometimes brand owners forget what's offered on their landing page and write their ad copy from scratch. As a result, even good ad copy with a high CTR may fail miserably, because after customers or clients go to the landing page they can't find what the ad copy has promised. You need to have some sort of correlation between your sales copy on the landing page and your Google AdWords copy. One easy way of doing this is to highlight and include your USPs and benefits in your landing page that relate to the promise that you made in your ad copy.

Google AdWords tip 9: Take account of day and time for running the ad campaign

Each market segment that you compete in is unique and has its own unique web traffic pattern. For example, depending on the type of products and services you're selling, some days of the week may be better than others. Equally, some times of the day may be better than others. A combination of optimum days and times is likely to yield a higher CTR.

The default scheduling made by Google is to allow you to run your ads every day of the week, or just on weekdays or weekends. This may be sufficient for your purposes. Alternatively, it may be in your best interests to set your campaigns up to run at dates and times of your own choosing and spend more or less on specific days of the week or hours of the day. For example, you may find that your company or organization's web traffic and sales are strongest during the week and sharply drop off over the weekend. If this is the buying pattern you face, then you might want to set up your campaigns to reflect these traffic flows so that when customers and clients are online they can find your ads quickly and easily and you don't have to stretch the budget over gaps of time that bring you poor-quality traffic that has a low CTR and poor conversion rate.

Google AdWords tip 10: Keep the campaign constantly under review

The entire success of your Google AdWords copy is dependent on the CTR and conversion into sales and so it's sensible to carry out some form of testing of your ad copy:

- Test your Google AdWords copy headline. Create a few variations of the headline and see which brings you more CTR and more sales conversations. Don't get fooled by high CTR – high CTR doesn't necessarily mean that your ad is performing well. Rate of conversation is what it's all about.
- Test different offers. Each of your ads might include an offer, and you may create a few offers to see which one works the best. For example, does an offer of '20 per cent off' perform better than 'qualify for an immediate $50 discount'?
- Test your USP. Sometimes even after you've identified a unique strength of your product or service, it may not be the best one in terms of converting interest into sales, so always test with different value propositions and see which one works for you.
- Run multiple split tests of your Google AdWords copy. Have at least three ads set up in each ad group and run them for a considerable amount of time before coming to a conclusion about their performance.
- Make small changes at a time. For example, start with the Google AdWords headline first. When you're changing the headline, don't make any other changes. Run that test for a while and find out the best headline that gives you a good CTR. Once you achieve an acceptable result, move to the next item and test it thoroughly. Continue this until you've refined what is working well. CTR is an important indicator for your ad's effectiveness because CTR is directly related to your ad copy whereas conversion is only partially related. Conversion depends a lot on your sales copy and landing page as well, so concentrating more on CTR initially would be a better idea, and slowly you can work your way up to increase your sales conversion rate.
- Even the slightest of changes matter. You might not find all tests worth doing, but you should know that even a single punctuation mark can make a significant difference on your CTR.
- You should make sure that you test every single dot in your ad copy thoroughly. Some basic items to be tested include:
  - www versus non-www in your display URL;
  - different use of caps in your headline and description;
  - trailing dots (…) at the end of your ad copy; and
  - the use of other punctuation and special characters within the Google AdWords copy.

Sales letter

There's an old saying in sales and marketing: if you try to sell to everyone, you'll end up selling to no one. No matter how universal your product or service happens to be, customers and clients want to be able to feel you're connecting with them. Before you write a sales letter, stop. Think about the person at the other end who's going to receive it. Earlier we talked about a market segment of one. Even in B2B sales and marketing, it's a real person who shows up to the sales meeting, reviews the products and services on offer and ultimately writes the cheque.

'Each of these people is a real person with a unique background, hopes and dreams. Just like the path in life that led you to where you are now, they've walked their own path', observes British sales training guru Sean McPheat.

The same principles that apply to an online newsletter apply to the construction of the sales letter.

'The sales letter is probably the most powerful piece of copywriting ever to have been invented. By its very nature personal – if written properly – it takes your sales pitch directly to each and every one of your prospects', observes Andy Maslen.

The reality is that most sales letters are junk mail that ends up in the recycle bin.

As we've said earlier in this chapter, in order to improve the chances of the sales collateral being read, there needs to be a strong narrative. Creating a compelling story that delivers your key sales messages not only delivers greater impact but also is more memorable for the recipient.

Print or e-mail version of the sales letter?

There's no straightforward answer, and it really depends on whom you're trying to communicate with. Revenue per message is shrinking – whether delivered by physical direct mail through the letterbox or delivered by e-mail to an individual's PC, laptop or mobile device. As a result, many salespeople feel they must send more and more messages to compete. Wrong. Volume is a detriment, not an asset. In the battle to win the hearts and minds of recipients, relevance has become even more important in the 'war of words'.

In many respects the sales letter – whether in physical or soft-copy format – can be relatively quick and inexpensive to produce, but it's often hard to beat the odds of it actually being opened and read (Table 7.8).

From reviewing Table 7.8, it's clear that typical response rates for any type of sales letter are likely to be low, and they're getting lower. One reason why so many sales letters fail to drive sales is that they don't cut to the chase or get to the point fast. In this respect sales letters aren't that different from many other sales channels, such as e-mails, web pages or press ads.

Table 7.8 Typical response rates for the sales letter

Type of sales letter	Typical response rate	What you can expect
Sales letter individually addressed to a named recipient	6.7 per cent of the names mailed to	67 responses per 1,000 pieces posted
Sales letter B2C campaign	7.1 per cent of those mailed to	71 responses per 1,000 pieces posted
Sales letter B2B campaign	6.2 per cent of those mailed to	62 responses per 1,000 pieces posted
Sales letter door drop to households but not named individuals (otherwise known as 'junk mail')	5.0 per cent of those who receive the mail	50 responses per 1,000 pieces posted
Door drop to households but not named individuals (otherwise known as 'junk mail')	40 per cent is put in the recycle bin unopened	Of the 60 per cent that does get opened by the householder, 20 per cent doesn't get read
E-mail sales letter campaign	Open rates for segmented and named individuals versus non-segmented campaigns can vary as much as 20 per cent	A carefully segmented and named e-mail campaign will perform 20 per cent more effectively in the first 30 days

The ultimate sales letter will address the following questions that will be in the mind of intended recipients:

- What keeps them awake at night giving them indigestion, boiling up their oesophagus, eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling from the 'can't sleep at night' experience?
- What are they afraid of?
- What are they angry about?
- With whom are they angry?
- What are their top three daily frustrations?
- What trends are occurring and will occur in their businesses or lives?
- What do they secretly and ardently admire most?
- Is there an inbuilt bias to the way they make decisions ('System One' or 'System Two' thinkers?)

- Do they have their own language or code?
- Who else is selling to them, what are they selling to them and how are they selling to them?

Product sales brochure

This tends to be the glossy, high-production variety of sales collateral where the ratio of words to pictures, diagrams and graphics could be as high as 10:90, whereas an e-mail newsletter may have a ratio of 70:30 words to pictures.

The product sales brochure tends to be less personal, although this can be overcome if the tone of the sales collateral is open, friendly and engaging.

Car manufacturers spend what looks like a small fortune developing beautiful-looking product sales brochures that give the prospective purchaser strong emotional reasons for wanting to buy what is a high-ticket item.

One major flaw in the whole process is deciding whether the product sales brochure is actually required and how it will be used to drive sales by those who receive it.

Not having clear, behaviour-orientated objectives can be a fatal flaw in the thinking that sits behind the investment required to print a large number of these glossy 'vanity sheets' that aren't measured in terms of the value they deliver to the company or organization. But that doesn't mean they can't be.

A product sales brochure can be an appropriate piece of sales collateral in a variety of contexts:

- generating sales leads, for example for holidays abroad;
- winning orders, for example, B2B markets such as expensive yachts;
- driving free trials, for example test drives of the latest car model;
- improving perception of the company or organization, for example showing how it manufactures its products and the quality of raw materials used;
- gaining new members or supporters, for example a professional body, university or private members' club; and
- providing something to salespeople that they can hand out with pride at conferences, exhibitions, events and hospitality functions and to senior-level individuals within 'traditional' market segments such as law, accounting, medicine, insurance and other professions or in the luxury goods market such as clothing, watches, hi-fi, jewellery, apparel and high-end accessories where the expectation is to receive a well-designed and high-end product sales brochure.

International Chamber of Commerce Code (2011)

Background to the Consolidated ICC Code (2011)

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Code sets the ethical standards and guidelines for sales and marketing, including the production of sales collateral, around the world. Developed by experts from a wide range of market and customer segments, the ICC Code (2011) is a globally applicable framework that harmonizes best practice in sales and marketing from the Americas, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia Pacific. The ICC Code applies to all sales and marketing communications in their entirety, including all words and numbers as well as material originating from other sources.

The Code is voluntary but has been incorporated by industry regulators across the world. For example, in the UK, it's been adapted by the Committee on Advertising Practice to produce its own CAP Code, overseen by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

For a detailed explanation of the codes of practice that affect this area of sales and marketing practice, refer to Guru in a Bottle®'s *Essential Law for Marketers* (2nd edition).

The ICC Code is relevant for B2B as well as B2C sales and marketing collateral and takes account of social, cultural and linguistic factors in the production of such materials. For example, when judging communications addressed to children, the ICC Code provides that their natural credulity and inexperience should always be taken into account in any determination as to the appropriateness of those communications.

Assumptions made by the ICC Code

The ICC Code makes a number of assumptions that are relevant when producing sales collateral: from a B2C perspective, individual customers and prospects are assumed to have a reasonable degree of experience, knowledge and sound judgement and to be reasonably observant and prudent when making purchasing decisions; and, from a B2B perspective, companies and professional organizations are presumed to have an appropriate level of specialized knowledge and expertise in their field of operations.

These same assumptions are applied in the CAP, BCAP and Direct Marketing Association codes of practice in the UK.

The ICC Code is structured in two main parts: general provisions on sales and marketing communication practice that contain fundamental principles; and then a series of detailed sections that cover particular activities such as direct marketing, sponsorship and sales promotion.

For a detailed explanation of data protection controls and laws, refer to Guru in a Bottle®'s *Essential Law for Marketers* (2nd edition).

General provisions of the ICC Code

Basic principles

All marketing communications should be legal, decent, honest and truthful, should be prepared with a due sense of social and professional responsibility, and should conform to the principles of fair competition as generally accepted in business (Article 1).

Decency

Sales collateral shouldn't contain statements that offend standards of decency currently prevailing in the country and culture concerned (Article 2).

Honesty

Sales collateral should be framed so as not to abuse the trust of consumers or exploit their lack of experience or knowledge. Relevant factors likely to affect consumers' purchasing decisions should be communicated in such a way and at such a time that consumers can take them into account (Article 3).

Social responsibility

Sales collateral should respect human dignity and shouldn't incite or condone any form of discrimination, including that based upon race, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation. In addition, such activities shouldn't without justifiable reason play on fear or exploit misfortune or suffering, or appear to condone or incite violent, unlawful or anti-social behaviour or play on superstitious beliefs (Article 4).

Truthfulness

Perhaps the most important principle in the ICC Code and one that goes to the root of the production of sales collateral is that all such activities must be truthful and not misleading (Article 5). Any form of sales material shouldn't contain any statement or claim that directly or by implication, omission, ambiguity or exaggeration is likely to mislead the consumer.

The ICC Code spells this out in some detail, and although not exhaustive the following is a useful checklist as to what 'truthfulness' means in practice when writing sales materials:

- Characteristics of the product that are material in influencing the consumer to make a purchase, for example the nature, composition, method and date of manufacture, range of use, efficiency and performance, quantity, commercial or geographical origin or environmental impact must be clear.
- The value of the product and the total price to be paid by the consumer must be clear.
- The terms for delivery, exchange, return, repair and maintenance of the product must be clear.

- Other information, including terms of guarantee, intellectual property (IP) rights and trade names, compliance with international and national standards, awards, and the extent of benefits for charitable causes as a result of making a purchase, must be truthful.

Use of technical or scientific data and terminology

In much the same way that Article 5 provides for 'truthfulness', this principle (Article 6) captures situations where sales materials may 'sail close to the wind' without actually being dishonest and may be 'economical with the truth'.

In practice, copywriters shouldn't engage in the following activities:

- Misuse technical data such as research results or quotations from technical and scientific publications.
- Present statistics in such a way as to exaggerate the validity of a product claim.
- Use scientific terminology or vocabulary in such a way as to falsely suggest that a product claim has scientific validity.

Use of 'free' and 'guarantee'

This is perhaps unusual, as it's a specific rather than a basic point of principle, but it addresses the temptation to use words like 'free' and 'guarantee' within sales literature. In order to stem underhanded and oblique sales and marketing activities, the ICC Code provides that the term 'free', as in 'free gift' or 'free offer', should only be used in very limited circumstances (Article 7):

- where the 'free offer' involves no contractual obligation whatsoever; or
- where the 'free offer' involves only the obligation to pay shipping and handling charges, which shouldn't exceed the cost estimated to be incurred by the marketer itself; or
- where the 'free offer' is in conjunction with the purchase of another product, but provided that the price of that product hasn't been inflated to cover all or part of the cost of the 'free offer'.

Such a provision closes the door to many 'sharp practices' where the consumer is led to believe that there's a value-added benefit (for example, a significant financial saving) when in fact it's nothing of the kind and instead the copywriter is treating the consumer as gullible to such a tactic.

The provision also states that use of the term 'guarantee', 'warranty' or any such expression in such copy shouldn't give the impression that consumers will enjoy additional rights over and above their statutory rights.

The terms of any guarantee or warranty, including the name and address of the guarantor, should be easily available to the consumer, and any exclusion clauses or limitations on consumer rights or remedies must be clear, conspicuous and in accordance with national and international laws.

Substantiation

Sales materials often include claims, descriptions or illustrations that are communicated to consumers in order to influence them in making an informed choice. The ICC Code provides that such claims, descriptions and illustrations should be capable of both verification and substantiation (Article 8).

Identification

About a decade ago or even longer it was the fashion to place ‘advertorials’ that were paid-for advertising but made to look like editorial with the veneer of ‘independence’ about the content in the advertisement. Thankfully, this type of sales copy is losing its appeal, as there should be clear water between sales copy and genuine editorial content.

The ICC Code specifically states that such sales copy should be clearly distinguishable as such. When paid-for sales copy appears in a medium containing news or editorial matter, it should be readily recognizable as a paid-for inclusion, and the identity of the brand owner should be immediately apparent (Article 9).

Such sales copy shouldn’t misrepresent the true commercial purpose and, as a result, copy that’s promoting the sale of a product, for example, shouldn’t be disguised as ‘market research’, ‘consumer surveys’, ‘user-generated content’, ‘independent blogs’ or ‘independent reviews’ where in fact these are far from being unsolicited or independent points of view.

Identity

This is linked to Article 9, and the ICC Code provides that the identity of the brand owner should be apparent in such sales materials and where appropriate should include contact information to enable the consumer to get in touch without difficulty (Article 10).

Comparisons

The ICC Code provides that any comparison of a competitor’s products or services in sales materials mustn’t mislead and must comply with the principles of fair competition (Article 11). Points of comparison should be based on facts that can be substantiated and shouldn’t be unfairly selected.

Denigration

The sales material shouldn’t denigrate any person or group of persons, firm, organization, industrial or commercial activity, profession or product or seek to bring it or them into public contempt or ridicule (Article 12).

Testimonials

As discussed earlier in this chapter, testimonials and case studies are some of the most powerful ways of getting a message across to a desired market and customer segment, as they have a quality of independence about them. The

ICC Code recognizes the potency of such content and provides that such sales materials shouldn't use or refer to any testimonial, endorsement or supportive documentation unless it's genuine, verifiable and relevant, as to do otherwise would be dishonest (Article 13).

The ICC Code adds that testimonials or endorsements that have become obsolete or out of date and therefore misleading through passage of time should be removed from all sales and marketing collateral.

Environmental claims

Given the increased importance of environmental issues within a sales context, the ICC Code was updated in line with international standards.

Copywriters need to ensure that any environmental claims or messages made in the sales literature hold up to the basic principles of truthful, honest and socially responsible communications and avoid misleading consumers.

Whilst the principles in the ICC Code appear simple, applying them to make new environmental claims, often based on terms that aren't universally understood, is much more complicated. ICC guidance maps that process for companies and provides a standard for brand owners to evaluate such claims should they be challenged under national and international laws and regulations.

An environmental claim refers to any claim in which explicit or implicit reference is made to environmental or ecological aspects relating to the production, packaging, distribution, use or disposal of products.

The ICC Code guidance on use of environmental claims includes:

- ensuring that all statements and visual treatments don't mislead, overstate or exploit consumers' concern for the environment;
- avoidance of general claims like 'environmentally friendly', 'green', 'sustainable' and 'carbon friendly' unless there's validation of such claims against a very high standard of proof;
- presenting qualifications in a way that is clear, prominent, understandable and accessible to consumers;
- presenting improvement claims separately so it's clear whether each claim relates to the product, an ingredient of the product, the packaging or an ingredient of the packaging; and
- the inappropriateness of emphasizing a marginal improvement as a major environmental gain, highlighting the absence of a component that's never been associated with the product category, or making a comparison with a competitor's product (unless a significant environmental advantage can be verified).

Portrayal or imitation of persons and references to personal property

The roots of this principle lie directly in the need to protect the personal privacy of citizens, and the ICC Code provides that sales materials shouldn't portray or refer to any persons, whether in a private or a public capacity, unless prior permission has been obtained; nor should such material convey the impression of a personal endorsement of the product without prior permission having being sought in the first instance (Article 14).

Exploitation of goodwill

In the same way that Article 14 is a principle about respect for privacy, the ICC Code on exploitation of goodwill prevents any unjustifiable use of a name, initials, logo and trademarks of another company, brand owner or institution (Article 15).

Imitation

Sales materials shouldn't in any way take unfair advantage of another's IP rights or goodwill in the absence of consent (Article 16). This principle effectively forbids copycat sales materials, as there may be an action in law for passing off.

For a detailed explanation on the tort of passing off, refer to Guru in a Bottle®'s *Essential Law for Marketers* (2nd edition).

Sales materials shouldn't imitate those of another brand owner in any way likely to mislead or confuse the consumer, for example through the general layout, text, slogans and visual treatment.

Safety and health

Sales literature shouldn't without justification on educational or social grounds contain any visual portrayal or any description of potentially dangerous practices or situations that show a disregard for safety or health as defined by national laws and standards (Article 17). For example, a sales brochure for a range of children's trampolines with children playing on the products should be shown to be under adult supervision, as the activity involves a safety risk that could potentially pose a hazard for children if they are not supervised by an adult.

Responsibility

Observance of the rules of conduct laid down in the ICC Code is the primary responsibility of the brand owner. Other parties also required to observe the ICC Code include copywriters and subcontractors (Article 23), who should also exercise due care and diligence in the preparation of sales material.

Employees of any of the above who take part in the planning, creation and publication of such materials are also responsible – commensurate with their pay grade – for ensuring that the rules of the ICC Code are observed and should act in the spirit and letter of the ICC Code.

Effect of subsequent redress for contravention

Subsequent correction and appropriate redress for a contravention of the ICC Code by the party responsible are desirable but don't excuse the contravention of the ICC Code (Article 24).

Implementation

The ICC Code and the principles enshrined in it are typically adopted and implemented nationally and internationally by the relevant local, national or regional self-regulatory bodies (Article 25).

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