



The copywriter is a salesman.

In his classic book, *Scientific Advertising*, Claude C. Hopkins wrote "The only purpose of advertising is to make sales." Now, as a copywriter, I'm interested primarily in the words used in advertising. To be fair, I wouldn't know where to start when it comes to graphic design or layout or production methods. That's just not my area of expertise. However, I would also contend that the words are the most important part of any advertisement. Given that my livelihood depends on it, you would expect me to say that.

If you doubt how important words are, consider this. When you receive a piece of direct mail that is all graphics and clever colours and tricky folds and angles, what do you make of it? Well, if you're like me, you spend a few moments trying to work out just what the message is. Then you may think about the product. If you've not yet thrown the offending piece of paper sculpture in the bin, you may look for a company name. If, however, you're not actually in the business of advertising, the chances are that as soon as you have to start thinking what the piece of direct mail is about it's looping nicely into the waste basket.

There's no question that I prefer a letter every time. Something that tells me how something will benefit me, how much it will cost, and how I can go about getting hold of it. And do you know what? Research shows time and time again that letters work best. This is a lesson that appears to be forgotten with every new direct mail campaign.

When you see an advertisement on the TV that makes you think how clever the creators were, I guarantee that you've no intention of buying the product. Ever. Think of some of the car advertisements you've seen over the past year or so. I bet they've put more money the way of the music composer or band whose old hit they've revived than the company doing the advertising.

It's a cliché that advertisements that win prizes fail to sell. The blame lies with an advertising industry that has fallen in love with the same



GrahamStewart

trends that see less and less drama on TV and more and more reality shows.

When it comes to advertising, creativity should not mean dreaming up ways of making advertisements appear to fit in with the trend for vacuous nonsense. Creativity, when it comes to advertising, must always be the servant of sales. Otherwise, companies who want TV advertising are simply funding the show reels of directors and producers who dream of shooting feature films.

When advertising is seen as a stepping stone to a more 'creative' career, then the advertising fails, sales are not generated, and the companies footing the bills are cheated.

Unfortunately, a lot of companies are willing to pay for this empty tosh because they are browbeaten by ambitious advertising executives and feel they must make their advertisements trendy: they want to be part of the zeitgeist.

So where does the copywriter come in? It's hard, I know, but the copywriter must make a stand. Whatever the ambitions of the designers and even that of the product marketers, the role of the copywriter always remains the same: to sell the product. And that means understanding the target audience and conveying in the best possible way how the product will benefit that audience. If the rest of the advertising team choose to subvert that message with clever tricks, at least the copywriter can say to himself "I did what was needed".

And next time, the copywriter will do it again, whether the message is ruined or not.

Thanks for taking the time to download and read this article. I hope you've found it useful. If you have any comments or questions about the article feel free to email me at the address below.

Graham Stewart