UNDERSTANDING THE COPYWRITER: A GUIDE FOR THE ADVERTISING STUDENT

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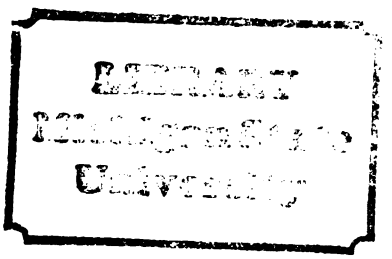

ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE COPYWRITER:
A GUIDE FOR THE ADVERTISING STUDENT

By

Donald Stuart Kreger

The copywriter's job is eagerly sought because of the desire for financial reward, challenge, and recognition. But what is the copywriter? A useful description is that he is a communicator, dealing in fact, whose purpose is to inform and persuade. He is a writer with an understanding of human motivation, as well as a versatile salesman of products and ideas.

The purpose of this thesis is to give the advertising student a more intensive analysis of the copywriter than is generally found in texts on copywriting. The student will hopefully gain greater insight into the copywriter's personality and professional life. The paper is intended to complement the number of how-to books on copywriting that are available on library shelves.

The creative person is identified as original, flexible, open-minded, and free from restraints. He is a doer

rather than a dreamer. The ideal copywriter possesses all of these traits, plus such specific characteristics as innate writing ability, imagination, a liking and understanding of people, empathy, curiosity, enthusiasm, flexibility, resilience, a visual sense, and the ability to think logically.

Most advertising professionals agree that a college education is a necessity to provide the writer with a broad liberal background. It also whets his appetite for further knowledge. The copywriter with natural writing ability can develop his skills with practice and on-the-job training. He must also go out and seek new experiences in life, listen to people and observe their actions, be constantly receptive to new impressions. Above all, he must genuinely like people.

In developing creative ideas, the copywriter needs to know about the consumer, the consumer's problems or dissatisfactions, the client's product or service, and competitive products or services. He must be involved in and believe in the product to do an effective writing job. In approaching the creative solution to a problem, the writer seeks to establish new and meaningful relationships between things. The basic steps in the creative process are defining the problem, accumulating data, digesting the information, developing alternative solutions, letting the unconscious

mind take over, and the birth of the idea. Imagination must be disciplined, however, and relate to the problem at hand rather than operate unrestrained.

While there are opposing views on the need for writing rules, most creative people feel that products are so similar today that the writer needs great latitude in arriving at creative solutions. The major characteristics of good contemporary copywriting are the dramatization of facts, frankness and honesty, freshness and originality, conversational language, emotional impact, clarity, conciseness and simplicity.

Most advertising agencies use the writer/art director team approach to creative work. This functions best in an atmosphere of mutual respect and creative freedom. A particularly successful collaboration of this kind was the Avis "We try harder" campaign.

The copywriter must satisfy his employer, his client, government agencies, and his own individual conscience in the performance of his job. If he evaluates his ethical standards and refuses to compromise his values, he will be able to exercise good judgment in whatever situation might arise.

Finally, the copywriter of the future will have to be even more knowledgeable, imaginative, and empathetic to communicate with the consumer in an increasingly competitive environment. He will also need to be especially patient and sensitive to people in order to function effectively in a more restrictive working climate.

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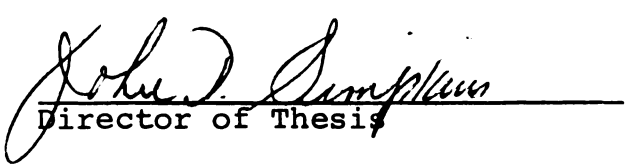

Director of Thesis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although a copywriter is influenced by many people in the course of his advertising career, the people who usually have the greatest impact (both pro and con) are his supervisors. There have been four such superiors in my 11 years in agencies who have helped shape my creative thinking and my writing talents, such as they were: Dean Pennington of Gardner Advertising Company, St. Louis; Fred Czufin of Gardner Advertising Company, New York; Jim Jordan of Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn, New York; and Jack Griffin of BBDO, Minneapolis.

On the academic side, I wish to thank Dr. John D. Simpkins of Michigan State University for his guidance in organizing the thesis, giving it focus, and keeping it geared to advertising students. His objectivity, analytical ability and scholarship have been invaluable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF PLATES

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, the Campbell Ewald agency advertised for a copywriter. They wanted

> . . . a man who can make advertising interesting . . . The type of writer who worries, every time he gets an assignment, about how he is going to make his ad stand out from the sea of ads that will surround his . . . who sits down and starts to wrestle with his facts and his intuition and his imagination . . . When he comes out, in an hour or a day or a week, he's wringing wet. But he's got an idea. A good idea. A smart, different dramatic, interesting idea and, boy, does he feel good . . .[1]

Despite the fact that the ad ran only once in two publications, it drew a total of 400 replies.

Clearly, the author of the ad was himself demonstrating the art of copywriting. But the pull of the ad (assuming that jobs were not particularly scarce that year) does indicate something of the unique character of the copywriter's job, as well as its rather magnetic appeal.

Why is the copywriter's job so attractive? There is, of course, the lure of making big money and living the good life. There is the challenge and glamour of advertising, so eloquently capsulized in the Campbell Ewald ad. There is the

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[1]Judith Dolgins, "Because He Loves the Feel of Words," Printers' Ink, June 14, 1963, p. 18.

opportunity for recognition and status; the stimulus of competiting for success both in the marketplace and in one's career; the pride of authorship; the fun of working with exciting people; the variety of work assignments; the possibility of travel. That these rewards may not all be forthcoming does not diminish the desire to attain them. Thus, the copywriter's job is eagerly sought. And, once attained, is preciously held. "It's a frightening, horribly fast-paced, often demoralizing workday," confesses one professional, "and I wouldn't trade it for the world."[2]

Granting the appeal of the copywriter's job, we still need to know just what the copywriter is. How does he differ from other professional creative writers and how is he the same? Arriving at an answer is not simple because there is a good deal of overlapping between the copywriter and his fellow writers. But we shall make an attempt.

Former agency creative director Hanley Norins characterizes the copywriter as a communicator. He bases his rationale on the fact that the copywriter must communicate within the tight restrictions of time and space, and to many kinds of audiences--to consumers, to his colleagues and to his clients.[3]

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[2]Charles Michael Boland, Careers and Opportunities in Advertising (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1964), p. 72.

[3]Hanley Norins, The Compleat Copywriter (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), pp. 1-8.

The problem with this definition is that it doesn't go far enough. The copywriter is indeed a communicator. But so is the newspaper reporter, editorialist, columnist, novelist, essayist, playwright and poet. We must then consider that the copywriter is a special kind of communicator and proceed from there.

Like the writer of fiction, the copywriter uses language--with all of its power and beauty--for effective communication. But the copywriter's world is rooted in fact, not make-believe. And his major purpose is not to amuse, divert or entertain (although he may well do this in the course of his writing). His purpose is to inform, to motivate, to persuade.

It is this concept of the copywriter as persuader that moves us closer to an understanding of his role. The newspaper reporter deals basically in information, as does the magazine article writer. The essayist is largely concerned with the descriptive arts. And while the editorialist and columnist may be interested in persuading readers, they are primarily concerned with substantive public issues rather than private commercial gain.

Because the copywriter's persuasion is directed largely toward the profit motive, we can also say that he is a salesman. As creative director Jeremy Gury puts it:

> A copywriter is, first of all, a writer in the fullest sense of the word, with a sensitive understanding of human emotions and psychological motivations; he

> is, at the same time, a versatile salesman who knows how to apply all the arts of persuasion to the problems of selling in an intensely competitive world.[4]

Copywriter Shirley Milton calls the copywriter "a combination of hard-headed businessman looking at his own product and at the competition's, and of a magician weaving a selling spell around a commodity."[5] His job, she continues, is to "create a fundamentally sound selling idea, then to write the words . . . that will communicate the selling idea to the potential customer, in terms of what will motivate her (or him) to buy."[6]

If we may settle on this definition of the copywriter, we may then proceed to the major purpose of this study: to gain some insight into the nature of the copywriter, both as a person and as a creative writer. Although there are a substantial number of texts and articles dealing with advertising copywriting, they are primarily concerned with rules and techniques: how to write television commercials, how to write headlines, how to write retail ads, and so forth. This paper is not concerned with the broad strokes of the copywriting field. Instead, it

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[4]Boland, Careers, p. 73.

[5]Shirley F. Milton, What You Should Know About Advertising Copywriting (New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1969), p. 6.

[6]Ibid.

focuses on who and what the ideal copywriter is, the process he goes through in order to do his job, and how we can identify his writing when we see it.

It is hoped that this study will provide the advertising student with a more intensive analysis of the copywriter than is found in most books on copywriting. The intention is to complement the existing literature by giving the student a greater understanding and appreciation of the advertising copywriter's personality and abilities. The student may then be better able to measure his own talents, interests and aspirations by the model presented in the study.

This report is organized into six major sections or chapters. The first chapter is concerned with a synthesis of the ideal copywriter's personality--those qualities deemed essential or helpful to the successful practitioner. The second chapter deals with how the copywriter is developed and nurtured through education, observation and experience. The third chapter discusses the nature of the creative process, and the fourth chapter attempts to identify those qualities which characterize effective advertising copy. The fifth chapter is devoted to how the agency copywriter works, using the example of a successful advertising campaign. The sixth chapter discusses the question of personal ethics and conscience within the pressures and restraints of the copywriter's job.

And, finally, the epilogue takes a speculative look at the copywriter of the future.

The material for this study has been drawn primarily from published books and articles on copywriting, advertising and creativity. Quotations are used extensively--from advertising executives, copywriters, university professors and other authors--because they demonstrate the wide diversity of thought on a range of topics associated with the copywriter's personality and writing skills.

Limitations: Although the present author is an 11-year agency veteran--as a copywriter and associate creative director--he will try to maintain as much impartiality as possible in presenting the material. Every writer, of course, is exercising some degree of subjectivity in his selection and organization of material. This paper is no exception. It should be further pointed out that this study primarily discusses the advertising agency copywriter, since most of the published materials and observations are by agency-oriented people. The study is also mainly concerned with consumer rather than industrial or other specialized forms of copywriting. This is because consumer advertising presents the copywriter with his greatest competitive challenge (especially in the packaged goods field), and will better demonstrate to students those elements which comprise effective advertising copy.

CHAPTER I

THE COPYWRITER AS A PERSON

The Creative Personality

Creativity, we learn, shows up in early childhood. We identify the creative child as

> . . . original, independent, flexible, open-minded, imaginative, inquisitive. He 'plays with ideas', doesn't settle for obvious answers to problems. Ordinary people trust hard facts; creative types are intuitive--they look beyond facts to what might be.[1]

According to psychologists, the creative person is characterized by his

> . . . high level of intelligence, his openness to experience, his freedom from restraints, his aesthetic sensitivity, his cognitive flexibility, his independence in thought and action, and his strivings for solutions to the more difficult problems he sets for himself.[2]

Industrial psychologist Jesse S. Nirenberg has listed what he believes are the characteristics of the

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[1] "Creative Kids," Changing Times, July, 1963, p. 37.

[2] C. H. Sandage and Vernon Fryburger, Advertising Theory and Practice (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1967), p. 313.

successful advertising person. They seem particularly relevant to the creative copywriter:

> 1. The ability to see relations between various parts, so they can be combined into new wholes (abstract thinking).
> 2. The tendency to view situations in large perspectives or wholes rather than a part at a time.
> 3. The emotional freedom to try new arrangements or combinations. He (the advertising man) must be unafraid to be different.
> 4. Understanding human behavior.
> 5. Verbal Fluency.
> 6. Judgment of design (more important for the art director).
> 7. Drive to create (the creative man must have both the creative resources and the will to create).[3]

Another list of qualities inherent in creative people is provided by a special issue of the Kaiser Aluminum News. Based on a broad spectrum of resources, the Kaiser list includes:

> 1. Inherited sensitivity. Children reflecting their parents' musical, literary, artistic or scientific talents.
> 2. Early training. Creativity can be nurtured in a creative family environment.
> 3. Liberal education. Creativity is fostered by a questioning attitude instilled by teachers and courses of study.
> 4. Asymmetrical ways of thought. The creative person finds an original kind of order in disorder.
> 5. Personal courage. The creative person is not afraid of failure. He has a good opinion of himself.
> 6. Sustained curiosity. Capacity for childlike wonder. The creative person never stops asking questions.
> 7. Not time-bound. The creative person does not work by the clock. Time lacks a social meaning.

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[3] S. Watson Dunn, Advertising Copy and Communication (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1956), p. 16.

8. Dedication. An unswerving desire to do something. Problems cannot remain unsolved or feelings unexpressed.

9. Willingness to work. Perhaps no one in society works harder. The creative person is constantly looking for solutions.[4]

Don Tennant, former creative director of the Leo Burnett agency, thinks of creative people as doers, people who "go ahead and do what other people simply daydream about. They are the people who have learned that the key to being creative is to act. The so-called 'creative person' stands out in a crowd not so much for what he has done, but because of what others do not do."[5]

Qualities of the Ideal Copywriter

The copywriter, of course, is more than just a creative person. He is a particular kind of creative person, possessing a distinctive set of characteristics to some extent and in some combination. What follows in this chapter is a composite portrait of the ideal copywriter by advertising professionals and academicians.

A good copy man, writes veteran copywriter Hal Stebbins, must be "a humanist, a realist, a bell-ringer all in one . . . He must be sensitive and sensible. He

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[4]John S. Wright, Daniel S. Warner, and Willis L. Winter, Jr., Instructor's Manual to Accompany Advertising, 3d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), p. 55.

[5]Sandage and Fryburger, Advertising Theory, p. 303.

must have a sense of imagery harnessed to a sense of practicality."[6]

Authors Burton and Kreer elaborate further on the contrasting qualities of the copywriter:

> He's a realist--yet imaginative. He's an enthusiast--yet coldly practical. He's a businessman--yet something of an artist. He likes and knows people, but he would just as soon not have them around when he writes . . . He's an individualist--but he writes for the masses. He may have formal education--but his strength is in his knowledge of simple human relations. He's likely to be sensitive--but he must fight for his ideas . . . He's varied, many-sided, yet he's guided by one impulse--to sell.[7]

Professor George Timothy Clarke believes that a copywriter must be

> . . . courageous, to be himself; inventive, to find the new; flexible, to adapt to better techniques; sensible, to know when he's wrong; thoughtful, to explore all possibilities; imaginative, to see beyond the commonplace. The copywriter must know and understand people and what makes them tick . . . The copywriter must have patience, inspiration, and a sense of sales. He must be disturbed by an insatiable curiosity and be willing to satisfy it by digging out meaningful details . . . He must think clearly . . . set down his thoughts logically for others to follow . . . He often thinks daringly, is not fearful that his fresh ideas . . . must be subdued just because they are different.[8]

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[6] Hal Stebbins, Copy Capsules (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1957), p. 15.

[7] Philip Ward Burton and G. Bowman Kreer, Advertising Copywriting (London: Prentice-Hall International, 1962), p. 10.

[8] George Timothy Clarke, Copywriting: Theory and Technique (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 8.

To determine the qualities that make up a good copywriter, Elbrun Rochford French surveyed 126 professional copywriters and received a total of 642 characteristics. The most frequently mentioned were:

Talent and skill	34.1%
Vivid, creative imagination	22.2
Selling ability	20.6
Curiosity	19.0
Understanding of people	17.3
Interest in and liking for people	17.3
Intelligence, brains	16.5
Understanding business	14.3
Enthusiasm	13.5
Visual sense	13.5
Ability to organize work	10.3
Enjoyment of writing	10.3
Deep love of writing	9.5
Sense of humor	7.1
Patience	7.1

Other qualities brought out in the survey were hard-working, gregarious, an ear for speech and language, ability to survive criticism, inquisitiveness, self-discipline, a logical and analytical mind, self-confidence, tenacity, pride in work, good taste, and an insight into people's behavior.[9]

In another and larger survey, Professor S. Watson Dunn asked 410 copywriters in agencies, retail stores, newspapers, and radio and TV stations what qualities seemed to be most important for copywriters. As might be expected, creative ability was mentioned most (86%), followed by

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[9] Elbrun Rochford French, ed., The Copywriter's Guide (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pp. 441-446.

getting along with others (63.6%), selling ability (57.9%), and the ability to take criticism (29%).[10] The high rank of getting along with others probably reflects the close working relationships the copywriter has with colleagues, clients and others involved in the creating of advertising.

From this broad perspective of the copywriter, we now move to a close-up view of certain key traits.

Writing Ability

"Being able to write," says writer Don Rivers, "is a gift you're born with. It can be polished, directed and disciplined; but no amount of cramming or tutoring can make a writer out of you if the original spark is not there."[11]

The viewpoint is shared by some of advertising's veteran creative men. "Creative talent typically shows up early in life," writes James R. Adams. "People who can write reveal their capacities while in grade school . . . People who are truly creative are creating."[12] Charles Brower, former chairman of Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn, agrees that good writers are writing in the

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[10] Dunn, Advertising Copy, p. 17.

[11] Don Rivers, Your Career in Advertising (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1947), p. 31.

[12] James R. Adams, Sparks Off My Anvil from Thirty Years in Advertising (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 39.

elementary grades. "You cannot learn creative writing any more than you can learn to have measles," he says. "Either you have it or you don't."[13]

"A good copywriter," says agency head Draper Daniels, "begins with an ability to write, a respect for writing, and a liking for writing." Although Daniels feels that you cannot be a good copywriter unless you can write well, writing ability itself is no guarantee of success. Too many other qualities are necessary.[14] Agency creative director Walter O'Meara believes that if a person has natural writing ability, you can make a copywriter out of him.[15] What O'Meara cannot say, of course, is how good a copywriter that individual may become.

Former agency copy chief Charles Whittier relates the ability to write to the ability to think. The ability to write, he says, presupposes the ability to think and express thoughts in a way that makes them clear, vivid, interesting, convincing and persuasive. The ability to think includes the individual's awareness of when he is thinking, and the self-discipline to make himself think.[16]

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[13]Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, p. 11.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Clarke, Copywriting, pp. 215-217.

[16]Charles L. Whittier, Creative Advertising (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1955), pp. 42-46.

Imagination

Imagination may be defined as the mental synthesis of new ideas from elements experienced separately. "Without imagination," says Walter O'Meara, "you have essays, dissertations and arguments. With it, you have copy that sells."[17]

Professor George Burton Hotchkiss lists imagination (or vision, as he called it) as one of the three inborn qualities he believes a copywriter must have (the other two being common sense and sincerity). He describes vision as the ability to see beneath the surface, to perceive relationships not apparent to the casual eye. This capacity, says Hotchkiss, grows through use and feeds on facts--knowledge of people and products, history, science and literature.[18]

For many products these days, notes one observer of the advertising scene, the only difference between competitive brands is the advertising. Now, for the first time in the agency business, he says, a premium is being placed on imagination.[19] Thus, a course for businessmen becomes "a wonderful two years' trip at full pay"; a

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[17]Clarke, Copywriting, pp. 215-217.

[18]George Burton Hotchkiss, Advertising Copy, 3d. ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), pp. 16-22.

[19]Robert Glatzer, The New Advertising: The Great Campaigns from Avis to Volkswagon (New York: The Citadel Press, 1970), p. 10.

cardiogram is a "telegram from the heart"; and a car rejected by quality control becomes "a lemon."[20]

The ideal copywriter should possess a bent for metaphor, a talent for association. His mind should always be open, receptive to inspiration. In fact, advertising has been characterized as a "what if" business. "What if," for example, "we conjured up the aroma of freshly brewed coffee by recreating on television the rhythmic sound of coffee percolating?" This is what must have occurred to the Maxwell House copywriter when he created that TV commercial in the late 1950's.[21]

Burton and Kreer warn the writer, however, that his imagination must be earth-bound and willing to hold itself to the limitations of the product, the market and the budget. What is really needed, they say, is practical imagination.[22] Professor Hotchkiss labels this quality common sense. The writer may have his head in the clouds, but his feet must be anchored firmly in the ground.[23]

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[20]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 10.

[21]Bernard Ryan, Jr., So You Want to Go into Advertising (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 45.

[22]Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, pp. 13-16.

[23]Hotchkiss, Advertising Copy, pp. 16-20.

Liking and Understanding of People

"The difference in writers," says veteran writer Walter Wier, "is essentially a difference in human understanding--a difference in the strength of the desire to want and understand other human beings and to communicate with them."[24]

Former copywriter and agency head George Gribbin agrees. "I think central to the good writing of advertising," he said in an interview, "is a person who has developed an understanding of people, an insight into them, a sympathy toward them."[25] Gribbin further observed that "a good writer can never be a snob; a snob sets himself apart from people rather than being one of them. That's suicidal for a writer."[26]

"People," writes copywriter Rena Nelson, "are a copywriter's special field of knowledge." Like the greatest salesmen, the greatest copywriters like and understand people. These writers have a special sense of what makes

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[24]Walter Wier, On the Writing of Advertisements (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), p. 123.

[25]Denis Higgins, The Art of Writing Advertising: Conversations with William Bernbach, Leo Burnett, George Gribbin, David Ogilvy and Rosser Reeves. (Chicago, Advertising Publications, Inc., 1965), p. 51.

[26]Ibid., p. 69.

people tick--what makes them laugh, cry and dream. They have a keen discernment of basic human needs and desires.[27]

Agency creative director Nadeen Peterson discussed this aspect of the copywriter's personality in a speech to the American Association of Advertising Agencies:

> For me, copy derives its ability to persuade from two separate and distinct sources. One is everything that makes up the message and the other is everything that makes up the receiver of the message. To be effective . . . it is not enough just to know how to write the copy in a clever or witty or concise manner. You have to understand the person you're talking to and write it to him (or her).[28]

A knowledge of human behavior, then, is considered essential to the competent and successful copywriter. He must be something of an amateur psychologist, with a dash of anthropologist and sociologist thrown in.[29] Charles Whittier suggests, however, that you can't understand people unless you like them and they like you.[30]

"What it comes down to," says Draper Daniels, "is a true understanding of people--their hopes, fears and

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[27]John J. P. Odell and Rena L. Nelson, ed., To Market, To Market: A Book on Advertising and Marketing by Experts in the Profession (Highland Park, Ill.: Al Collins Publishers, Inc., 1965), pp. 48-49.

[28]Nadeen Peterson, "Persuasion--Copy, Candor and Conscience"(paper from the 1972 annual meeting of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, March 18, 1972).

[29]Boland, Careers, p. 75.

[30]Whittier, Creative Advertising, pp. 42-46.

frustrations, and what makes them do things. Some of this is instinctive, some can be acquired simply by growing older with one's eyes, heart and pores open."[31]

Central to an understanding of other human beings is our ability to empathize with them, to project ourselves into their roles. "Who could be more unperceptive," says copywriter Shirley Polykoff, "than the writer who talks about the average person, meaning everybody but himself. Isn't it true that, for the most part, what appeals to me appeals to you?"[32]

Empathy is difficult for the writer to cultivate because products, appeals and audiences vary so much. Yet, the versatile copywriter must try to empathize with everyone. "He not only has to imagine how the stuff is going to look," says copywriter Harry Hartwick, "but how it will be received."[33]

Describing his approach to creating an ad, Leo Burnett explained that he tries "to get a picture in my mind of the kind of people they are . . . how they use this product, and . . . what it is that actually motivates

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[31]Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, p. 11.

[32]"Think It Out Square, Then Say It With Flair," Broadcasting, December 4, 1967, p. 48.

[33]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 11.

them to buy something . . ."[34] To be able to get this mental picture that Burnett is describing is to possess empathy.

Curiosity

"Learn to look at things," says famed copywriter Bernice Fitzgibbon ("Nobody but nobody undersells Gimbels"), "as if you had never seen it before in your life . . . I believe that the one common denominator among the successful copywriters has been this sense of wonder--this holy curiosity."[35]

Leo Burnett has also taken note of this quality. "It seems to me," he has written, "that a great many people would be better writers if they didn't think that their functions began and ended behind a typewriter. Curiosity about life in all its aspects . . . is still the secret of great advertising people.[36]

In some respects, the good copywriter is like the good newspaper reporter--ferreting out information to satisfy his desire for facts. The curious copywriter wants

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[34]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 43.

[35]Willard A. Pleuthner, 460 Secrets of Advertising Experts (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961), p. 82.

[36]Leo Burnett, Keep Listening to that Small Wee Voice (American Association of Advertising Agencies, 1962), p. 18.

to know what things are made of, how they work, what makes people buy, what makes them notice an ad, what makes them read it.

The copywriter, says Hanley Norins, should be diligent in his own field and a supreme dilettante in all others. The wider his range of interests, the more and better tools he has to do his job.[37]

Enthusiasm

"When something really excites me," says copywriter Judy Blumenthal, "I know it's right. But the idea has to work in all directions. It has to make sense with the product, not just by itself. Most of all, it has to be exciting."[38]

This capacity to become enthusiastic, to view each new assignment as a challenge can have an inspirational effect on the copywriter. The God of the writer's moment, says Hanley Norins, is the subject he's writing about. It completely absorbs him, carries him along on a wave, and pushes him so intensely into solving problems that he has neither time nor inclination for negative thoughts.[39]

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[37]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 9.

[38]"Portrait of a Copywriter," Marketing/Communications, March 12, 1965, p. 26.

[39]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 11.

It is not surprising, then, that some of advertising's outstanding writers approach their work in this spirit of excitement. William Bernbach is described by one of his colleagues at Doyle Dane Bernbach as having "an absolutely childlike enthusiasm for something great."[40] And former agency head George Gribbin thinks that a writer should be "joyous, and an optimist, rather than a cynic. Anything that implies rejection of life is wrong for a writer, and cynicism is a rejection of life.[41]

Flexibility

This trait, says Hanley Norins, takes the longest to cultivate. It grows as the writer himself matures. Flexibility is not be be considered as indecisiveness, but rather as open-mindedness. "The wings of an airplane are built to 'give' so they won't snap," writes Norins. "Copywriters, too, are supposed to move through a lot of turbulence." Adds account supervisor Dave Cleary: "Have convictions, but don't be rigid."[42]

Norins feels that the copywriter should be flexible in the true spirit of the scientist. He quotes author Rudolph Flesch to the effect that what we need "is an attitude

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[40]Glatzer, New Advertising, p. 17.

[41]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 69.

[42]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 12.

of distrust toward our own ideas." As soon as we have an idea, we should immediately try to disprove it.[43]

Charles Whittier also reminds the writer to keep an open mind and to judge ideas on their merits rather than on their source. You can't think of everything yourself, Whittier points out, so seek ideas from other people. If a good idea is offered you, grab it.[44]

Resilience

> There once was a writer named Bryant,
> Whose actions were often defyant,
> You'd pencil his stuff,
> He'd fly in a huff,
> And stick out his tongue at the clyent.[45]

"If you're hypersensitive," advises writer Jerome Cowle, "you'd better stay away from advertising copywriting."[46] The copywriter, Cowle continues, must be able to survive pressure and operate efficiently no matter how great the stress. He must have the resilience to bounce back from rejection and start over with renewed enthusiasm.[47]

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Whittier, Creative Advertising, pp. 42-46.

[45] Rivers, Your Career, p. 33.

[46] Jerome M. Cowle, How to Make Big Money as an Advertising Copywriter (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1966), p. 35.

[47] Ibid., p. 36.

Copywriter Sidney Olson describes resilience as "the ability not to die inwardly when your little flower is trampled on."[48]

BBDO president Tom Dillon discussed the need for the copywriter to be both sensitive and thick-skinned:

> The greatest difficulty a writer must face lies in the fact that his work is going to be changed and worked over by others . . . The writer who is unable to accommodate himself to the reality of writing somebody else's message . . . and not over his own signature . . . gets shaken out of the agency field quickly.
>
> A copywriter . . . in order to be a good one . . . must be sensitive to people and people's reactions . . . yet he must be thick skinned when it comes to criticism of his work. The combination of a thick skin in respect to his own problems . . . and a sensitivity in respect to the problems of others is an unlikely combination . . . which is why it's relatively difficult to find the good copywriter.[49]

Burton and Kreer agree that the writer just can't afford to be a prima donna. He must learn to appreciate justified criticism, and make the best of unjustified criticism, too. He must give gracefully when he is overruled and not let it bother him. A sense of humor, they add, is a great help in adjusting to criticism.[50]

The copywriter of today must work within a framework of restraints, restrictions and requirements. His work,

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[48]French, Copywriter's Guide, p. 443.

[49]Boland, Careers, pp. 74-75.

[50]Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, pp. 13-16.

in Tom Dillon's words, must "pass through a sieve of inspection by client and agency attorneys, product technicians, consumer testing panels, network acceptance committees and other checks and balances."[51] His copy is reviewed by account executives, agency plans boards and various client levels. "Suggestions" and "improvements" may come at any time from any quarter. Ads and commercials may undergo research and be overhauled or killed altogether. And budgets may be cut, rendering ideas impractical or impossible.

Is it any wonder, then, that the copywriter must be resilient, durable and especially patient--patient to come up with ideas and patient to start over again should his ideas be thrown out.

Visual Sense

"A copywriter needs to think graphically," says Shirley Milton. "Visualization shares with the headline the task of capturing the attention of the potential consumer. It is natural, then, that the copywriter who will write the headline must also think about the visualization."[52]

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[51]Statement by Tom Dillon in behalf of the joint ANA-AAAA Committee before the Federal Trade Commission, October 22, 1971.

[52]Milton, What You Should Know, p. 49.

The copywriter should also be able to think of the ad as a whole, not just in terms of the copy he will write. He should be able to "see" the finished ad in his mind's eye, and thereby manage to evaluate its total impact on the reader. Many ads today derive their major thrust from a close integration of words and pictures. So the writer's responsibility is to the ad in its entirety, not just to the copy. For example, after the first landing on the moon, Volkswagon ran an ad showing the moon lander with the single copy line: "It's ugly but it gets you there." Here was a concept in which the picture and the words depended totally on each other.

The advent of television has demanded that the copywriter learn to think visually. "Copy has long since lost the meaning of written words," says Bob Forman, former BBDO creative head. "Copy is anything that acts as a selling message. A minute of film with no words at all is copy in a TV commercial."[53]

Logical Thinking

The copywriter must think clearly, says Professor George Timothy Clarke, and set down his thoughts clearly for others to follow.[54] He must be able to take a complicated

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[53]"The Copywriter--From Word Mechanic to Total Communicator," Sponsor, June 29, 1964, p. 28.

[54]Clarke, Copywriting, p. 8.

problem, strip it away to its essentials, discard whatever is superfluous, and then present it in logical, step-by-step fashion to other people.[55]

It takes judgment (usually developed through experience) to be able to sort through information and decide what is useful and important, and penetration to be able to cut through to the heart of the problem and recognize the major factors necessary to its solution.[56] With the ability to think logically, the copywriter is able to present his message from start to finish without getting sidetracked.[57]

Other Traits

Charles Whittier believes that the copywriter should maintain a questioning attitude, midway between skepticism and gullibility. The writer should want to know all the details and see proof before accepting things at face value. Whittier also feels the copywriter should be something of a sentimentalist rather than too much of a sophisticate. This will allow him to empathize more with his audiences.[58]

Draper Daniels looks for a natural sales sense in the copywriter--a commercial instinct that leads the writer

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[55]Ryan, So You Want, p. 45.

[56]Whittier, Creative Advertising, pp. 42-46.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Whittier, Creative Advertising, pp. 42-46.

straight to the buyer's line of least sales resistance. If the copywriter does not possess this ability naturally, he will need to acquire it through experience.[59]

Burton and Kreer view the ideal copywriter as a perfectionist, checking facts, polishing words, making his copy a piece of careful, coordinated work. He does the very best he can to write as well as he possibly can. The authors also feel that the writer should possess a diversified knowledge which enables him to write on a variety of subjects.[60]

Professionalism is the key word to writer and author Clyde Bedell. "If you write copy," he says, "you should know your business. The dilettante may think an ad is good or bad. The professional usually knows it's good or bad--and why. And, equally important, he can tell you."[61] To be a professional, Bedell asserts, you must master the body of knowledge in the field, keep up with the evolving truth the field develops, and work with a sense of obligation to the professional body and the public.[62]

Copywriter Tom Murphy believes that the advertising writer must be very much aware of what things cost, what

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[59]Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, p. 11.

[60]Ibid., pp. 13-16.

[61]Clyde Bedell, How To Write Advertising That Sells (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1952), p. 7.

[62]Ibid.

company makes what products, current advertising campaigns and techniques, and so forth.[63] Murphy also lists initiative and desire as important characteristics for the copywriter. The writer must use every hour on the job productively and not always wait to be led. And (given the talent), he must have the desire to do the best possible job in order to succeed.[64]

Agency head Mary Wells Lawrence talks about the three things she seeks in a writer: "Talent, which we take for granted; people who have a good deal of just plain common intelligence; and also people who are humble enough to appreciate all the help they can get from other people." The extra she looks for is that a person combine "talent and taste with an ability to take information and use it." Mrs. Lawrence also confesses a liking for people who are "hungry for money" because "it does give you a certain drive."[65]

Summary

This chapter has identified and discussed some two dozen attributes of the ideal copywriter, based on the

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[63]Tom Murphy, "Advertising Copywriting," Writer's Digest, January, 1971, pp. 32-33.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Don Grant, "If It Isn't Terribly Well Done, I'm a Little Miserable," Advertising Age, April 5, 1971, pp. 1, 57, 58.

observations and writings of advertising professionals and academicians.

Many of these qualities are closely related, if not identical. A writer who is flexible, for example, will certainly be resilient in the face of criticism. A writer with imagination will undoubtedly possess a visual sense. A sentimentalist will almost necessarily have some degree of empathy. And a writer who is curious will most likely maintain a questioning attitude.

It should be remembered, too, that this is an ideal portrait, not an average or typical one. We can say with some certainty that the outstanding advertising copywriters have an acute imagination and use it in their work. But dull and pedestrian copy is being written by professional copywriters with little imagination or creative spark. Like any other form of writing--novels, poetry, drama--there is good and bad copywriting, brilliant and hack copywriters.

Besides imagination, most successful copywriters exhibit a sense of empathy, a logical mind and the ability to visualize the "whole" of a creative entity. Resilience is a quality of almost purely practical import. The copywriter cannot function in a vacuum. He must write for his clients. And if he cannot take criticism and bend his will to others, he will not be able to operate effectively. Curiosity can also be considered an applied characteristic.

The outstanding copywriter may not be curious all the time. But when he needs information, he will investigate his subject thoroughly from all angles and with great tenacity.

By the time a student reaches college age, the chances are that he will either have exhibited some affinity for writing or not. But whether this writing ability can be directed and shaped will depend on factors discussed in the next chapter, dealing with education, experience and writing practice.

In essence then, the outstanding copywriter seems to combine within himself an early liking and talent for writing, a mind that is at once imaginative and logical, and a genuine affection for people. All the rest appears to be subordinate or capable of cultivation.

Perhaps the best single summary of what it takes to write advertising copy was given by copy chief Leonard Loveridge:

> It takes a heart more than a brain. If you can't feel, you can't write . . .
>
> It takes knowing that sincerity, more than excitement or cleverness makes an ad go over, and it takes work to give your ads a likable personality . . .
>
> It takes the maturity to accept whatever life throws at you and still feel good about it . . .
>
> It takes knowing that whatever you're selling isn't going to revolutionize anybody's life. And people wouldn't be taken in by any such hogwash anyway . . . You were hired to sell merchandise, not your soul. You know that if you can convince people that your product is going to make their lives a little better or pleasanter, you've done your job . . .

> You like yourself enough to like other people. You don't take things too seriously, including your product. You're willing to admit it's fallible . . . Nobody expects--or wants--you to be perfect.
>
> You're able to sympathize with people because you're smart enough to know you're not much different. You may have been to school a few more years than the parking attendant, but he may know things you'll never learn. He could probably tell you that what it takes to be a copywriter is mainly just being a human being.[66]

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[66]Leonard Y. Loveridge, "What It Takes To Write Copy," Printers' Ink, May 27, 1966, p. 66.

CHAPTER II

THE MAKING OF THE COPYWRITER

"A person is born with a certain capacity for learning," says creative head Don Tennant, "with certain latent talents and abilities, and with a certain potential emotional and intellectual capacity. But from birth on . . . how these capacities and talents are directed, trained, encouraged and shaped determine how they will be expressed--as a plumber, an artist, a diplomat, or a copywriter."[1]

Advertising director Karyl Van identifies several factors that are important to the copywriter's development. "Family environment is one. The desire to write, which is nurtured by advanced education is another . . . a broad knowledge or background which increases the person's ability to have ideas . . . is a third factor that develops the copywriter after he is born."[2]

How College Can Help

"What education cannot do," said one college president, "is prepare men and women for specific jobs. All it

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[1]Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, p. 12.

[2]Ibid.

can do is train their minds so that they can adjust themselves to any job."[3] David Ogilvy agrees that a college education seldom teaches people to write well. But it extends their general education for four years and gives them a more diversified background of knowledge.[4]

This seems to be the prevailing view today among advertising executives: that a college education is a necessity because it develops the writer's background, stimulates his desire for further knowledge, and gives him the tools to seek it out.[5]

In addition to specific advertising courses, the student interested in copywriting as a career will probably benefit from coursework in journalism, communication, English, marketing, sociology, psychology, consumer behavior, economics, history, literature, drama, music, art, philosophy and anthropology.

Another value of college is that it provides the student with the opportunity to expand his social frontiers and become involved with other people. This concept is explored further in the last part of this chapter.

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[3] Ibid., p. 21.

[4] Ibid., p. 19.

[5] Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, pp. 19-21.

Learning on the Job

The copywriting staffs of most large advertising agencies are a heterogeneous collection of educational backgrounds and job histories. There are English graduates, music graduates, people from industry and the arts. There are former engineers, jewelers, chemists, architects and secretaries. David Ogilvy himself did not come to copywriting until he was 39, following a checkered career as a researcher and door-to-door salesman, among other jobs.

"I wouldn't go for too many routinized men in my copy department," says William Bernbach. "I pull 'em in from all over the lot. I think it tends to give them a fresh point of view, an outside point of view. And what there is to know about advertising, we teach them later."[6]

"The best kind of training for a copywriter," agrees Rosser Reeves, former chairman of the Ted Bates agency, "is to work in a big advertising agency under people who know what they are doing."[7]

In Professor Dunn's survey of 410 copywriters--discussed earlier in this paper--the writers were asked what kind of experience was most helpful to a copywriter.

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[6]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 12.

[7]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 98.

On-the-job training came first (79%), followed by selling experience (39.7%), advertising courses (37.9%) and psychology courses (24.3%).[8]

Improving Through Practice

"No amount of practice will make a copywriter out of anyone who doesn't have the talent," says James R. Adams, "but all the talent in the world won't make a copywriter without practice."[9]

Draper Daniels agrees. "A copywriter needs to be born with certain natural abilities, but he needs to work hard to develop them to the full in order to become a really good copywriter."[10]

In the French survey of 126 copywriters cited earlier, the respondents were asked how copywriters could increase their skills. Practice came first (47.6%), reading books was next (40.5%), watching and listening to people was third (23.8%), and studying ads was fourth (23%).[11] Clearly, for the writer with inherent ability, there is no better way to improve than to keep writing.

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[8]Dunn, Advertising Copy, p. 20.

[9]Adams, Sparks, p. 79.

[10]Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, p. 11.

[11]French, Copywriter's Guide, p. 418.

"Most of the fine writers in every field," says writer Victor Schwab, "including copywriting, have one thing in common. They worked hard and wrote much. Their tireless industry produced a quantity of acceptably good work. And out of their practice and experience came flashes of exceptional work, shot through with insight and effectiveness."[12]

Life as an Educational Process

"The dedicated creative person," writes Walter Wier, "can at no time afford the luxury of living only his own life, of cozily insulating himself within the fuzzy cocoon of his own point of view." As he moves among people, the creative person reacts in an "incoming" rather than an "outgoing" way. "His mental and emotional pores are constantly open, absorbing the eminations of others, storing up within his secret self the stuff and dreams of all mankind."[13]

One best prepares himself for communication, says Wier, "by learning to love and genuinely loving all the countless other human beings with whom he inhabits the earth."[14]

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[12]Victor O. Schwab, How To Write a Good Advertisement (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 220.

[13]Wier, Advertisements, p. 35.

[14]Ibid., p. 39.

What the writer needs, Hal Stebbins believes, is "Observation, Retention, and Selection. You have to observe and remember. You have to read and retain."[15] You simply take what you have seen, read, heard and remember, he says,"and then you add yourself. And it is precisely because you add yourself that it is so important to cultivate resources within yourself; to keep regenerating the only battery that regenerates and perpetuates itself--the human mind; to store in your subconscious storehouse memories and images that will step out of the wings whenever they get their clue from you."[16]

Art director William Taubin advises creative people to soak up everything they see, everything they hear--to become a sponge of experience rather than a sponger. "Your best ideas," he says, "will come from life around you. From people's faces in the subway. From the newspapers. From wonderful books you read. From things you observe in the movies and in plays."[17]

"You will find that something which moved you deeply ten or twenty years ago," he continues, "will suddenly pop into your mind to provide the ideal solution to

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[15]Stebbins, Capsules, pp. 8-9.

[16]Ibid., p. 5.

[17]Pleuthner, 460 Secrets, p. 232.

a current problem. It must come from deep inside you . . . and then the ad will come to life for other people."[18]

Be observant, urges creative man Charles Anthony Wainwright. Listen to the language of the cab driver and the counterman, the conversation of neighbors; listen to kids talking at play; be attentive to phrases overheard in busses and stores. By listening and observing, you can find out what people think. The writer's job, he says, is to reach people. And to reach people, you must understand their likes and dislikes, the way they talk, and the way they think.[19]

Wainwright feels that the copywriter must make a conscious effort to break his habits and routines. He must look for new people and new ideas every day of his life. He must begin to read books, magazines, newspapers, even product labels.[20] "Life is grist for the creative advertising man," says James R. Adams. "Wherever he goes and whatever he does, he should keep his eyes and ears open."[21]

Writer Aesop Glim defines this receptiveness to new impressions as "wide-mindedness." In the course of

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[18] Ibid., p. 233.

[19] Charles Anthony Wainwright, The Television Copywriter (New York: Hastings House, 1966), pp. 68-70.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Adams, Sparks, p. 49.

time, he says, the copywriter will have occasion to draw upon almost everything he knows. And the more he has to draw upon, the richer his copy. The writer must not confine his readings to his own narrow interests, or his observations only to those people he finds most congenial. Most of the products and services he will deal with cut across all lines of social strata, geography, and education. He should therefore go out and observe people's home life, business life, travel and play. He should visit automobile showrooms, hardware stores, paint stores, laundromats, wherever goods are sold and services performed.[22]

The copywriter's education never stops for a minute, says copywriter Shirley Milton. "They are always 'in the marketplace,' always listening, testing, curious about what is new. They are always critical of products, of performance, measuring promise against actual use, and critical, too, of themselves."[23]

"There is no new art show," she continues, "no new gadget that is unimportant to a good copywriter. Who knows where the next bright idea will come from?"[24] As David Ogilvy puts it, a good writer cannot write good ads until

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[22]Aesop Glim, Copy--The Core of Advertising, 2d. rev. ed.;(New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), pp. 25-26.

[23]Milton, What You Should Know, p. 6.

[24]Ibid.

he has "immersed himself in the marts of trade" and has "studied the realities of salesmanship."[25]

Agency head Dick Lord advises writers to "Be hep. Know what's going on around you in the world and all the little worlds within it. I've never met a good copywriter who was a dull person."[26] And Bernice Fitzgibbon sees a concrete benefit--the development of taste--resulting from this expansion of the writer's vistas. "The person who gets ahead," she observes, "makes a steady day-to-day effort to understand what is beyond him. He keeps looking at things, and listening to things . . . that at first don't appeal to him. Eventually, his tastes change and he catches up with what lies beyond him."[27]

Summary

This chapter takes a wide-angle view of the factors that help shape the advertising copywriter. Certainly one of the major requirements of the copywriter's job is versatility: the ability to write on a wide range of topics. A college education not only provides the student with a broad general background, but also gives him the opportunity of seeking out information. It gets him into the research habit.

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[25]Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, p. 11.

[26]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 106.

[27]Pleuthner, 460 Secrets, p. 83.

The copywriter never knows when he will need to call upon his storehouse of knowledge. The principles he studied in psychology or consumer behavior may serve him later in developing a creative approach for a new product. His readings in literature or drama may help provide the setting or situation for a television commercial. His grounding in marketing or economics may give him a better understanding of the client's distribution problems. His education is always there, ready to be used.

Working in an advertising agency or in the advertising department of a company is obviously the fastest way to learn the advertising business and develop writing skills. But any kind of selling experience--working in a retail store, a gas station, a supermarket--gives the student another kind of liberal education. The copywriter who must sell clothing or gasolene or canned peas through his writing is infinitely better prepared to write if he understands first-hand what goes on where these items are sold: how the salespeople function, how the customers react, and the give-and-take of making a sale.

Reading books and magazines; studying ads and television commercials; attending plays, concerts, films, art shows and exhibits all contribute to the writer's general education, and better enable him to do his job. From the student's reading comes a greater awareness of

storytelling ability, structure and the use of language. From current advertising comes the development of judgment in evaluating ads and commercials for interest value and communication. From drama, art and music come new styles and techniques which can be adapted for advertising layouts, and television and radio commercials.

Finally, the copywriter can derive most of his executional ideas from a conscientious study of human behavior. How much more realistic and believable will be his radio and TV commercials if they are rooted in a study of people. It is this "shock of recognition," based on astute observation, that has made many advertising campaigns come to life for readers and viewers. The observant copywriter will pick up conversation--from children at play, from truck drivers in a cafe--that can later be recalled when a new approach is needed for that peanut butter or anti-acid account.

The making of the copywriter is a complex and ongoing process. But the key to the process is initiative. The writer must shake off his inertia, break out of his comfortable routine, go out into the world and accumulate some experiences.

CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE IDEAS

Knowledge: The First Step

Discussing the creating of advertising, William Bernbach boiled it down to this: "You must be as simple, and as swift, and as penetrating as possible. And it must stem from knowledge. And you must relate that knowledge to the consumer's needs."[1]

Copywriter Shirley Polykoff put it another way: "We feel we not only have to know everything there is to know about the product, but everything there is to know about the people we want to sell it to."[2]

Knowledge, then, is the vital first step in the copywriter's pursuit of creativity. Citing the number of preparatory stages that Michaelangelo went through before putting chisel to marble, motivational researcher Dr. Ernest Dicter concludes that

> Creativity was based, in his case, and probably is in all cases on the systematic, logical, and step-by-step accumulation of facts . . . It is our conviction

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[1]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 17.

[2]"Think It Out Square," p. 48.

> that true creativity cannot exist without this factual foundation. Insight and genius need something to work with.[3]

BBDO President Tom Dillon defined the three steps that must preceed the development of creative work.[4] The first step, he said, is to identify the prime prospect for your advertising message--that group of individuals to whom the advertising should be directed. These are usually the high frequency buyers who make the brand decision.

The copywriter needs to know how many of these heavy users there are among total customers, and what percentage of the product they consume. (The heavy user, for example, may constitute only one-third of total prospects but consume two-thirds of the product.)

Information is needed on how the prime prospect differs from the average prospect by age, income, family size, race, ethnic origin, occupation, life style and other factors. The writer needs to know where the prime prospect lives, how and when he uses the product, and so forth.

The second step is to determine the prime prospect's problem: what he likes and dislikes about the product category, the client's product, or competitive

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[3]John S. Wright, Daniel S. Warner, and Willis L. Winter, Jr., Advertising (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), p. 366.

[4]Statement by Tom Dillon before the FTC.

products. These problems are both tangible (stains that won't come out of clothes) and intangible (taste, psychological attitudes). Interviews with consumers can help to uncover latent problems, since most people have some dissatisfactions with almost everything: scent, size, shape, feel, ingredients, effectiveness, etc. The importance of uncovering consumer problems is underscored by creative director Nadeen Paterson. "You have to sympathize with the reader," she says, "solve a problem for him and then you can sell your prospect."[5]

The third step is to examine the product or service in the light of what has been learned about the prime prospect and his problems in the decision process. This usually requires the creative man to personally involve himself in every detail of the product: performance, packaging, ingredients, and how it compares with the competition.

This need of the copywriter to know and understand his product or service is well documented by some of the outstanding creative people in advertising. "I try to drench myself in the product," says former Doyle Dane Bernbach copy chief Phyllis Robinson, "and then--by free association--just let go . . ."[6] Copywriters Ron Rosenfeld

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[5]Peterson, "Persuasion."

[6]"Comments of a Copy Chief," Advertising Age, July 15, 1968, pp. 47-48.

(a DDB alumnus) and Rena Nelson agree. "Basically, copy comes out of the product," says Mrs. Nelson. "Stay with the product. End with the product. It is the 'hero' of the piece."[7] Rosenfeld advises writers not only to involve themselves with the product but to care about it. "So many ads are unconvincing," he says, because they lack this excitement."[8]

Both Phyllis Robinson and Ron Rosenfeld developed their creative philosophies under creative genius William Bernbach, who is particularly intense on relating creativity to the product. "Your cleverness, your provocativeness, your imagination and inventiveness must stem from your knowledge of the product," he says.[9] This is why the copywriter must know his product inside out before he starts work. "You've got to get steeped in it. You've got to get saturated with it," insists Bernbach.[10]

Leo Burnett looks for the "inherent drama" he believes is in every product--that special something that makes people continue to buy the product. The writer's job is to discover that special something and capture it in

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[7]Odell and Nelson, To Market, pp. 48-49.

[8]"The Creative Life of a Doyle Dane Copywriter," Marketing/Communications, July 23, 1965, p. 67.

[9]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 17.

[10]John S. Wright and Daniel S. Warner, ed., Speaking of Advertising (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), p. 313.

the advertising.[11] It takes a good deal of digging, of course, to come up with that elusive something. And this may be why copywriter Janet Munro claims that "three-fourths research and one-fourth talent maketh the great copywriter."[12]

The Need for Belief

Can the copywriter do his most effective work without some personal commitment to his subject? David Ogilvy thinks not. "Good copy," he feels, "can't be written just for a living. You've got to believe in the product."[13]

William Bernbach asserts that belief in the product's worth transcends even writing skills. "What you believe is going to come across even if you don't have the skills your competition has," he says. "Now, if you can combine skill with a deep belief, you're way ahead of the game."[14]

Discussing what makes copy and commercials dull, Leo Burnett senses that "the writer really doesn't know what he is writing about and has no personal conviction

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[11] Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 44.

[12] Merrill De Voe, Effective Advertising Copy (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1956), p. 88.

[13] Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 86.

[14] Ibid., p. 24.

about it. As a result, he writes all around it, over it, under it, and never does succeed in making contact with the busy flesh-and-blood people to whom his words should be addressed." No writer will ever really succeed, Burnett believes, until he knows how to reduce his subject to its simplest terms, "until he develops some sincere convictions about it; and until he musters the courage to feel and act like a human being when a blank piece of paper stares him in the face."[15]

Researcher Alfred Politz argues that the advertising man, if he believes that a product has a right to be on the market, has an obligation to find an approach "which makes the product look good and thereby interesting." "If a product has features worth paying money for," he continues, "it must have features worth paying attention to."[16] It is the writer's task to find out what these features are and to present them with conviction to his audience.

"I do not believe," says Walter Wier, "that one can be a cynic and communicate effectively. Full communication occurs when belief follows in what is said, and belief implies faith and trust in the person communicating."[17]

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[15]Burton and Kreer, Advertising Copywriting, pp. 5-6.

[16]Wright and Warner, Speaking, p. 246.

[17]Wier, Advertisements.

Viewpoints on Creativity

"Our species is the only creative species," writes author John Steinbeck, "and it has only one creative instrument: the individual mind and spirit of man."[18] But what is creativity?

Dr. Gary Steiner, in The People Look at Television, describes it as "the ability to produce and implement new and better solutions to any kind of problem."[19] Leo Burnett believes that the real key to creativity "is the art of establishing new and meaningful relationships between previously unrelated things in a manner that is relevant, believable and in good taste."[20]

Most conceptual definitions of creativity would include the joining together of two or more elements to form a new unity with some meaning or purpose. These elements may seem irrelevant. But when they are joined (say, to form an advertising message), the recipient of the message will become interested because he is hearing and experiencing this new unity for the first time. The copywriter who concocted "Alka Seltzer on the Rocks" as a cooling aid to summer

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[18]Albert C. Book and Norman D. Cary, The Television Commercial: Creativity and Craftsmanship (New York: Decker Communications, 1970), p. 2.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Burnett, Keep Listening, p. 9.

stomach upsets was joining an alcoholic drink concept to proprietary medicine. The result was a bright, fresh idea.

The creative copywriter is expected to have the kind of mind that is able to see new relationships in old concepts, to see new ways of presenting familiar products. "If your idea is good," says copywriter Ed Graham, who wrote the famous Bert and Harry Piel campaign, "it has to be different from any idea ever done. That will be its biggest advantage. And it will also be its biggest drawback. Old ideas . . . have something to be measured against."[21]

Unlike many other creative writers, however, the copywriter can't sit around and wait for inspiration to strike (although it may strike whether he is sitting around or not). He must be creative on demand, usually within a specified framework of time. He must put the creative process to work.

"What you do," says famed advertising writer James Webb Young, "is take the different bits of materials which you have gathered and feel them all over, as it were, with the tentacles of the mind. You take one fact, turn it this way and that, look at it in different lights, and feel

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[21]Joyce, "Idea," p. 108.

for the meaning of it. You bring two facts together and see how they fit."[22]

Hal Stebbins views creativity as a dual process: "You build up by imagination. You tear down by analysis. You sift and sort. You select and reject."[23]

A number of writers have outlined steps in the process of getting ideas.[24] If we were to put together a composite list, it would include most of these stages:

Orientation or Definition: This first step is concerned with defining the problem and understanding its nature. Without agreement on what the problem is, there is no way to judge whether the ideas produced will solve it.

Preparation or Accumulation: This next step involves the gathering of raw materials--the information that is needed to solve the problem. Facts are assembled, data is sifted and analyzed.

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[22]James Webb Young, A Technique for Producing Ideas (Chicago: Advertising Publications, 1949), pp. 42-43.

[23]Stebbins, Capsules, p. 10.

[24]In addition to James Webb Young, see Alex Osborn, Applied Imagination (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963); Harold Rugg, Imagination (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1963); Paul Smith, ed. Creativity: An examination of the Creative Process (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1959); and Rudolph Flesch, The Art of Clear Thinking (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1951). See also Sandage and Fryburger, Theory and Practice, pp. 312-313; and Joyce, "Idea," p. 110.

Digestion or Cerebration: You ponder on the problem. Your mind ranges over alternative solutions. You work over the material mentally, weigh all conceivable elements in all conceivable combinations.

Incubation or Gestation: Your subconscious mind now takes over the problem. As James R. Adams says, "A creative man's best work is done when he isn't supposed to be working at all."[25]

Illumination or Elation: This is the birth of the idea, the solution of the problem--what Harold Rugg calls "the flash of insight."[26]

Alex Osborn tells us that the process of creativity is necessarily "a stop-and-go, catch-as-catch-can operation, one that can never be exact enough to rate as scientific."[27] Hal Stebbins agrees that each creative person must find the method that works best for him (such as taking a walk). He believes that copy is written in the head, not on the typewriter, and that putting it on paper is just a detail. The writer should be so full of what he wants to say that he has to write it just to get rid of it."[28]

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[25]Adams, Sparks, p. 50.

[26]Rugg, Imagination, pp. 11-19.

[27]Osborn, Applied Imagination, p. 115.

[28]Stebbins, Capsules, pp. 11-12.

Copywriter Shirley Milton considers creative thinking a skill that must be cultivated intensively and consistently:

> All creative thinking is basically a manipulation of memories, a re-arrangement of fragments of memory. It has been said that man cannot create anything absolutely new. All his experiences are based on memories, impressions of experiences, his own or vicarious experiences that he has studied, or read, or heard about, or seen depicted in pictures or in films.[29]

She lists the three major supports on which a writer's output largely depends: First, wideness of education (learning experience and its continuance); Second, continued experiences of the world about the writer, and a willingness to have strong impressions of these experiences; And third, the ability to make use of all the techniques for getting ideas.[30]

The Importance of Discipline

"All great craftsmen discipline their creative work," says David Ogilvy.[31] William Bernbach agrees. "It's not hard for anybody to get ideas," he says. "The important thing is to recognize when the idea is good. You must have imagination, you must have inventiveness, but it must be disciplined. Everything you write, everything on a page,

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[29]Milton, What You Should Know, p. 43.

[30]Ibid., p. 44.

[31]De Voe, Copy, p. 88.

every word, every graphic symbol . . . should further the message you're trying to convey . . . You measure the success of any work of art by how well it's achieved its purpose."[32]

Bernbach also insists that one cannot be creative until he has crystalized into a single purpose, a single theme what he wants to tell the reader. "For merely to let your imagination run riot," he says, is not being creative . . . The creative person has harnessed his imagination. He has disciplined it so that every thought, every idea, every word he puts down . . . makes more vivid, more believable, more persuasive the original theme."[33]

The waste baskets in the Doyle Dane Bernbach copy department, says former copy chief David Reider, "are full of ideas that are fresh, new and exciting." But they don't reach the client, he continues, because they won't sell.[34] Creativity has always meant selling," says Bernbach. "The primary responsibility of truly creative people is not just to exercise creative freedom, but to know what is good creative work and what is merely pretentious acrobatics."[35]

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[32]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 17.

[33]Wright and Warner, Speaking, p. 313.

[34]"Total Communicator," p. 28.

[35]Wright and Warner, Speaking, p. 318.

Researcher Alfred Politz argues that too many advertising people confuse imagination with creativeness. Imagination, he says, is a fundamental requirement of advertising professionals. Creativeness is the advanced form of imagination. It is used purposively by abiding to rigid rules and meeting practical conditions. Imagination, Politz continues, needs the discipline of organization, selection and constructiveness. Like Bernbach, he believes that creativeness is the opposite of pure freedom of imagination.[36]

Finally, Rosser Reeves puts the matter in practical terms: "The art of advertising," he says, "is getting a message into the heads of most people at the lowest possible cost . . . We should subordinate our own creative impulses to that one over-all objective."[37]

Summary

This chapter is concerned with the process that the copywriter must go through before he is ready to sit down at his typewriter and put words to paper. The process is a very deliberate and systematic one. In essence, the writer must prime his creative pump with facts. He must learn everything there is to know about the object (the consumer) and the subject (the product) of his creativity.

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[36] Ibid., p. 245.

[37] Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 108.

The amount of information and research available to the copywriter will, of course, vary with the nature of his subject matter, the funds set aside for gathering data, and the time allotted to get the job done. But the writer must make a determined effort to absorb everything he can get hold of that might provide him with working material for his imagination.

There is no one foolproof method of getting ideas once the writer has done his homework. The human mind is a strange and wonderful mechanism and we are far from solving all its mysteries. But we can say that out of the information we feed into it--mixed with all of our life memories and experiences--will come the insights we need to solve our creative problems. We must have the training and discipline, however, to recognize when our solutions are workable. And, in this endeavor, experience is the best teacher.

The process of gathering information is one that can be learned by doing. And given the gift of a creative mind, the copywriter can even cultivate his creative resources with diligent practice and application. For the copywriter, unlike many other creative writers, must force his creativity to function under pressure. And the sooner he begins training himself to do this, from his earliest years, the better prepared he will be for the stringent demands of a copywriting career.

CHAPTER IV

THE WRITING OF ADVERTISING COPY

In the preceeding chapters, we have examined the qualities of the ideal copywriter (imagination, understanding of people, etc.); the important factors that influence his development (education, writing practice, observation, etc.); and the processes by which he gets his ideas (knowledge-seeking, free association, etc.).

Now we are ready to relate the ideal copywriter to the work he produces--to characterize the outstanding copywriter by the quality of his writing. The best of contemporary copy can be analyzed for common points of excellence. And that is the major purpose of this chapter: to describe the ideal copywriter by writing ability instead of by personality factors.

Before we can do this, however, we must first ask: to what extent (if at all) can rules of good copywriting can be formulated to insure success? A good place to begin is with a historical perspective.

Copywriting Rules: Pro and Con

In one of the earliest books on advertising (Good Advertising in 1896), Charles Austin Bates argued that

advertising is news, and that to be effective, it must be presented in news fashion. Copywriter John Kennedy in 1904 developed the thesis that advertising is "salesmanship in print," and that to make people buy, you must give them a "reason-why."[1]

Claude Hopkins, the reigning genius at the Lord and Thomas agency from 1907 to 1924, developed reason-why copy for such clients as Schlitz (bottles "Washed in live steam"), Puffed Wheat and Puffed Rice ("Grains that are shot from guns"), and Palmolive Soap ("Keep that schoolgirl complexion"). Hopkins was fond of coining such pronouncements as "all advertising disasters are due to rashness," "people do not buy from clowns," and "the brilliant writer has no place in advertising."[2]

The most famous rule-maker in contemporary advertising is undoubtedly David Ogilvy. And the staunchest foe of copywriting rules is probably William Bernbach. Content is more important than form, says Ogilvy.[3] To which Bernbach replies that execution can become content. It can become just as important as what you say.[4]

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[1]Dolgins, "Feel of Words," p. 126.

[2]Ibid., p. 127.

[3]David Ogilvy, Confessions of an Advertising Man (New York: Atheneum, 1964), p. 93.

[4]Dolgins, "Feel of Words," p. 118.

Himself a former researcher, Ogilvy claims that all of his ideas about what constitutes good copy derive from research, not personal opinion.[5] He insists that all major ads and commercials be tested before they run, and he recognizes that one value of research lies in defending proposed campaigns to the client. "It's hard for clients to argue with research," he says. "They all use it in their own business."[6] Most of his research is concerned with the testing of copy lines.

Ogilvy's copywriting rules are legion: Humorous copy doesn't sell. Include the brand name in the headline. Inject maximum news in the headline. Use testimonials. Use women or babies to attract women. Use men to attract men.[7]

"Research," counters Bernbach, "has created a lot of advertising technicians who know all the rules."

> They can tell you that babies and dogs will attract more readers. They can tell you that body copy should be broken up for easier reading. They can tell you all the right things and give you fact after fact. They're the scientists of advertising. But there's one rub: advertising is fundamentally persuasion, and persuasion happens to be not a science but an art.[8]

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[5]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 79.

[6]Glatzer, New Advertising, p. 88.

[7]Ogilvy, Confessions, pp. 89-128.

[8]Glatzer, New Advertising, p. 17.

"All I want," he says, "is for the idea to convey memorably (and because it's memorable, it must be fresh and original) the advantages of our product. Now if breaking every rule in the world is going to achieve that, I want those rules broken."[9] Art director William Taubin (who once worked for Bernbach) agrees: "Don't hesitate to break the rules. If everyone heads east, then you go west."[10]

Hanley Norins observes that the writer should know the rules, but be suspicious of them. He quotes account supervisor Dave Cleary's warning that "rules have a way of turning into ruts."[11]

Author Leo Bogart notes that the so-called textbook rules of advertising (i.e., keep the headline short, have one dominant illustration) are being constantly violated by copywriters with great ideas. All these rules, he says, vanish into the air when we look at individual campaigns. The great idea that captures the public's fancy never comes by the book and never comes from looking at what worked so well in the past.[12]

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[9]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 20.

[10]Pleuthner, 460 Secrets, p. 233.

[11]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 14.

[12]Leo Bogart, Strategy in Advertising (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), p. 81.

William Bernbach makes the point that businesses and products are so similar today that advertising needs imaginative and original craftsmen who can "take that selling proposition, and through the magic of their artistry, get people to see it, get people to remember it."[13] The writer must make the consumer feel something about the product. Everybody is saying that he is the best, Bernbach observes. "What counts is the artistry with which you say it so that people will believe it."[14]

Returning to the content of advertising, Bernbach takes the position that it is simply not enough to say all the right things. You can have all the right things in your ad, all the important copy points. But if no one is made to stop and pay attention, you've wasted your money.[15] "Things have to be said that motivate people," Bernbach concludes. "The difference is the art."[16]

Will Shelton, former agency head, believes that creativity is a blend of art and science. The copywriter's first job, he says

> . . . is to provide mind-openers--interesting new thoughts, persuasive new facts, fresh new concepts. What we in the business call advertising ideas. His

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[13]Wright and Warner, Speaking, p. 313.

[14]Glatzer, New Advertising, p. 18.

[15]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 14.

[16]Glatzer, New Advertising, p. 17.

> second job is to lodge these ideas deeply and firmly into the prospect's mind. This calls for clear communication. As mind-opening is an art, and communicating a precision skill, the best advertising is a happy combination of art and science, idea and execution, theme and technique. Often there are many different, possible answers to the two questions of what to say and how to say it. But always . . . both questions must be answered.[17]

Characteristics of Good Copywriting

If the copywriter's task could be boiled down to just a few words, those words might well be: to make the facts come alive. As creative director Pat Gallagher puts it: "Anyone can state facts about a product, and maybe even state them clearly." But the copywriter, he continues, must state his facts so compellingly and so dramatically that his writing equals or betters the content of the magazine or TV program that carries the advertising. "The point of view," says Gallagher, "must be expressed in a way that gives 'voltage' to the idea behind the statement of the facts."[18]

Copywriters Charles Ewell and Paul Margulies of Doyle Dane Bernbach had the task of communicating the fact that every Volkswagon gets many coats of paint. Under a photograph of a steel VW chasis, they wrote the headline: "After we paint the car we paint the paint."

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[17]Boland, Careers, p. 74.

[18]Ibid., p. 73.

You should see what we do to a Volkswagon even before we paint it.

We bathe it in steam, we bathe it in alkali, we bathe it in phosphate. And then we bathe it in a neutralizing solution.

If it got any cleaner, there wouldn't be much left to paint.

Then we dunk the whole thing into a vat of slate gray primer until every square inch of metal is covered inside and out.

Only one domestic car maker does this. And his cars sell for 3 or 4 times as much as a Volkswagon.

(We think the best way to make an economy car is expensively.)

After the dunking, we bake it and sand it by hand.

Then we paint it.

Then we bake it again, and sand it by hand.

Then we paint it again.

And sand it again by hand.

So after 3 times, you'd think we wouldn't bother to paint it again and sand it again. Right?

Wrong.

What gave "voltage" to the facts in this Volkswagon ad was a vivid way of describing three coats of paint ("painting the paint"); plenty of detail (bathing in steam, alkali, phosphate, etc.); and repetition ("Then we bake it again," etc.). The ending of the ad ("you'd think we wouldn't bother to paint it again") allowed the reader to answer the question and participate in the ad. It also provided a memorable finish.

Television also offers outstanding examples of dramatizing the facts: A chimpanzee operating a Xerox machine to show how easy it is; a woman giving herself a permanent in an expensive evening gown to point out that it makes no mess; shaving a peach to prove the Remington Electric Shaver shaves

close without irritation; and subjecting Johns-Mansville roof shingles to the prop wash of a DC-6 to demonstrate wind-resistance.[19]

Besides bringing facts to life, the best of contemporary copywriting has a number of other important attributes in common:

Frankness and Honesty

Most students of today's advertising scene would probably agree that copy (and advertising generally) is much less pretentious than ever before. Advertising for Volkswagon and Volvo, to pick two outstanding examples, seems to reflect the recognition that consumers want basic information but are not making life and death decisions. Most good contemporary advertising appears to take an honest view of the client's product--its shortcomings as well as its advantages. The enlightened advertiser makes little effort to hide his product's limitations and even anticipates objections. He reasons that his claims will be more believable by an honest recitation of his product's disadvantages. These disadvantages, of course, are never really terribly damaging, and are ultimately turned into pluses for the advertiser. Despite Professor Clarke's

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[19]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 154.

caution that the copywriter must not be deprecatory to his product, Volkswagon has made ugliness an affectionate symbol of the car's practicality and continuing value.

"I think the best copywriters respect the reader," says copywriter Judy Blumenthal. "The reader recognizes and reacts in a reciprocal way . . . I dislike ads that take me for a fool as a consumer . . . the 'newest,' the 'greatest,' the 'best'--any kind of generality, unless you can really prove it true."[20] "The cardinal sin of advertising," warns James R. Adams, "is boastfulness."[21] And one of David Ogilvy's more uncontested rules is: Avoid superlatives, generalizations and platitudes.[22]

Lest contemporary advertising men delude themselves into thinking they invented honesty, we must go back to the 19th century and read the work of copywriter John E. Powers for the John Wanamaker store in Philadelphia. Powers had a fetish for clean layouts and pithy sentences (which came to be known as "Powerisms.") He was also reputed to be a fanatic for honesty. Then he asked one of the Wanamaker managers what items should be featured in the next day's newspaper, the manager replied: "Well, we have a lot of rotten gossamers and things we

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[20]"Portrait," p. 26.

[21]Adams, Sparks, p. 85.

[22]Ogilvy, Confessions, p. 108.

want to get rid of." The salesman was shocked to find in the next day's Wanamaker ad: "We have a lot of rotten gossamers and things we want to get rid of."[23]

A Strong Central Idea

This is absolutely essential for good advertising, says copywriter Shirley Milton. She claims it adds vitality, believability, interest and memorability.[24] David Ogilvy goes so far as to say that a compaign will be second rate unless it is built around a central theme.[25] And James R. Adams believes that an ad should make only one key, compelling point, and that all other ideas should be subordinate.[26]

As early as the 1880's, Nathaniel Fowler was advancing "The Fowler Idea" of putting one main concept into an ad and hammering away at it. Fowler was an arch foe of whimsy and humor in advertising and contributed the first important book to the profession, Building Business, in 1892.[27] His views on advertising were personified over a half-century later by Rosser Reeves of the Ted Bates agency.

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[23]Dolgins, "Feel of Words," p. 122.

[24]Milton, What You Should Know, p. 47.

[25]Ogilvy, Confessions, p. 95.

[26]Adams, Sparks, p. 83.

[27]Dolgins, "Feel of Words," p. 122.

Reeves was also a bitter foe of humor in advertising and a strong believer in finding the "unique selling proposition" for a product. Once the key selling idea was arrived at, always out of some product advantage, ("M & M candies melt in your mouth, not your hands"), Reeves hammered away at it for years to the tune of millions of dollars.

Supersalesman Albert Lasker, head of the Lord and Thomas agency during the early part of the present century, had three basic advertising principles: (1) Develop a central sales idea, (2) Having a central sales idea, give it news, and (3) Having a central sales idea, make it sing. Lasker believed that any advertising man could develop a central theme and give it news, but that only a skilled master could make it sing.[28] Most of the singing was done by copywriter Claude Hopkins, whose slogans for Schlitz, Puffed Rice and Palmolive Soap were quoted above in this chapter.[29]

No matter what their creative philosophy, most advertising men would agree on the need for a strong central selling idea, particularly in view of the increasing number of competitive products with similar performance capabilities. The reader is reminded of William Bernbach's

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[28]De Voe, Copy, pp. 88-89.

[29]See the section on Advertising Rules: Pro and Con in this chapter.

observation earlier in this paper that you cannot be creative unless you have crystalized into a single purpose, a single theme what you want you tell your audience.[30]

Originality and Freshness

"I think the most important thing in advertising," says Bernbach, "is to be original and fresh."[31] "Unless you say things freshly, unless you say them originally, unless you say them with imagination, you bore people. And the most expensive thing . . . is boring people."[32] David Ogilvy agrees: "You can't bore people into buying. You can only interest them."[33]

Bernbach notes that it's a knowing world today with informed consumers and a great many good products with similar characteristics competing for the same group of customers. And though it takes hard work to present one's story memorably, it pays off in results. "Just be sure," he cautions, "that your advertising is saying something with substance, something that will

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[30]See the section on The Need for Discipline in Chapter III.

[31]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 12.

[32]William Bernbach, "Creativity in Advertising," The International Advertiser, Fall, 1971, p. 21.

[33]Ogilvy, Confessions, p. 97.

inform and serve the consumer, and be sure you are saying it like it's never been said before."[34]

"Your impact with the consumer," he continues, "will be in direct proportion to the originality of your presentation. A unique selling proposition is no longer enough. Without a unique selling talent, it may die."[35]

Bernice Fitzgibbon reminds copywriters that "no ad is ever sought out and read by anybody except the person who wrote it or the one who paid for it."[36] And she has coined this motto for herself: "When I am dead, let only this be said. 'Her sins were scarlet but her ads were read.'"[37]

Why does there seem to be so little advertising that is fresh and daring? Leo Bogart suggests that "advertising plans are made by businessmen, they involve large sums of money, and there is a strong conservative resistance to the offbeat."[38]

Another reason is that it is difficult for fresh ideas to survive the gamut of scrutiny and review at various agency and client levels. "Suggestions" and "improvements" may turn offbeat ideas into very ordinary ones.

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[34]Bernbach, "Creativity," p. 22.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Pleuthner, 460 Secrets, p. 82.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Bogart, Strategy, p. 81.

Still a third reason is the "curse of copycatting." What better way to insure against misfire than to copy a successful campaign. The problem with imitative advertising is that an idea may become so overly familiar that it begins to generate ridicule or even resentment. This follow-the-leader trend also tends to eliminate differences between products and may only confuse the consumer.

Despite all the obstacles, however, there does seem to be a definite groundswell toward fresh, bright copy. Some examples:

> For Pakn-it underwear: "Man does not shrink after washing. Nor should his T-shirt."
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> For Volvo: "Break the new car habit."
>
> For Quaker Oats: "Does it make sense to jump out of a warm bed and into a cold cereal?"
>
> For Ronzoni Spaghetti Sauce: "The government makes you say 'Flavored with Meat' when you don't put in enough meat to say 'Meat.'"
>
> For Air Jamaica: Photograph of a girl in a bikini. "Defrost in 3 hours."
>
> For the Peace Corps: "Make America a better place. Leave the country."
>
> For El Al Airlines: "We don't take off until everything is Kosher."
>
> For Shell: A man furtively empties an auto ashtray onto the street. "What have you done to your country lately?"

For Modess Napkins: "You buy a grapefruit more intelligently than you buy a sanitary napkin." For Mobil: A driver sits behind the wheel of his car. "The most dangerous defect in today's cars."

A Personal, Conversational Style

"Don't try to write," says Hal Stebbins. "Just try to say something."[39] His point, of course, is that copy should sound like conversation, not "writing." James R. Adams advances the same argument. "A lot of people may buy a given product," he says, "but they do it one by one." He advises the copywriter to conjure up another person and talk directly to him or her.[40] The key words here are "another person" (instead of people) and "talk" (instead of write).

Creative director Nadeen Peterson has concluded that copy represents the writer's personality. She points out that Shirley Polykoff's Clairol copy ("Is it true that blondes have more fun?", "If I have one life to live, let me live it as a blonde") sounds exactly like Shirley Polykoff. "It is warm and understanding and she embraces your problems with a nice motherly hug and tells you

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[39]Stebbins, Capsules, p. 15.

[40]Adams, Sparks, p. 81.

everything will be all right . . . She understands the soul and psyche of a woman with a headful of mousecolored hair."[41]

Copywriter Stan Burkoff advises the writer to "persuade through his typewriter the way he'd try to persuade in conversation. He should clarify the subject matter quickly. He should state his product benefit quickly. He should try to use conversational language. And his claims should be meaningful."[42]

Finally, Hal Stebbins believes that "copy is something you can study; but something you can't copy. Use your own imagination. Draw on your own creative resources. It may be wonderful. It may be terrible. But it is you."[43] To quote Emerson: "Every mind is different; and the more it is unfolded the more pronounced is that difference."[44]

Colloquial Language

"Copy must live," says Nadeen Peterson. "It must be alive . . . It must complement the product the way the two parts of a marriage complement one another."[45]

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[41]Peterson, "Persuasion."

[42]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 52.

[43]Stebbins, Capsules, p. 5.

[44]Ibid., p. 6.

[45]Peterson, "Persuasion."

Copywriter Judy Blumenthal agrees that "the language of an ad is important. I feel very strongly about how it sounds. The copy should be a pleasure to read."[46]

Most copywriters would undoubtedly support David Ogilvy's rule of using the same colloquial language that customers use every day.[47] Says Hanley Norins: "The copywriter must speak with the voice and listen with the ear of the audience. He must be tuned into the vibrations of the multitude and find the means of expression which is of common interest to all."[48]

If you talk people's language, observes copywriter Tom Murphy, by inference you understand them. And if you don't understand your audience, how can you create a desire in them for the product? Murphy feels that the copywriter should be able to write for people of all ages, from children to over-65's.[49] And while he subscribes to the use of colloquial language, he also believes that the writer must be able to write literate sentences. He must know the rules of grammar, even if he breaks them to convey a thought more clearly.[50]

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[46]"Portrait," p. 25.

[47]Ogilvy, Confessions, p. 112.

[48]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 15.

[49]Murphy, "Copywriting," pp. 32-33.

[50]Ibid.

Former agency head George Gribbin notes that one of the marks of the good writer is that he avoids cliches, not only in his writing but in his speech as well.[51] And copywriter Shirley Milton urges writers to use language that is "appropriate, current, fast-moving; simple, honest and specific."[52]

Emotional Impact

The view in 1923 among a great many advertising people was that if you appeal to reason in your advertising, you appeal to about 4% of the human race.[53] This may be an exaggeration, but the point remains that emotion can be a powerful asset in the hands of the creative copywriter. "Not to use tender feelings among people," says former DDB copy chief Phyllis Robinson, "not to see people's hopes and cares, is abdicating your responsibility."[54]

Copywriter Judy Blumenthal agrees. "If an ad doesn't reach people's feelings, it isn't communicating. It's a zero. So the first thing I do is try to find out how people feel about the product. And then I decide how I want to make people feel about it. This is the seed of

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[51]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 69.

[52]Milton, What You Should Know, p. 39.

[53]Dolgins, "Feel of Words," p. 128.

[54]"Copy Chief," pp. 47-48.

the ad. Everything else grows with it."[55] In addition to emotional impact, of course, an ad must have real meat to it. The best ads, she concludes, have both emotion and the facts.[56]

The following ad for the Better Vision Institute, written by Leon Meadow of Doyle Dane Bernbach, is a particularly fine example of combining information with emotional impact. The photograph shows a boy of about 12, wearing a baseball cap and fielder's glove, racing out into the street after a fly ball as a car bears down on him. The headline, chilling in its matter-of-factness, reads: "The car will probably kill the boy."

> The man in the car is a careful, responsible driver. In explaining the accident, he will say, "The boy ran out from the sidewalk. I saw him too late. I have good eyes." He has--as far as he can tell. He passed a routine vision test when he first got his driver's license. He can still see fine straight ahead. But a professional eye examination will show that, without becoming aware of it, he has lost some of his side vision. In an accident like this, that can be the tragic difference. At best, driving is dangerous enough. All of us owe it to all of us to make sure we're seeing as clearly and completely as we can.

It seems appropriate to repeat what William Bernbach said in the section dealing with copywriting

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[55] "Portrait," p. 25.

[56] Ibid., p. 26

rules. "Businesses are similar, products are similar. What's left is my ability to make the consumer feel something. Execution is content."[57]

Clarity, Conciseness, Simplicity

These are three of the most important words in the copywriter's lexicon. Hanley Norins observes that the communicator (copywriter) must be clear in his own mind what he wants to accomplish before he can make himself clear to others. Norins quotes Professor Wendell Johnson that "the degree to which there is communication depends upon the degree to which the words represent the same thing for the receiver or reader as they do for the sender or writer. And the degree to which they do is an index to the clarity of the communication or written statement."[58]

"It takes a lot of nerve," says James R. Adams, "to expect a reader to do his own thinking when he reads your advertisement. You should do it for him. If you give him hurdles to cross . . . he has every reason to desert you. After all, he is doing you a favor by reading your advertisement."[59]

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[57]Glatzer, New Advertising, p. 18.

[58]Norins, Compleat Copywriter, p. 15.

[59]Adams, Sparks, p. 80.

The copywriter would be well advised to check the clarity of his writing. And one way to do this is to read it aloud to make sure that everything follow logically, and that it tells the reader what he should do and why it makes sense for him to do it.[60]

Students frequently want to know how long a sentence and how long an ad should be for maximum clarity and readability. It is difficult to generalize because the length of copy really depends on the audience to whom the ad is addressed, the importance and complexity of the subject to the audience, and such practical considerations as the amount of space available to the writer. But we can say that all copy--no matter how long or short--should be concise. That is, it should contain no unnecessary words, sentences or paragraphs. The writer should make every word support the central idea and delete every word that doesn't. He should say just enough to make his point and then conclude. He should resist any temptation to add those few extra words or that one extra sentence. "Compression," says James R. Adams, "is the great art in advertising copywriting."[61]

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[60]Irwin C. Roll, "Say It Simple," Printers' Ink, August 11, 1961, pp. 58-59.

[61]Adams, Sparks, p. 75.

Adams also makes the case for simplicity in advertising copywriting. "The capacity of the average reader to misunderstand," he says, "is almost beyond comprehension."[62] And he reminds us that "nowhere else does it cost as much to be misunderstood as in advertising."[63]

Short sentences are important to readability. But too many short sentences can become monotonous, especially in long copy. So sentences of varying length seem to be the best solution in writing for a general audience.[64] Simplicity applies not only to sentence length, of course, but to the writer's choice of words as well. An unfamiliar word can stop the reader's flow of thought. So plain, simple language should be the writer's stock-in-trade.[65]

One of the supreme examples of clarity, conciseness and simplicity is the much-admired campaign for Talon zippers. The subject admittedly is not complex. But the category of zippers is also not a very high-interest one either. It took a creative copywriter to inject freshness and memorability into the subject. In the following Talon ad, written by Bob Veder of Delehanty,

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[62]Adams, Sparks, p. 80.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Wright, Warner and Winter, Advertising, p. 400.

[65]Ibid., pp. 397-398.

Kurnit and Geller, the photograph is of an embarrassed-looking businessman walking down the steps of a public building holding a briefcase in front of his pants. The headline: "A prominent New York stockbroker just went public."

> It's bad enough when the market takes a sudden plunge.
>
> But when your trouser zipper goes down, you lose another kind of security.
>
> For your own good, look for the Talon Zephyr nylon zipper next time you buy yourself a suit or a pair of slacks.
>
> The Zephyr zipper is designed not to snag or jam. And a little device called Memory Lock will make sure your zipper stays up.
>
> So all you'll have to worry about going down are your stocks.

In 82 words, we have a strong central idea; conveying facts in a fresh and original way; written in conversational, colloquial language; and with human understanding and a sense of humor.

Summary

This chapter shifts focus from the personality of the ideal copywriter to the key qualities of his writing. Most contemporary copywriters do not feel bound by rules, but rather let the objectives of the message and the need to generate attention and interest dictate the creative

approach. The best advertising seems to be a blend of strategy and execution: finding the right thing to say and then saying it in a way that motivates people to action.

Good copywriting has a number of common characteristics. It takes bare facts and presents them dramatically and memorably. It is devoid of pretense and treats readers as intelligent human beings. It is built around a strong central idea and expresses that idea in a fresh and original way. The selling story is so organized that it is simple, clear and understandable. And the language is conversational, colloquial, and appropriate to the audience being addressed. The copywriter also appeals to people's feelings when it is a natural and integral part of his subject matter.

CHAPTER V

THE COPYWRITER ON THE JOB

Up to this point, we have spoken of the copywriter rather abstractly. That is, we have discussed who he is, how he thinks, and what characterizes his writing. But we have not considered his working methods on the job or his relationships with other creative people. That is one of the aims of this chapter.

The latter part of the chapter is really a synthesis or summation of what has gone before. By means of a case history, we can observe how the highly gifted copywriter approaches a creative advertising problem, and the quality of both concept and copy that results from a close working relationship. Our example is the famed Avis campaign of the early 1960's. This case study will also link the characteristics of good copywriting to an outstanding and successful copywriter, Paula Green.

The Team System of Working

In one of his most quoted passages, Leo Burnett observed that "after all the meetings are over, the phones have stopped ringing, and the vocalizing has died down,

somebody finally has to get out an ad, often after hours. Somebody has to stare at a blank piece of paper. Probably nothing was ever more bleak. This is probably the very height of loneliness . . . ."[1]

Creative man James R. Adams also noted that "creative advertising is a lonesome type of endeavor, and for that reason, it is doubly difficult to put forth the effort necessary to succeed in it."[2]

This description of the copywriter is still undoubtedly true in a great many, if not most, instances. In the early and mid-1960's, however, in such advertising agencies as Doyle Dane Bernbach, Jack Tinker and Carl Ally, a new kind of working relationship began to develop. Instead of the writer preparing the copy and then giving it to an artist to make a layout, the writer sat down with the art director from the outset to plan an ad or a campaign. Often, the copywriter suggested a visual way to express the idea. And the art director, in turn, frequently contributed a concept or a bright headline. Writer Faith Popcorn describes her relationship with art director Stuart Pittman: "When Stuart and I met, he was an art director and I was a

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[1]Boland, Careers, p. 63.

[2]Adams, Sparks, p. 43.

copywriter. Now we believe there's no such thing as an art director and a copywriter . . . we're both writers and art directors."[3]

This team spirit is echoed by writer Joy Golden and art director Stuart Rosenwasser:

> Joy: You have to have a relationship where you can go 'yech.' I mean, I'll do 15 headlines and he'll 'yech' every one of them. And then he'll sit down and do one and I'll say 'yech' too.
>
> Stuart: The thing is to be able to communicate. I like to feel I'm involved. I don't like working with writers who go into their office and write and then come back and show you.
>
> Joy: The reason we work so well together is we cross lines without stepping on each others toes.[4]

One reason why the writer/art director team system came about was that more and more great advertising concepts consisted of a single powerful idea that fused art and copy. This was particularly true of such outstandingly written and visualized campaigns as Marlboro, Alka Seltzer and Benson and Hedges. Now, in the early 1970's, the team system is the accepted manner of working in both large and small agencies.

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[3] "Mateswapping and Forced Marriages Among Creative Teams," Marketing/Communications, September, 1970, p. 33.

[4] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

The Avis Campaign: A Case History

In 1962, the president of Avis rent a cars, Robert Townsend, paid a visit to Doyle Dane Bernbach. He told the agency: "I have one million to spend, and I need five million worth of impact." The agency said they would take the account if Townsend would agree to run the campaign without changes. Bernbach also asked for 90 days to prepare the advertising.[5]

The creative team of copywriter Paula Green and art director Helmut Krone were assigned to the account. Krone was well-established at the agency, having been the art director on the award-winning Volkswagon campaign. Mrs. Green was lesser known, although she had been at Doyle Kane Bernbach since 1956.[6]

The Green/Krone team immediately considered the Avis problem. It was certainly not the largest of the car rental agencies (Hertz owned that distinction). It was certainly not the best in terms of service. And it was certainly not the most profitable (in fact, it had been losing money). On the other hand, Townsend had the authority to make the key decisions at the company, and could be relied on to back the advertising.

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[5]Glatzer, New Advertising, pp. 63-65.

[6]Julius J. Spector, "Paula Green on the Doyle Dane Way," Marketing/Communication, May, 1969, p. 39.

[7]Glatzer, New Advertising, pp. 63-65.

The campaign that emerged from the Green/Krone collaboration has been called one of the most important and unusual campaigns of the 1960's. It drew shocked comments from other agencies and advertisers as being derogatory to the client. But Bernbach knew that what the campaign was really saying was not just that "Avis is only number two," but that "Avis tries harder" than its competitors. For executives renting cars, it became something of a fad to rent from second-place Avis instead of the leader, Hertz. In turn, Townsend made good on his promise to upgrade his company, his cars, and his service. The "We try harder" slogan became a much-imitated phrase, and was printed on millions of buttons all around the world.

The success of the Avis campaign (from a 3.2 million loss in 1962 to a 3.0 million profit in 1964) was not just a triumph of advertising. It was a total effort on the part of Avis management, Avis employees and the advertising agency. The "We try harder" promotion inspired Avis sales people to exert themselves in providing excellence of service. And good service, in turn, fed the advertising and gave it credibility. It was a classic case of agency-client collaboration.

One factor that made the Avis campaign possible was the creative freedom given Paula Green and Helmut Krone to experiment with new ideas and dare to break the rules. This has always been the case at Doyle Dane Bernbach since its

founding in the late 1940's. Says former creative director Bob Gage: "This isn't a place where you're free to create great stuff. It's demanded of you."[8]

The creative environment that Gage describes has been possible only because the agency's creative head, William Bernbach, believes in the supremacy of individualism. Every writer and art director is allowed to develop in his own way and express his own brand of creative thought. Says creative director Bob Levinson of Bernbach: "He's a genius at letting people be themselves."[9]

Bernbach himself stresses the importance of cultivating talent. "You have to care for your people," he says, "let them grow."[10] The agency has not imposed a rigid definition of talent on its creative people. "We have rather searched," says Bernbach, "for what is outstanding . . . You have to find out what their talent is and nurture that, because that's a natural thing."[11]

Paula Green may come as close as anyone can to the ideal copywriter described in the first chapter of this paper. And the ads she wrote for Avis are prime examples of the characteristics of good copy discussed in the

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[8]Glatzer, New Advertising, p. 17.

[9]Ibid., p. 18.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Higgins, Art of Writing, p. 19.

preceeding chapter. She follows no set formula in her approach to an advertising concept. Her philosophy is simply "to come to grips with the product and the problem, then to give it a new feeling."[12] The fact that her work seems so obvious to people after it has been done is a tribute to her ability to find the simplest solution to a creative problem.

What happens when two highly creative people like Paula Green and Helmut Krone collaborate on an advertising campaign? Mrs. Green describes the process:

> We sit in a closed room and beat each other to death . . . You sit head to head and wrestle with it . . .
>
> You arrive at a concept. And by arriving at a concept, it really means you've arrived at an ad . . .
>
> Usually headline and a visual idea . . . happens together, and the art director will scribble it down . . . We'll take a hard look at it and come back to it the next day and make sure we like it as well.[13]

Discussing what makes good copywriters and good copy, Mrs. Green echoes some of the same points brought out in earlier chapters. She believes that the writer needs the ability to put himself "in the other guys shoes," which is another way of saying empathy.[14] And she holds the view--as do almost all creative copywriters--that the essentials of effective copywriting are clarity, simplicity, compelling language, and a sense of the dramatic.

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[12] "Paula Green," p. 40.

[13] Ibid., p. 42.

[14] Ibid.

She is particularly hard on pretentiousness ("I hate writers who say 'Look at me, aren't I clever?'"),[15] and equally demanding of herself ("The important thing to me is that I'm proud of it. And I'm proud of it when it suits me.")[16]

Above all, Paula Green believes that advertising copy must be fresh and original, but rooted in the objectives of the advertising. "You search for freshness," she says, "but you never sacrifice what you have to say for the sake of doing something novel."[17]

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[15] Ibid., p. 46.

[16] Ibid., p. 43.

[17] Ibid.

PLATE I

Avis is only No.2 in rent a cars. So why go with us?

We try harder.

(When you're not the biggest, you have to.)

We just can't afford dirty ashtrays. Or half-empty gas tanks. Or worn wipers. Or unwashed cars. Or low tires. Or anything less than seat-adjusters that adjust. Heaters that heat. Defrosters that defrost.

Obviously, the thing we try hardest for is just to be nice. To start you out right with a new car, like a lively, super-torque Ford, and a pleasant smile. To let you know, say, where you can get a good, hot pastrami sandwich in Duluth.

Why?

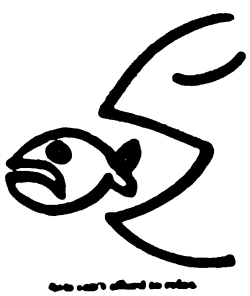
Because we can't afford to take you for granted.

Go with us next time.

The line at our counter is shorter.

PLATE II

When you're only No.2, you try harder. Or else.



Little fish have to keep moving all of the time. The big ones never stop picking on them.

Avis knows all about the problems of little fish.

We're only No.2 in rent a cars. We'd be swallowed up if we didn't try harder.

There's no rest for us.

We're always emptying ashtrays. Making sure gas tanks are full before we rent our cars. Seeing that the batteries are full of life. Checking our windshield wipers.

And the cars we rent out can't be anything less than lively new super-torque Fords.

And since we're not the big fish, you won't feel like a sardine when you come to our counter.

We're not jammed with customers.

PLATE III

Avis needs you. You don't need Avis. Avis never forgets this.

We're still a little hungry.

We're only No.2 in rent a cars.

Customers aren't a dime a dozen to us.

Sometimes, when business is too good, they get the short end and aren't treated like customers anymore.

Wouldn't you like the novel experience of walking up to a counter and not feel you're bothering somebody?

Try it.

Come to the Avis counter and rent a new, lively super-torque Ford. Avis is only No.2 in rent a cars. So we have to try harder to make our customers feel like customers.

Our counters all have two sides.

And we know which side our bread is buttered on.

PLATE IV

If you find a cigarette butt in an Avis car, complain. It's for our own good.

We need your help to get ahead.

Avis is only No. 2 in rent a cars. So we have to try harder.

Even if it's only a marked-up map in the glove compartment or you waited longer than you felt you should, please don't shrug it off.

Bug us.

Our people will understand. They've been briefed.

They know we can't afford to hand you anything less than a new car like a lively, super-torque Ford. And it's got to be immaculate, inside and out.

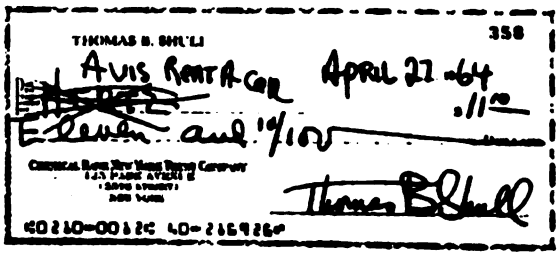
Otherwise, make a noise.

A Mr. Meadow of New York did.

He searched and came up with a gum wrapper.

PLATE V

Who do you think of first when you think of rent a cars? Certainly not Avis.



How one of our customers made out his check.

It must be nice to be a household word. Like Jell-O, Coke or Kodak.

But we're not. Avis is only No. 2 in rent a cars, and it's always the big fellow you think of first.

So we have to try harder. Hoping the people who stumble on us will come back for more.

(We probably have the world's most fussed-over Fords. Spick and span and nicely in tune.)

And when someone calls us by the wrong name, we turn the other cheek.

After all, it doesn't matter what you call us.

Just so you call.

PLATE VI

If Avis is out of cars, we'll get you one from our competition.

Somehow or other, we'll put you in a car.

We're not proud. We're only No. 2.

We'll call everybody in the business (including No. 1). If there's a car to be had, we'll get it for you.

At the airport, we'll even lock up our cashbox and walk you over to the competition in person.

All of which may make you wonder just how often all our shiny new Plymouths are on the road.

We have 35,000 cars in this country.

So the day that every one is out is a rare day for Avis. (If you have a reservation, don't give it a second thought.)

And don't worry about the car our competition will give you.

It's for an Avis customer and they know it.

This is their chance.

PLATE VII

If you have a complaint, call the president of Avis. His number is CH 8-9150.

There isn't a single secretary to protect him. He answers the phone himself.

He's a nut about keeping in touch.

He believes it's one of the big advantages of a small company.

You know who is responsible for what. There's nobody to pass the buck to.

One of the frustrations of complaining to a big company is finding someone to blame.

Well, our president feels responsible for the whole kit and caboodle. He has us working like crazy to keep our super-torque Fords super. But he knows there will be an occasional dirty ashtray or temperamental wiper.

If you find one, call our president collect.

He won't be thrilled to hear from you, but he'll get you some action.

PLATE VIII

Avis is only No.2. But we don't want your sympathy.

Have we been crying too much? Have we overplayed the underdog?

We didn't think so till David Biener, 11 years old, sent us 35¢, saying, "It may help you buy another Plymouth."

That was an eye-opener.

So now we'd like to correct the false impression we've made.

We don't want you to rent Avis cars because you feel sorry for us. All we want is a chance to prove that a No. 2 can be just as good as a No. 1. Or even better. Because we have to try harder.

Maybe we ought to eliminate the negative and accentuate the positive.

Instead of saying "We're only No.2 in rent a cars," we could say "We're the second largest in the world."

CHAPTER VI

THE COPYWRITER'S CONSCIENCE

"The path of the professional copywriter isn't easy," says George Gribbin.[1] And when we consider how many masters the copywriter must serve, how many different interests he must satisfy, we can better appreciate the difficulty of his task.

First, there is his employer, whether it be an advertising agency, a television station, or a retail store. The copywriter is expected to do the kind of work which meets certain specified standards, and which will produce results in the judgment of his superiors. Secondly, he must satisfy his client, the people who pay for the advertising. The client must agree that the creative execution will serve his needs and accomplish his objectives. It must also conform to whatever his personal tastes or prejudices.

Thirdly, the copywriter must create his advertising within the guidelines and restrictions of advertising industry codes and government regulations. These are constantly

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[1]Wright and Warner, Speaking, p. 253.

changing and evolving. The advertising must also be acceptable to the media in which it runs--the television networks, radio stations, newspapers, and magazines.

Fourthly, the copywriter must satisfy his own conscience that he has done the best job he is capable of and that his creativity will serve the interests of the consumer.

What this means in practical terms is that the copywriter must have genuine empathy, the quality described in the first chapter of his paper. He should be able to gauge how the consumer is going to perceive his message, how the ad or commercial is likely to be comprehended. And if he is in doubt, he should suggest testing or research to determine how his message will be interpreted.

This is important not only to insure the effectiveness of an advertising message, but to avoid misleading or misinforming the consumer. And the assumption here is that the copywriter of conscience does not want to deliberately deceive the consumer--that he feels an ethical obligation and moral responsibility to the object of his persuasion. The fact that the copywriter is, in the words of Professor Clarke, "a paid propagandist . . . creating and moulding public opinion" does not allow him to justify intellectual dishonesty by claiming results.[2]

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[2]Clarke, Copywriting, p. 16.

The copywriter of conscience will shun such questionable practices as quasi-truths (ignoring important negatives to stress product advantages), appealing but half-intelligible claims (such as "uniweld body"), and contrived testimonials (hiring celebrities who do not use products to endorse them).[3]

The copywriter who respects the consumer will banish from his copy such "weasel" phrases as "unsurpassed for nutrition" (which means no more nutritious than any other product) and "save up to 40%" (which could mean that, in some cases, you might lose 10%).

Communication scholar Erwin Bettinghaus argues that "every individual ought to have developed a set of ethics and a set of expectations regarding ethical conduct, and that he should know what they are and how to apply them in various situations." This applies very specifically to the copywriter, who uses the art of persuasion to influence human thought and behavior.[4]

The copywriter must search his conscience and examine his values. Only then will he know instinctively how to proceed in any given instance. Writers have refused to

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[3]Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image: A Guide To Pseudo-Events in America (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961), pp. 211-228.

[4]Erwin P. Bettinghaus, Persuasive Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), p. 284.

work on accounts (cigarettes are an example) and have quit their jobs because they could not reconcile their personal standards with the demands of a particular situation. Most cases, of course, are not that black and white. The great gray area is composed of those little ethical erosions that develop from day to day. The copywriter who refuses to compromise his values will not find his integrity slipping away from him during the course of his writing career. The copywriter of conscience will heed the advice of copywriter and agency founder Leo Burnett:

> Now, more than ever, is the time for us to cling like wildcats to the only realities we can swear we have hold of--our own sacred and individual integrities--our own savage refusuals to compromise with what we, as sensitive and thinking human beings, feel to be the truth . . . the truth we know in our gut to be true.[5]

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[5]"Leo Burnett on Integrity," Marketing/Communications, December, 1971, p. 55.

EPILOGUE: THE FUTURE COPYWRITER

The advertising student--looking ahead to a copywriting career--may speculate: what will the copywriter's job be like a few years from now when I finish school? What qualities of the copywriter will be particularly important then? Recognizing the dangers of prediction, we can still make some reasonable assumptions based on present trends.

<u>You will be working in a more competitive environment than today's copywriter</u>.--The number of new products coming onto the market is increasing at a rapid rate. And by "new products," we mean not only innovations, but additions to a company's present line to compete with existing products. When we consider the mini-cameras, double-bladed razors, instant meals, double-knit fabrics, and hot lather shaving creams of today--is there any doubt that competition will be even more intense in the years ahead?

What this means for the future copywriter is that he will be under even greater pressure to devise effective selling strategies, and communicate them to the consumer in ways that will command and hold attention. With the consumer exposed to more and more advertising messages--on TV and radio, in newspapers and magazines--the burden will be on the

copywriter as never before to create interesting, imaginative and benefit-oriented ads and commercials.

You will have to be more knowledgeable than today's copywriter.--Because the copywriter must play a leading role in the formulation of creative strategies, he must have a good working knowledge of the marketing process--manufacturing, distribution, packaging--all of the factors involved in the movement of goods and services to consumers. This background is essential to the creation of effective, on-target advertising. The most likely source of this training is the university, which can give the writer a basic understanding of the marketing approach. He can then apply his general knowledge to a particular client's advertising problems.

The future copywriter will also need a much broader general background than the writer of today. Not only will he have to write for particular market segments--ethnic groups, age categories, people who are concerned about nutrition--but he will also have to create advertising on an expanded range of subjects from electronics to ecology. The more knowledgeable he is, the better prepared he will be to come up with creative solutions. Education, travel, sales experience--these will all be invaluable in conditioning the copywriter to meet the demands of his job.

You will have to work under more restraints than today's copywriter.--The increasing pressures of consumer protection groups--as well as more government involvement in

advertising--will undoubtedly affect the future copywriter's job. The question is: in what way, and to what extent? Will copywriters have less freedom to use vivid, imaginative language? Will their jobs actually turn out to be simpler because there will be definite guidelines to follow in making advertising claims? No one really knows, of course. Regulation could be a help or a hinderance. We must wait and see.

The copywriter, however, will certainly have to be even more patient and resistant to frustration than at present in coping with the changing conditions of his job. The copywriter of the future will still have to serve many masters: his employer, his clients, regulatory agencies, and his own individual conscience. So it will take writers with exceptional resilience, integrity, and common sense to be able to function effectively in this more restrictive atmosphere.

<u>You will be more involved in public relations than today's copywriter</u>.--The continuing emphasis on the social responsibility of business will have its impact on the copywriter of tomorrow (as it already has had on the copywriter of today). More and more clients will want ads and commercials that inform the public of what their companies are doing to serve the interests of society. The copywriter will thereby spend an increasing amount of his time selling client image as well as company products and services.

In addition, more advertising agencies will be involved in public service and political advertising, and the copywriter will play a significant role in this, too. Thus, the copywriter of the future will be a public relations communicator as well as a salesman of client products. This trend toward corporate communication is evident today in the advertising of such companies as Gulf and Mobil.

You will need to be even more sensitive to people than today's copywriter.--In order to arrive at sound selling strategies, the copywriter must analyze the needs and wants of consumers; he must also understand human nature to take advantage of emotional appeals; and he must be able to get along with his colleagues, his superiors, and his clients to function on the job.

This sensitivity to people will be even more important in the competitive environment predicted for tomorrow. For the copywriter must create his messages at a time when the average consumer is overwhelmed with a vast array of choices in goods and services. Thus, the future writer must find better ways of communicating with people. He must use all of his intelligence and creative imagination to make his client's voice heard in the sound and fury of heightened competition. He must penetrate the boredom barrier that surrounds the consumer in a market saturated with advertising.

At the same time, the copywriter of the future must learn to accommodate his thinking to the concerns of consumer

advocates and government agencies. These groups must be granted a genuine interest in protecting the consumer. It may be easy for the future copywriter to feel that everyone is out to frustrate him and stiffle his creativity. But the sensitive writer will resist the impulse toward hostility. He will accept the fact that he represents his client's interests, and that the public deserves representation too.

In short, the copywriter of tomorrow will need to an exceptional degree that indispensable quality of the creative individual--empathy.

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