

# How To Keep Your Reader Interested

There's a thinking in some circles of advertising that goes something like this: "You have to be 'clever' with words. It's a cluttered market out there. You've got to stand out. Use a pun, a euphemism, a play-on-words. Something that makes people think twice."

I want to challenge that way of thinking.

Firstly, how does a euphemism make a message clearer? Isn't a copywriter supposed to communicate clearly?

"But everyone likes a good pun! It makes people laugh and then they feel good about our brand."

Remember the last time you laughed out loud at a pun in an advert? Yep, me neither. Here's a good tip about puns. Don't use them.

Secondly, what about telling the reader a benefit about your product? Something in it that's good for them? It's not such a hard thing to do, is it?

"But that's boring! People are too busy to read that kind of stuff. They need something funny!"

Well, hold on. Aren't we trying to target only the people who will be interested in our product and service anyway? So what if everyone else gets bored? Do you really want to spend a fortune entertaining people who are never going put a single penny your way? No way!

So let's try to communicate only to those people who are likely to be interested in what we do and let's tell them why they should choose us and not our competitor.

Still not convinced? Here's another argument.

Take a look at some examples of branded Direct Marketing material. Anything that has a clear response mechanism to it, a call to action – either a telephone number or a reply-form. Look for the big users of Direct Marketing – credit card companies, banks, insurance brokers and charities.

You'll probably find something similar to these:

“0% interest for 9 months”

“Up to 30% off your car insurance”

“£2 a month can help save a child's sight”

They don't sound particularly original do they? And they're certainly not entertaining. So why do these companies/charities persist in using them?

This is the trick. “0% interest for 9 months” BECOMES interesting to anyone looking for a credit card. “Up to 30% of your car insurance” BECOMES useful for someone wanting to insure their car. “£2 a month can help save a child's sight” BECOMES relevant to someone who's looking to support a charity.

This is basic psychology:

Advertising that we normally ignore or “filter” will pass through to our conscious brain and become interesting once we're interested in the product or service.

A copywriter's job is NOT to entertain everyone (however much they'd like to). It's to communicate clearly to those customers/prospects who are likely to be interested in the product or service.

The so called 'boring' headlines in the above examples really do work. And you know why I know they work. Because it's Direct Marketing. Direct Marketing measures the EXACT response of every single advertising campaign that's rolled out. We know when an advert is a success. And we know when an advert flops. So when the next Direct Marketing campaign rolls out the same mistakes aren't repeated.

Now look at the adverts with a pun. On billboards, magazines, evening TV - the ones with the “humorous” slogan, euphemism or play on words. You'll see that 99.9% of these kind of adverts DON'T have a response device.

Which is why they can get away with writing nonsense.

So in conclusion, when the next 'genius' who puts their creative thinking cap on and comes up with, “Heinz Ketchup isn't just sexy. It's saucy.”

Go tell them to 'put a lid on it'.

Get it?

(And ironically, my point is proven once again.)