

David Ogilvy (born 1911), a British-American business executive, was a leader in the post-World War II "creative revolution" in American advertising.

David Mackenzie Ogilvy was born on June 23, 1911, in West Horsley, England. He attended preparatory school in Edinburgh from 1924 to 1929 and won a scholarship in history to Christ Church College, Oxford. By his own admission an [indifferent](#) student, Ogilvy left Oxford without a degree in 1931 and spent a year as an apprentice chef in a Parisian hotel. He returned to Great Britain and supported himself by selling cooking stoves door-to-door. He was so successful that his employer asked him to prepare an instructional manual for his fellow salesmen. The manual, together with the [intercession](#) of his brother Francis, helped win him a position at the London advertising agency of Mather & Crowther. He remained there until 1939, when he decided to seek new opportunities in the United States, a country that had long intrigued him.

Shortly after his arrival in the United States he was asked by pollster George Gallup to join his Audience Research Institute in Princeton, New Jersey, as associate director. Ogilvy later called this "the luckiest break of [his] life," for few other positions could have so quickly educated him to the ways of the American market. While with Gallup Ogilvy conducted over 400 public opinion surveys, many of them for the major Hollywood studios.

In 1942, with the world at war, Ogilvy was recruited by the British intelligence organization in America headed by William Stephenson. Ogilvy's assignment was to collect economic intelligence from Latin America and to prevent the enemy's access to strategic materials there. From 1944 to 1945 he also served as the second secretary to the British embassy in Washington.

In 1948, after a brief stint as a tobacco farmer in Pennsylvania, Ogilvy joined with New York advertising man Anderson Hewitt to form the advertising agency that would eventually become known as Ogilvy & Mather. Although Ogilvy had no previous experience as an advertising [copywriter](#), he directed most of the agency's creative efforts, particularly after [Hewitt's](#) departure from the firm in 1953. Ogilvy brought to the task a great [flair](#) for language and a visual sense so highly developed that in the early years he usually acted as his own art director.

His talents first came to the attention of a national audience in 1951 when he was approached by Hathaway, a small Maine clothing firm, to promote its line of moderately priced shirts. Ogilvy's copy for the initial ad was effective by itself. But it was the accompanying photograph that propelled the Hathaway campaign into advertising history. At virtually the last moment Ogilvy decided to photograph his male model wearing a Hathaway shirt - and an [eyepatch](#). "The Man in the Hathaway Shirt" appeared for the first time in the *New Yorker* of September 22, 1951. It caused a sensation. The eyepatch somehow lent the shirt an air of quality and sophistication. That image was carefully reinforced in a follow-up campaign portraying the Hathaway man as an eyepatched man-about-town. Eventually Hathaway no longer needed to display its name in its advertisements. The "man with the eyepatch" was identification enough. The company, meanwhile, could barely keep up with the demand for its shirts.

Ogilvy's reputation as a master of product image was further enhanced in 1953 when he took over the account of Schweppes, a British manufacturer of [quinine water](#) then struggling to gain a [foothold](#) in America. Ogilvy designed his print campaign around Commander Edward White-head, the bearded and ever-so-British director of Schweppes' American operations. In the 1950s a beard was as exotic as the Hathaway man's eyepatch. And it soon proved to be as compelling a sales device. Within five years Schweppes was selling over 30 million bottles a year.

The Schweppes and Hathaway campaigns were primarily tributes to Ogilvy's visual gifts. But he was equally [adept](#) at moving consumers through the power of his words. The tag line he composed for the Rolls-Royce automobile company in 1958 ("At sixty miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock") helped double that firm's American sales in a year.

As the 1960s opened Ogilvy's advertising style was being widely copied on Madison Avenue and his agency had grown to become the 12th-largest in the nation, with such clients as the Shell Oil Company and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. But as the number of accounts grew, Ogilvy gradually took a less active role in the creation of the firm's advertising. He continued, however, to [oversee](#) operations as chairman of the board until 1975.

Ogilvy served as chairman of the [WPP Group](#) in London from 1988-1992. He stepped into the role of consultant in 1992. He was also honored as an officier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1990.

Through best-selling books and widely publicized speeches David Ogilvy emerged as one of advertising's most [eloquent](#) spokesmen. Yet he never hesitated to point out the faults of his profession. One of the most creative advertising men of his time, he was [scathing](#) in his criticism of those executives so "creative" that "they forget their main mission - to sell the product." Certainly no one ever "sold the product" better than David Ogilvy.

Further Reading

Ogilvy described his professional career in *Confessions of an Advertising Man* (1963). *Blood, Brains and Beer: The Autobiography of David Ogilvy* (1978) provided the personal details. In *Ogilvy on Advertising* (1983) the master surveyed the contemporary scene. *The Unpublished David Ogilvy* was released in 1988. Ogilvy's achievements were placed in historical perspective in Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (1984). His most famous advertisements are [reproduced](#) and analyzed in Robert Glatzer, *The New Advertising: The Great Campaigns from Avis to Volkswagen* (1970).

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