

Weaving Messages: Real Advertising Works



"The consumer isn't a moron; she is your wife."

David Ogilvy

In 1951, David Ogilvy, a principal in the firm that was then called Ogilvy, Benson, and Mather, met Ellerton Jette, president of C.F. Hathaway. Hathaway agreed to pay \$3,000 for an advertising campaign provided Jette would not change a single word of copy. The "Man in the Hathaway Shirt" campaign became one of the top 100 advertising campaigns of all time. It was so successful, in fact, that Ogilvy claimed that he didn't even know why. Yet, this single campaign, which used real men and told their stories, put Hathaway on the

map after 116 years of relative obscurity.

Advertising has not failed, but some agencies are failing.

Since the golden era of advertising, agencies sometimes seem to have placed the consumer connections behind creative tool kits with attention-grabbing [design](#) followed up with meaningless [messages](#). What happened? Maybe it's the competitive nature of the field, but agency designers and some copywriters tend to play to one of three audiences: if not their own ego, then to their current and future employers or (worse) any number of advertising panels made up of their peers. While not all competitions are equal, I have had the displeasure of seeing ad competition "judges" rave over creativity that would be easily dismissed by the audience.

"When copywriters argue with me about some esoteric word they want to use," Ogilvy explained. "I say to them 'Get on a bus. Go to Iowa. Stay on a farm for a week and talk to the farmer.

Come back to New York by train and talk to your fellow passengers in the day-coach. If you still want to use the word, go ahead." If Ogilvy were alive today, he would have shuffled anyone with [Photoshop](#) along for the ride. And, he might have sent some clients along too, reminding them that it's more important for consumers to connect with the advertisement than for the owners to "like it."

Where social media sometimes helps companies and writers reconnect with consumers.

Throughout the 1990s with the advent of Photoshop, advertising agencies began to convince themselves that consumers were only interested in pretty pictures. Consumers didn't read copy, they claimed, not even one sentence beyond a witty headline. Social media, blogs in particular, has been helping to reshape opinion. Consumers do read copy, but they only read good copy. Or, more specifically, they read real copy. Sometimes they read conversational copy. Sometimes, via Twitter, they read dialogue (with distress tweets and spam being shrugged away as fast as they are created). Sure, some people like Mark Cameron still like to [write leads](#) that begin "Not so long ago, the relationship that brands had with their customers was a one-way street" or Andy Sernovitz who says "It's not genuine" or the classic Eric Clemons [claim](#) that the "Internet is not replacing advertising but shattering it."

But the reality is that the advertising they don't appreciate was never meant to be appreciated as much as the model that preceded it. Writers like Ogilvy wove in audience appreciation, cultural understanding, and conversation into most of their advertisements. The results were a connection that many advertisements, even clever ones, seldom seem to reach. I purposely left the copy off the man in the Hathaway shirt. On its own, despite looking like so many fashion ads today, it's a meaningless display ad. Paired with the right message, considering the era and audience, the conversation starter adds value. Here is the opening paragraph from one of the campaign's classic ads ...

American men are beginning to realize that it is ridiculous to buy good suits and then spoil the effect by wearing an ordinary, mass-produced shirt. Hence the growing popularity of HATHAWAY shirts, which are in a class by themselves

Sources : <http://copywriteink.blogspot.com/2009/08/>