



Lynda Russell-Whitaker

What did the Direct Response Copywriters ever do for us?

Lynda reviews Glenn Fisher’s key themes: Know your audience, features vs. benefits and the importance of narrative.

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd.

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What did the Direct Response Copywriters ever do for us?

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker
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Des explores some ways in which our communication can either establish or diminish trust.

Direct response copywriting (i.e. writing directly to consumers) is a somewhat niche topic. If you haven’t already done so, it’s worth investing time, energy and cash into developing your firm’s skills in this area. Let’s face it, most of us are ‘in the business’ of selling something to someone at any given time of the day: products, services, ideas et al. At the very least, there are a number of sound and effective techniques in direct response copywriting that are likely to be very useful in other areas of your business communication. Email marketing is probably the most obvious direct parallel, but the principles employed by seasoned copywriters in this industry are more widely applicable.



It is important to know your audience

one of the highest priorities before attempting to bash out your slide deck, preparing your speech for the upcoming business conference you’re attending (probably virtually), or writing the report for the next meeting of the Board of Directors?

Without having a pretty good idea of who we are addressing, and what is likely to motivate them to read your document, or listen to your talk, how can we accurately inform, educate and persuade them to take that action? That’s where researching our market audience is so crucial. Not just the broad brushstrokes, but the finer details. Asking the pertinent questions. And listening to their answers. Observing their behaviours too. The best writers are great observers.

If you work in sales, and/or you’re a GPB client, and/or you’ve been a reader of SpeakUp! for any length of time, you’ll be well aware of Features versus Benefits (including Ewan’s article in SpeakUp! #69 ‘Incomplete Benefits’²). Chapter Six of ‘The Art of the Click’ is devoted to this topic. Early on in this chapter, Glenn Fisher writes:

“The best writers are observers”

“It’s a copywriting concept that goes back decades. You’ll find it discussed in books by David Ogilvy³, by Eugene Schwartz⁴, as far back as Claude Hopkins⁵ too. You go to any copywriting event today and you should see it on the agenda. If you don’t, ask for your money back. Seriously.”

Wouldn’t you say that knowing your audience as much as possible has to be

- Knowing your audience
- Features versus benefits
- The importance of narrative

What did Direct Response Copywriters ever do for us? (cont...)

He continues...

"In fact, if you only ever learn one thing about copywriting... learn the importance of using benefits over features."

This is more than distinguishing between a feature and a benefit. Fisher writes about *turning* features into benefits. The benefits that really persuade us that we want something are not merely practical; what truly drives us to make a purchase is often far less tangible. It's about how something makes us feel at a deeper level; the 'Pathos' element of Aristotle's Three Appeals⁶. This is what Fisher seems to be tapping into when he talks about taking benefits to another level by **charging** them with an 'emotional narrative'.

Having just collected a new Apple MacBook Pro this morning, I can testify to that intangible emotional benefit. Those of us who are loyal to the brand (sometimes grudgingly, admittedly) are not simply ticking the boxes of the sleek interfaces feature, and benefits of faster processing and easy action keyboards. There are some excellent PC laptops out there that do just as good a job on that front. We 'Apple Fanboys' are subscribing to something more ephemeral, and perhaps a little more exclusive. And that's really what we're paying the higher price for, isn't it?

The more we know our audience, the more in touch we will be with the benefits that appeal to them, and any potential objections they might raise.

Veteran direct marketer, Drayton Bird, does this brilliantly. His marketing emails are some of the most entertaining and persuasive I've ever read. He has worked in the industry for decades and sold a few hundred thousand copies of books on the subject.

In his book '*51 Helpful Marketing Ideas*', Bird encourages us to appeal to people's hearts, assuring us that their minds will follow:

"Underneath every corporate suit beats an all-too-human heart, full of human emotions. Make your appeal to that, and let logic take second place."

It's a compelling argument from someone behind many a successful marketing campaign over the years. In his book, '*Sales Letters that Sell*', he advises us to:

"Methodically write down all the sensible reasons why anyone should do what you want them to do; and all the excuses they might give you as to why they shouldn't. Every one of these should be covered in the copy (and the pictures, for that matter)."

"Once you have covered all the relevant benefits, and overcome all the likely objections, you will have more or less the right content to get the sale."

Conveying this kind of empathy in your writing is very potent. And great stories are very persuasive, whoever is doing the telling, whether it's a Monty Python sketch or Direct Response Copywriters...

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker



Aristotle came up with '*The Three Appeals*', and a few others⁶...

References

1. Glenn Fisher. 2020. *Glenn Fisher*. [online] Available at: <https://theglennfisher.com>
2. The 69th GPB Journal (Summer 2019) also contains articles on narrative, audience motivation and balanced communication.
3. David Ogilvy, *Confessions of an Advertising Man*
4. Eugene Schwartz, *Great Breakthrough Advertising*
5. Claude Hopkins, *Scientific Advertising*
6. Hasnae Kerach of GPB wrote about some of Aristotle's other appeals in the 70th GPB Journal, published in Autumn 2019.
7. Bird, Drayton, 2020. [online] [Draytonbird.com](http://draytonbird.com). Available at: <https://draytonbird.com>

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