



Ogilvy

Dear Mr. Calt:

On March 22nd you wrote to me asking for some notes on my work habits as a copywriter. They are appalling, as you are about to see:

1. I have never written an advertisement in the office. Too many interruptions. I do all my writing at home.
2. I spend a long time studying the precedents. I look at every advertisement which has appeared for competing products during the past 20 years.
3. I am helpless without research material—and the more “motivational” the better.
4. I write out a definition of the problem and a statement of the purpose which I wish the campaign to achieve. Then I go no further until the statement and its principles have been accepted by the client.
5. Before actually writing the copy, I write down every conceivable fact and selling idea. Then I get them organized and relate them to research and the copy platform.
6. Then I write the headline. As a matter of fact I try to write 20 alternative headlines for every advertisement. And I never select the final headline without asking the opinion of other people in the agency. In some cases I seek the help of the research department and get them to do a split-run on a battery of headlines.
7. At this point I can no longer postpone the actual copy. So I go home and sit down at my desk. I find myself entirely without ideas. I get bad-tempered. If my wife comes into the room I growl at her. (This has gotten worse since I gave up smoking.)
8. I am terrified of producing a lousy advertisement. This causes me to throw away the first 20 attempts.
9. If all else fails, I drink half a bottle of rum and play a Handel oratorio on the gramophone. This generally produces an uncontrollable gush of copy.
10. The next morning I get up early and edit the gush.
11. Then I take the train to New York and my secretary types a draft. (I cannot type, which is very inconvenient.)
12. I am a lousy copywriter, but I am a good editor. So I go to work editing my own draft. After four or five editings, it looks good enough to show to the client. If the client changes the copy, I get angry—because I took a lot of trouble writing it, and what I wrote I wrote on purpose.

Altogether it is a slow and laborious business. I understand that some copywriters have much greater facility.

Yours sincerely,

David Ogilvy, April 19, 1955