

The Golden Rules of Persuasive Copy Writing

These rules have been distilled by MORRIS HARGREAVES McINTYRE from over 40 focus groups on arts print and successfully tested in brochures, leaflets, direct mail letters and web pages for large and small organisations in both the visual and performing arts.

DON'Ts

- 1 Don't assume prior knowledge.** You say, 'following last year's triumph with La Republica...'. They read, 'if you didn't come last time, it's not for you'.
- 2 Don't use jargon.** You say, 'Mozart Piano Concerto No. 25 in C, K503'. They think, 'which one's that - what does it sound like?'.
- 3 Don't sell - just tell.** Too many adjectives and superlatives make you sound like a desperate double glazing salesman or that advert off the telly (sale must end Bank Holiday Monday).
- 4 Don't use too many exclamation marks.** They don't disguise your embarrassment.
- 5 Don't quote only fantastic snippets of reviews.** The longer and the less... dots between, and the more measured they are, the more credible impact they have.
- 6 Don't just give a plot synopsis.** Describe what it will actually be like
- 7 Don't use every typeface and point size you own.** It doesn't grab their attention; it just gives them a headache.
- 8 Don't just list the features.** It may be 'the oldest working theatre in Britain', but it's the unique, historic atmosphere that's the benefit.
- 9 Don't use PSs.** I know they're textbook, but they're hackneyed and false.
- 10 Don't shout.** Interrupting the flow of your letter with a screaming press review is like suddenly yelling at someone in the middle of a conversation.

So what works?

DOs

- 1 Be personal.** But instead of pretending it's a personal to them, make it a personal letter from you. People buy from people.
- 2 Be conversational.** We need to talk to people, not at them. That means informal, short sentences.
- 3 Quote the fanatic.** Every show has a director, curator, writer, actor, or artist that really believes in it. What inspires them will inspire the audience.
- 4 Be evocative.** Tell them how it will make them feel. Use script quotes or anything that gives insight and a real feeling for the work. It's art, so be creative.
- 5 Endorse it.** Most bookers are risk-averse, so emphasise familiar names, reputations and reviews. They love audience quotes - 'people like me' like it.
- 6 Dumb up.** Assume they're just as intelligent as you are, they just lack knowledge.
- 7 Reveal a little magic.** Give them a peek behind the scenes: the set, costumes, rehearsals and how artists work.
- 8 Use popular culture references.** When obscure jazz was described as 'making you think of tango and Fred Astaire dancing in films' they got it straight away.
- 9 Sell the whole night out.** That's what people want to buy.
- 10 Tell them where the No7 bus stops.** And every other detail imaginable.