

Blast Past Copywriting's Biggest Challenge

By Guillermo Rubio

In *Early to Rise* issue #2261, Charlie Byrne wrote:

"In films and books, it's sometimes known as a "deus ex machina" ... You may think of it simply as a plot twist ... But in copywriting, it's defying what Michael Masterson has termed the 'Categorical Imperative.' When readers start knowing where the copy is going ... they tend to dismiss it – tune it out ...

You see, the mind tends to simplify its work by slipping incoming ideas into pre-existing slots ("categories") it has already created. It does this so it can shift its attention to something else (anything else). ... In order to circumvent this tendency of the mind, strong writing – and, in particular, good sales promotions – must avoid a straight-line, logical approach. Instead, use 'indirection.'"

By using indirection, you prevent your prospect from "figuring out" what your letter is about.

Master copywriter Paul Hollingshead puts it this way: "Indirection is how a copywriter says something ordinary in a fresh, different, exciting way. It creates intrigue around a simple idea. Doing this is your biggest challenge as a copywriter. Once you master it, nothing will stop you from success."

For example, suppose a headline reads "Here's how you can save 15% off our amazing newsletter full of healthy living advice and pay only \$99.95 for 12 months of issues!"

As a prospect, you know exactly what this letter is about. And since you probably don't *need* a newsletter, it would most likely go straight into the wastebasket.

Properly used, indirection intrigues your prospect enough that he is compelled to keep reading (even if only to satisfy his curiosity). As a result, his attention is held long enough for you to present your product's benefits and tie them in to his core emotional complex.

A testament to the effectiveness of indirection is Bill Bonner's 20+ year control for *International Living*. (Charlie Byrne used this example in ETR #2261.) The headline starts off:

"You look out your window, past your gardener, who is busily pruning the lemon, cherry, and fig trees ... amidst the splendor of gardenias, hibiscus, and hollycocks."

At first glance, you have no idea what the letter is about. But it paints such a compelling picture that the prospect has to read more to satisfy his curiosity.

Another great example of indirection is Porter Stansberry's "railroad" letter. The headline reads:

*"There's a New
Railroad Across America.*

*And it's making some
people very rich ...*

*In fact, one ex-bond trader with a mixed track record
made \$1.8 million per day for 540 straight days!"*

This headline turns what could have been an "ordinary" financial newsletter promo that the prospect has already seen and categorized in his mind (e.g., "Make 670% Gains This Year With The New Uber Cash Newsletter ... America's #1 Financial Newsletter") into something the prospect hasn't seen before. It grabs attention and builds curiosity. It raises questions in the prospect's mind. Questions like:

- What is this new railroad?
- How is it making people rich?
- And, if an ex-bond trader with a *mixed* track record can make \$1.8 million per day, how much could I make?

Based on the headline alone, it would be difficult to "categorize" this as just another financial newsletter promo trying to sell you. And because of that, it grabs your attention long enough to tell you about the benefits of subscribing to its service.

Of course, indirection isn't limited to headlines and leads. You should use indirection, when appropriate, throughout your letter to keep the reader engaged.

Here's an example from the Ken Roberts Company that does just that:

"Most people never learn how or where to begin looking to achieve their own success (whatever that means to them). That's why I wrote A Rich Man's Secret and signed on with a major publisher to distribute it in bookstores nationwide. It's a very special novel (my first) that simply and straightforwardly reveals and describes the secret I discovered and instructs how to apply it to your life and circumstances. It works for anyone, anytime, anyplace."

Initially, it seems like this paragraph is setting up the prospect for a sales pitch about the book.

But instead, the copywriter employs indirection by saying, "I hope you'll get a copy at your favorite bookstore." This catches the prospect off guard, and makes him want to read more to find out what the letter is about (since it's not about the book).

The false close is another type of indirection. When the prospect senses you're about to get to the close, you unexpectedly go in another direction.

Here's an example from Mike Palmer's longstanding control for Stansberry Research:

"True Wealth, I promise you, is unlike any other investment advisory you've ever seen before. I guarantee Dr. Sjuggerud will fill you in on unique investment opportunities you'll never hear about anywhere else."

At this point, a less experienced copywriter would go into the close, telling the prospect how much it costs and what they get. To a prospect, this would be very predictable.

Instead, Mike uses indirection to keep the reader's attention ...

"For example, look at another super low-risk investment idea Dr. Sjuggerud is excited about right now ..."

The copy then goes on to tell the prospect about another investment that can help him put more money into his pocket.

Next time you sit down to write a sales letter, consider using indirection. There are various ways to employ it, and, as Paul Hollingshead says, once you've mastered it, nothing will stop you from success.

You can learn how to use indirection in more detail with [AWAI's Master's Program](#).

And however you choose to use it, it will exponentially increase your chances of turning what might've been a flop into a blockbuster hit.

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