

The Magic of False Logic

By Robert W. Bly

False logic, a term coined by my friend, Master Copywriter Mark Ford (aka Michael Masterson), is copy that manipulates (but does not lie about or misrepresent), through skillful writing, existing facts. The objective: to help readers come to conclusions that those facts, presented without the twists of the copywriter's pen, might not otherwise support.

A catalog for Harry & David says of its pears, "Not one person in 1,000 has ever tasted them." The statistic, as presented by the catalog writer, makes the product sound rare and exclusive — and that's how the average reader interprets it, just as the copywriter intended.

But a logician analyzing that statement might say it simply indicates that the pears are not very popular — almost no one buys them.

It's possible to argue that some false logic borders on deception, but the marketer has to make that call for himself.

A metals broker advertised "95% of orders shipped from stock" to indicate ready availability. But he ran his business out of an office and had no warehouse. How could he claim he shipped from stock?

"We do ship 95% of orders from stock," the marketer explains. "But not from *our* stock — from the *metal supplier's stock*. We are just a broker. But we do not advertise that, since being a broker is perceived as a negative."

A promotion selling a stock market newsletter to consumers compares the \$99 subscription price with the \$2,000 the editor would charge if he were managing your money for you, based on a 2% fee and a minimum investment of \$100,000.

The reader thinks he is getting Mr. Editor to give him \$2,000 worth of money management services for \$99, and quickly glosses over the fact that the newsletter is not precisely the same as a managed account.

A similar example is the promotion done by my friend Don Hauptman for *American Speaker*, a loose-leaf service for executives on how to give good speeches. In his promotion, he points out that this product can help you with your speeches all year long (it has periodic supplements) vs. the \$5,000 it costs to have a professional speechwriter write just one speech. But of course, *American Speaker* is not actually writing your speech for you.

There is an ongoing debate of whether people buy for emotional or logical reasons, but most successful marketers know that the former is more dominant as a buying motive than the latter. It is commonly said, "People buy based on emotion, then rationalize the purchase decision with logic."

Because they have made the buying decision based on strong feelings and ingrained beliefs, they are in essence looking for justification and support for what they already want to do.

Therefore, as long as the logical argument seems credible and sensible, they will accept it. They do not probe into it as scientifically or deeply as would, say, Ralph Nader or an investigative reporter for *Consumer Reports*.

Some critics view direct marketing as a step below general marketing in respectability, ethics, and honesty. And perhaps they might reason that my advocating the use of false logic adds fuel to their argument.

But in fact, false logic is not just the purview of direct marketers; general marketers use it routinely, some with great success.

For years, McDonald's advertised "billions sold" to promote their hamburger — leading customers to the false conclusion that just because something is popular, it is necessarily good. Publishers use similar logic when they trumpet a book as "a *New York Times* best-seller."

Is all this unethical? You can draw your own conclusion, but in my opinion, no.

A copywriter, like a lawyer, is an advocate for the client (or his employer). Just as the lawyer uses all the arguments at his disposal to win the case, so does the copywriter use all the facts at his disposal to win the consumer over to the product.

Certainly, we should market no products that are illegal, dangerous, or immoral, though one man's *Victoria's Secret* catalog is another man's soft porn. But to not use all the tools at our disposal (including false logic) to persuade the buyer is either incompetence, failure to discharge fiduciary duties, or both.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Robert W. Bly is a freelance copywriter and the author of more than 80 books including *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Direct Marketing* (Alpha Publishing). When he speaks this year at AWAI's *FastTrack to Copywriting Success* Bootcamp and Job Fair, he'll speak on specific ways to boost response with your copywriting.

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