

The Unpublished David Ogilvy

David Ogilvy

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Aged 27.

Early Years

In 1936, as a 25-year-old assistant account executive, David somehow was given the entire staff of his agency as an audience for his views on advertising. He came across his pronunciamento years later, when he was Chairman of Ogilvy & Mather, and sent the following excerpt to his Board, commenting that “it proves two things: A) At 25 I was brilliantly clever; and B) I have learned nothing new in the subsequent 27 years.”

Every advertisement must tell the whole sales story, because the public does not read advertisements in series.

The copy must be human and very simple, keyed right down to its market – a market in which self-conscious artwork and fine language serve only to make buyers wary.

Every word in the copy must count. Concrete figures must be substituted for atmospheric claims; clichés must give way to facts, and empty exhortations to alluring offers.

Facetiousness in advertising is a device dear to the amateur but anathema to the advertising agent, who knows that permanent success has rarely been built on frivolity and that people do not buy from clowns.

Superlatives belong to the marketplace and have no place in a serious advertisement; they lead readers to discount the realism of every claim.

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Apparent monotony of treatment must be tolerated, because only the manufacturer reads all his own advertisements.

• • •

From “The Theory & Practice of Selling the Aga Cooker,” a guide for his fellow door-to-door salesmen written in 1935 when David was twenty-four years old.

In an article about him in 1971, Fortune called it “probably the best sales manual ever written.”

Much of what it espoused for selling stoves door-to-door can be put to good use a half-century later for selling any kind of goods in any medium.

FOREWORD

In Great Britain, there are twelve million households. One million of these own motorcars. Only ten thousand own Aga Cookers. No household which can afford a motorcar can afford to be without an Aga ...

There are certain universal rules. Dress quietly and shave well. Do not wear a bowler hat. Go to the back door (most salesmen go to the front door, a manoeuvre always resented by maid and mistress alike) ... Tell the person who opens the door frankly and briefly what you have come for; it will get her on your side. Never on any account get in on false pretences.

Study the best time of day for calling; between twelve and two p.m. you will not be welcome, whereas a call at an unorthodox time of day – after supper in the summer for instance – will often succeed ... In

Early Years

general, study the methods of your competitors and do the exact opposite.

Find out all you can about your prospects before you call on them; their general living conditions, wealth, profession, hobbies, friends and so on. Every hour spent in this kind of research will help you and impress your prospect ...

The worst fault a salesman can commit is to be a bore ... Pretend to be vastly interested in any subject the prospect shows an interest in. The more she talks the better, and if you can make her laugh you are several points up ...

Perhaps the most important thing of all is to avoid standardisation in your sales talk. If you find yourself one fine day saying the same things to a bishop and a trapezist, you are done for.

When the prospect tries to bring the interview to a close, go gracefully. It can only hurt you to be kicked out ...

The more prospects you talk to, the more sales you expose yourself to, the more orders you will get. But never mistake quantity of calls for quality of salesmanship.

Quality of salesmanship involves energy, time and knowledge of the product ... We may analyse it under two main headings, ATTACK AND DEFENCE ...

ATTACK

1. **GENERAL STATEMENT.** Most people have heard

something about the Aga Cooker. They vaguely believe it to involve some new method of cooking. They may have heard that it works on the principle of "heat storage." Heat storage is the oldest known form of cooking. Aborigines bake their hedgehogs in the ashes of a dying fire ...

Having got some preliminary remarks ... off your chest, find out as quickly as possible which of the particular sales arguments that follow is most likely to appeal to your audience, and give that argument appropriate emphasis. Stockbrokers will appreciate No. 2. Doctors will understand No. 9. Cooks will be won over with No. 5. Only on rare occasions will you have the opportunity of getting through all twelve arguments.

2. **ECONOMY.** The Aga is the only cooker in the world with a guaranteed maximum fuel consumption. It is guaranteed to burn less than £4 worth of fuel a year ...

Stress the fact that no cook can make her Aga burn more fuel than this, however stupid, extravagant or careless she may be, or however much she may cook. If more fuel is consumed, it is being stolen, and the police should be called in immediately ...

3. **ALWAYS READY.** You cannot surprise an Aga. It is always on its toes, ready for immediate use at any time of the day or night. It is difficult for a cook or housewife who has not known an Aga to realise exactly what this will mean to her. Tell her she can come down in the middle of the night and roast a goose, or even refill her hot water bottle ... Hot breakfast may be given to the wretched visitor who has to start back to London at zero hour on Monday morning.

Early Years



On the boat emigrating to America, 1938.

4. **CLEANLINESS**, with which may be coupled beauty, is a virtue sometimes better appreciated by the prospect than by the salesman. The woman who does the work in a house spends more time on cleaning than on anything else ...

The Aga is innately clean ... Ladies can cook a dinner on the Aga in evening dress. Doctors will agree that it is so clean that it would not look out of place in the sterilising room of an operating theatre ...

An occasional flowery phase is called for to allow your enthusiasm full scope in describing the beauty and cleanliness of the Aga. Think some up and produce them *extempore*.

5. **COOKERY.** It is hopeless to try and sell a single Aga unless you know something about cookery and appear to know more than you actually do. It is not simply a question of knowing which part of the Aga bakes and which simmers. You must be able to talk to cooks and housewives on their own ground ...

Aga grilling should be featured, particularly to men, who are almost always interested in this if in no other method of cooking; it is the only culinary operation they ever see and understand ...

The Roasting Oven. Learn to recognise vegetarians on sight. It is painful indeed to gush over roasting and grilling to a drooping face which has not enjoyed the pleasures of a beefsteak for several years.

Before you open the top oven door, either actually or by description, forestall the inevitable observation that it “looks very small.” It is an optical illusion ... Demonstrate with exaggerated groping how far back the oven goes ...

Baking interests most women more than roasting. Without beating about the bush, tell the prospect that pastry baking, bread baking and cake baking are star turns ... Most women are subject to baking fits, and the ability to give this idiosyncrasy full rein may be enlarged upon at length ...

Casseroles and stews – luxuries where the gas or

MODESTY

David gave a talk to the Bombay Advertising Club in 1982. Afterward he was asked: “Mr. Ogilvy, Indian advertising draws its inspiration from Madison Avenue. What about Madison Avenue? What is its source?”

The reply: “Modesty forbids.”

electricity bill has to be remembered – become the master passion of the Aga cook. Stock, ham, and porridge cook all night long and lose their terrors for the dyspeptic. Cure the world of stomachache and heartburn – what a mission!

6. **APPEAL TO COOKS.** If there is a cook in the house, she is bound to have the casting vote over a new cooker. Butter her up. Never go above her head. Before the sale and afterwards as a user a cook can be your bitterest enemy or your best friend; she can poison a whole district or act as your secret representative. The Aga will mean for her an extra hour in bed, and a kitchen as clean as a drawing-room ...

7. **APPEAL TO MEN.** When selling to men who employ a staff or whose wives do their cooking, make a discreet appeal to their humane instincts. The Aga takes the slavery out of kitchen work. It does not cook the cook.

And compare the prices! If you can work on this appeal to a man’s better nature and combine it with an appeal to his pocket and his belly, you cannot fail to secure an order ...

8. **APPEAL TO SPECIAL CLASSES.** Children can be given the run of the Aga kitchen for making toffee and so on. There is no danger of burning, electric shocks, gassing or explosion.

Doctors will admire your perspicacity if you tell them that ... if a case keeps them long after the normal hour for dinner they will get an unspoilt meal on their return to an Aga house ...

There is no end to the special appeal Aga has for every conceivable class and profession. Think it out.

9. **SUMMARY OF MISCELLANEOUS ECONOMIES.** The Aga means fuel saving, staff reduction, reduced expenditure on cleaning materials, reduction of meat shrinkage and food wastage, abolition of chimney-sweeps; painting and redecorating is unheard of; electric irons and their antics are unnecessary; raids on registry offices for new servants become a thing of the past; the house can be let or sold at any time on its kitchen; bilious attacks and doctor's bills are halved; restaurants are seldom visited, and, as the French say: "The Aga owner eats best at home."

10. **WISE-CRACKING.** The longer you talk to a prospect, the better, and you will not do this if you are a bore. Pepper your talk with anecdote and jokes. Accumulate a repertoire of illustration. Above all, laugh till you cry every time the prospect makes the joke about the Aga Khan. A deadly serious demonstration is bound to fail. If you can't make a lady laugh, you certainly cannot make her buy.

DEFENCE

1. **GENERAL ADVICE.** You must always be faced soon or later with questions and objections, which may indeed be taken as a sign that the prospect's brain is in working order, and that she is conscientiously considering the Aga as a practical proposition for herself.

Some salesmen expound their subject academically, so that at the end the prospect feels no more inclination to buy the Aga than she would to buy the planet Jupiter after a broadcast from the Astronomer Royal. A talkative prospect is a good thing. The dumb prospect is too often equally deaf ...

2. **DETAILED OBJECTIONS.**

“It is too big for my kitchen.”

Boloney always. It only looks big because it does not, like gas stoves, stand on legs. Make the objection a pretext for going into the kitchen to measure, and continue the conversation there ...

Continue: There is no danger of getting burned with an Aga, so that it is possible to go right up to it. You have to give a range a very wide berth ...

“Can the Aga give off unpleasant fumes?”

The flue construction makes this quite impossible; a striking manifestation of the inventor's genius. [You will sometimes come across people with unfortunate gassing experiences of closed stoves. Try and avoid the subject as it introduces the wrong atmosphere.]

“Can the Aga make toast?”

Extremely well ... To the prospect who has positive information that her neighbour's Aga makes toast like white tiles, admit that the old Aga was rather weak in this regard; the present cooker is so fast that it toasts diabolically well.

“Does the smell of food cooking on the Aga penetrate all over the house?”

Nothing so impolite. The ovens ventilate direct into the flue so that all cooking smells are dispersed up the chimney. How different from ordinary ovens, which irresponsibly discharge their perfume into the kitchen.

“My cooker *must* heat the bath water as well.”

Explain that, as somebody with experience of heating engineering, you would strongly advise one heat unit for cooking and another separate unit for hot water; to combine the two units results inevitably in outrageous fuel consumption, and that kind of Victorian inefficiency means hot bath and cold oven, or hot oven and cold bath.

Continue: The Aga is called a “Cooker.” And, by heaven, that is what it is! Off you go again on the cooking advantages.

“I have heard of somebody who is dissatisfied.”

Probably at second hand. These malicious reports are spread by jealous people who have not got an Aga. Express grave concern and try to find out the name and address so that you can rush away then and there to put matters right. In this way you will give the prospect a foretaste of willing service.