

The E-Bootcamp in Hypnotic Marketing by Joe Vitale and Jo Han Mok
Copyright © 2003 by Joe Vitale and Jo Han Mok. All rights reserved.
Reproduction or distribution in any way, shape or form is strictly forbidden.

Lesson #6: The 50 Long-Lost Advertising Secrets of the Greatest Ad-Man and Copywriter in History!

I am a disciple of John Caples.

I've collected and read all of his books, studied his ads, traveled to Washington, D.C. to find and study his files and diaries, and even called him up on the phone once about twelve years ago.

But before I tell you what took place when I called John Caples, let me first explain just who he was so you can better appreciate this long-lost genius of advertising history...and why I was so disappointed when I made my call to him.

For more than 50 years, John Caples served as one of advertising's most effective and famous copywriters. Caples mastered results-oriented, mail-order copy at the early ad agency Ruthrauff & Ryan, where he wrote, arguably, the 20th century's most successful ad: "They laughed when I sat down at the piano -- but when I started to play!" That U.S. School of Music ad dramatically exemplified Caples' belief that people yearn to be carefree and popular.

As a teacher, lecturer and writer, Caples stressed simplicity and "getting to the point quickly." He joined what became Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BBDO) in 1927, where he served almost to the end of his days. His boss for much of that time was Bruce Barton, the subject of my book *The Seven Lost Secrets of Success*.

John Caples also wrote several books including *Tested Advertising Methods* (1932), *Advertising Ideas* (1938) and *Making Ads Pay* (1957). The first and last titles are still in print, and considered classics.

All of his writings followed the same themes and principles he held during his career: Caples believed in testing ads, consistency in copywriting practice and simplicity in advertisements. He was known (like Claude Hopkins before him) to dislike humor in ads because, as Caples said, "only half of the people in this country have a sense of humor, and clever ads seldom sell anything."

Caples was elected into the Copywriters Hall of Fame in 1973. He was elected into the Advertising Hall of Fame in 1977. The famous Caples Award, given for the year's best ads, was named after him. He died in 1990, at the age of 90, after spending 58 years in the advertising business. The man remains a legend.

I could go on and on about John Caples. In fact, there is a long review of one of his books at my website. See it if you want to know more about Caples, one of his books, and my respect for him. It's at <http://www.mrfire.com/0011.html>

Several years ago I researched Caples and some of his un-published writings. One of his checklists is worth gold to me. It's from 1972 but is just as valid today. I still use it to check my ads and sales letters before I run them.

Here it is –

How to Write Advertising That Gets Direct Response

John Caples, VP-Creative Director of
BBDO's Direct Response Division

1. Use a headline that attracts the right audience. Promise a benefit.
(Example: Car owners -- save one gallon of gas in ten)
2. Show a picture of the product or the product in use.
3. Hold the reader's attention by using -
 - (a) sub-headings and lists of important points
 - (b) sub-illustrations, diagrams, etc.
4. Create desire for the product or service by writing copy that tells as many benefits as possible.
5. Make the ad believable by including items such as the following:
 - (a) Tell how long the company has been in business -
(Examples: Founded 1890 ... Our 52nd Year)
 - (b) Include testimonials from satisfied customers.
 - (c) State approval by experts - (Examples: Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval ... Won Gold Medal Award)
 - (d) Give proof of popularity - (Examples: Over 12,000 sold ... 700 letters from delighted customers)
 - (e) Offer a money-back guarantee
6. Prove it's a bargain.
 - (a) Price reduced (Was \$40 ... Now only \$19.75)
 - (b) Dramatize the low price (Only 15¢ a day ... Only 10% above wholesale price)
 - (c) Give reason for low price (Warehouse sale ... Direct from factory to you ... Modern equipment lowers production costs)
 - (d) Build up value of proposition - (Examples: \$5 spent may save you \$500 ... One gallon of this floor wax covers average kitchen floor about 30 times)
7. Make it easy to act.
 - (a) Use coupon or business reply card.
 - (b) Tell how to order by phone.
 - (c) Offer 10 days free trial.
 - (d) Offer easy payment plan.
 - (e) Offer a booklet.
 - (f) Offer a sample.
 - (g) Offer free cost estimate.
8. Give reason to act now.
 - (a) If price is going up, say so.
 - (b) If supply is limited, say so.
 - (c) If there is a time limit, say so.
 - (d) Make a special offer - (Example: Dancing lesson free)
 - (e) Offer a reward for promptness - (Example: Free gift if you order immediately)
 - (f) Use action words - (Examples: Don't put it off ... Act now ... Delay may be serious ... Order today)

I strongly suggest that you study that checklist and use it to analyze any ad or sales letter you write.

In fact, let's have a little fun with it (at my expense) right now.

I wrote my first ad over thirty years ago. I had no idea what I was doing. I loved the martial art called Aikido and wanted people to join the Aikido Club I had formed at Kent State University. So I wrote a flyer to help promote Aikido to students.

Well, in 1973 few knew what Aikido was.

I had my work cut out for me.

But I was passionate about Aikido. So I sat down, wrote an ad and posted it all around the campus. I don't remember the results. We certainly got enough students to keep the Aikido Club going, but I doubt that my ad broke any records.

Recently I found that old ad of mine. I'm embarrassed to show it to you, but figure it may be inspiring (if I can start at such a low point and succeed, think what you can do) as well as instructive.

Here's the ad. Take a look...

AIKIDO



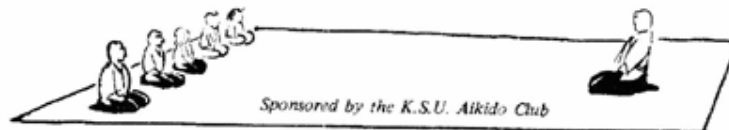
In the 1960's a small, thin, 85 year old man performed a demonstration of his home-made self-defense, called Aikido, for five U.S. Military Policemen. The burly men were told to attack. The men, all who knew either Judo or Karate, could not touch the old man. Not until the man permitted them to; and then the old man floored them all simultaneously.

Aikido is the youngest of all the martial arts. Its founder, Morihei Uyeshiba, was a master of many arts. He won many matches with the sword and spear. Yet he felt that winning at someone else's expense was not really winning; today's winners are destined to be tomorrow's losers.

As a result of Uyeshiba's long, involved search for a defense which would not permanently injure an attacker, Aikido was born. It is a way to divert harm from one's own person. In Aikido an attack is never stopped; it is met and guided in a way that causes the attacker to be thrown by the directional force of his own motion. The attacker injures himself. The harder he attacks the harder he is tossed away; the defense is measured by his offense.

As Aikido developed it became clear that it was not only an effective means of self-defense, but truly a Way to understand earthly life through the energy flow of the universe (called 'Ki' in Aikido). And because Aikido is natural movement following physical laws, and because it is not based on pitting one's strength against another, it is practiced by men and women, children and older people. Its exercise, yoga-like breathing and meditation can be practiced by all.

On October 26, at 8:30 pm, at the University School Gymnasium cross street from Satterfield Hall, a demonstration of Aikido will be performed by Sensei (instructor) Yoshimitsu Yamada, sixth degree black belt. There is no fee and everyone is invited to attend.



Well, what do you think?

Did it make you want to attend the Aikido demonstration?

Whether it did or not, how does it look when you use John Caples' checklist to analyze it?

Go ahead and study it now...

Well, what do you think now?

How does it look when you compare it to the Caples' checklist?

Is it a good or bad ad?

Here's my own opinion:

1. The headline on my ad doesn't attract the right audience and doesn't provide a benefit at all. It's a loser. I'm embarrassed.
2. The ad *does* have a graphic, so I think that's good. One point for me.
3. The ad doesn't have any sub-headings. Not good.
4. The copy weaves an interesting story and gives a few benefits. Good.
5. There's no guarantee, no testimonials, etc. Oops.
6. The magic word FREE should have been used instead of "no fee."
7. I didn't make it easy to act. I don't even give directions to the event!
8. There's no reason to act now.

Oh, well. So much for my first ad being an inspired hit.

The point here is you can now use John Caples' famous checklist on *your* next ad, sales letter, etc.

Now before we leave this subject of how to check the ads you write, let me give you one more major gift--a full article by the great John Caples.

This article may never have been published. It's probably from around 1972. I found it, paid to have it retyped and am including it here as a major prize for the students of this material.

Read it now....

50 Things I've Learned in 50 Years

By John Caples
Vice President, Batten, Barton, Durstine
& Osborn, Inc.

Headlines

1. The Headline is the most important element in most advertisements.
2. The best headlines appeal to the reader's self-interest or give news. Examples:

The secret of making people like you

Do you have these symptoms of nerve exhaustion?

Announcing a new fiction writing course

How a new discovery made a plain girl beautiful
3. Sometimes a minor change in a headline can make a difference in pulling power. A mail order ad for a book on automobile repair had this headline:

How to repair cars

The pulling power of this ad was increased 20% by changing the headline to read:

How to fix cars
4. Re-casting a headline can make a big difference in response. Here is the headline of a couponed ad selling retirement annuities:

A vacation that lasts the rest of your life

Here is the headline of an ad that pulled three times as many coupons:

A guaranteed income for life

The losing headline attempts to be clever by calling retirement a vacation. The winning headline is a straightforward promise of a benefit.

5. Long headlines that say something are more effective than short headlines that say nothing. A book publisher had difficulty selling a book with the title "Five Acres." This book was transformed into a best seller by changing the title to: "Five Acres and Independence."

Another publisher had a book entitled "Fleece of Gold." The sales of the book were more than quadrupled when the title was changed to "Quest for a Blonde Mistress."

6. In writing headlines, the copywriter should try to break the boredom barrier. "How I became a star salesman" was the headline of a successful ad for a course in salesmanship. The pulling power of the ad was increased by changing the headline to "How a fool stunt made me a star salesman."

Copy

7. Write your copy to the sixth grade level. Simple language is not resented by educated people. And simple language is the only kind that most people understand. When you read over your copy, say to yourself: "Will this be understood by my barber or by the mechanic who fixes my car?"

8. What you say is more important than how you say it.

Mail order advertisers do not use expensive artwork or fancy language.

9. Illustrations that show the product in use or the reward of using the product or service are usually the most effective.

Examples: In an ad for a bicycle, a picture of a boy riding a bicycle shows the product in use. In a retirement income ad, a picture of a happy couple sitting on a beach in Florida shows the reward of using the service.

10. There are two forces at work in the minds of your prospect. (1) Skepticism, and (2) The desire to believe. You can do your prospects a favor by giving them evidence that what you say is true. Your client will also benefit by getting increased response.

11. Specific statements are more believable than generalities. An example of a specific statement is the famous slogan for Ivory Soap - "99 44/100% pure"

12. Include testimonials in your ads. Two ads for a financial publication were split-run tested in Reader's Digest. The ads were identical except that one contained four brief testimonials buried in the copy. The ad with the testimonials produced 25% more sales. Some of the most successful mail order ads have been built entirely around testimonials. Examples: "I was a 97 pound weakling"...

“How I improved my memory in one evening.”

13. Localized testimonials in local media are especially effective. Seven couponed ads for a public utility were tested in New Haven newspapers. One ad featured a testimonial from a New Haven woman. This ad outpulled all the others. A newspaper campaign featuring local testimonials for a packaged laundry soap raised the sales of the soap from fourth place to first place.

14. Ads that involve the reader are effective. For example, the best pulling ad for a book of etiquette showed a picture of a man walking between two women. Headline: “What’s wrong in this picture?” A successful ad for a course in Interior Design had this headline: “Can you spot these 7 common decorating sins?”

15. Straightforward ads usually outpull “cute” ads. Two couponed ads soliciting subscriptions for a daily newspaper were tested by mail order sales as follows:

Ad No. 1

Headline: “Take it from me this
is the newspaper for you.”

Illustration: Picture of a smiling newsboy
offering the reader a copy of
the Times.

Ad No. 2

Headline: How to get the Times
delivered to your home

Illustration: No illustration. Just headline
and copy

Results: Ad No. 2 outpulled Ad No. 1 by 190%

16. In writing copy, don't merely tell your prospect the benefits he will get by buying your product or service. You should also tell him what he will lose if he doesn't buy.

17. Put your best foot forward in your copy. A copywriter asked my opinion of an ad he had written. He said: "I saved the best benefit till the end and used it as a punch line in the last paragraph." I said: "Put your best benefit in the first paragraph. Otherwise the reader may never get to your last paragraph."

18. Avoid humor. You can entertain a million people and not sell one of them. There is not a single humorous line in two of the most influential books in the world, namely, the Bible and the Sears Roebuck catalog.

19. If you want to drive home a point, you should say it three times. For example, suppose you are making a free offer. At the beginning of your copy, say "It's free." In the middle of your copy, say "It costs nothing." At the end, say "Send no money."

20. You can sometimes combine two successes to make a super success. For example: Seven ads for house paint were tested for pulling power. Here are the headlines of the two most successful ads:

1. New house paint made by (name of manufacturer)
2. This house paint keeps white houses whiter

These two headlines were combined as follows:

New house paint made by (name of manufacturer)
keeps your white house whiter

A campaign with this theme sold more house paint than any previous campaign.

21. Long copy sells more than short copy. The more you tell, the more you sell.

22. Write more copy than you need to fill the space. If you need 500 words of copy, begin by writing 1,000 words. Then boil it down to a concise, fact-packed message.

23. You can often improve the pulling power of an ad by setting a time limit. Retail advertisers increase sales by setting a cut-off date. Reader's Digest, in selling subscriptions, frequently uses such phrases as: "Return this card before October 31".

24. Spell out your guarantee. The word guarantee has been used so many times it has lost much of its force.

Here is a classic example of a spelled-out guarantee:

"This is my own straightforward agreement that you can have my coaching material in your hands for 10 days examination and reading before you make up your mind to keep it. You are to be the sole judge.

"You can return the material for any reason, or for no reason at all, and your decision will not be questioned. Your refund check will be mailed to you in full by the very next mail. This agreement is just as binding as though it had been written in legal terms by a lawyer."

25. You should ask for action at the end of your ad. Tell the reader what you want him to do. Sometimes it pays to offer a reward for action. In selling a 10-volume world history, the Book-of-the-Month Club offers a free book "to new members who enroll at this time."

26. People who buy once are your best prospects for buying again. I used to write ads for a publisher who sold little

booklets by mail for 25¢ each. The people who bought the booklets were good prospects for the publisher's \$5 books. And a number of the folks who bought the \$5 books were later induced to buy the publisher's \$25 library. The same principle applies in fund raising. People who give once are the best prospects for giving again.

27. The copywriter's job does not begin at 9 a.m. Nor does it end at 5 p.m. His job is with him all the time. Some of his best ideas come to him while he is shaving in the morning, while he is riding on a bus, or at lunchtime, or while he is walking along the street, or sometimes in the middle of the night. He should have paper and pencil handy at all times. He should write down ideas the minute they occur. Otherwise some of his most precious thoughts will be lost.

Testing

28. The key to success in advertising (maximum sales per dollar) lies in perpetual testing of all variables.

29. Over the years, many methods for testing copy have been devised. Opinion tests, readership tests, eye camera tests, pupilometer tests, recall tests, comprehension tests, coupon tests, inquiry tests, attitude tests, etc. Most of these tests produced useful information.

30. Here is a simple test. When you write a piece of copy, put it aside and read it over the next day. You will almost always be able to improve it.

31. Another simple method is to ask somebody to read your copy aloud. If he stumbles over a sentence, say to yourself: "That's not his fault. It's my fault. I must make the sentence better."

32. If you want to get an associate's opinion of an ad you wrote, don't show him just one ad. Chances are he will try to please you by saying: "It's good." That gets you nowhere. Show him two ads and say, "Which is better?"

33. Testing ads by asking people for their opinion is helpful. However, it can be misleading. Many will not vote for all-type ads. Most believe that an ad is not good unless it has a picture. This is not so. Some of the best-pulling mail order ads have had no pictures.

34. In an opinion test, people hesitate to reveal their selfish motives. For example, in an opinion test of life insurance ads, an ad with the headline "What would become of your wife if something happened to you?" outpulled an ad with the headline "To men who want to quit work some day." When these ads were subjected to a mail order sales test, the results were reversed.

35. Do not discard opinion testing because it is sometimes inaccurate. Opinion testing has one big advantage over mail order tests. You can ask the respondents why they voted for a certain ad. You can find out if the copy is understood or misunderstood. You cannot do these things in a mail order test.

36. The best tests, if properly handled, are sales tests. Mail order advertisers have an advantage in this respect. Every mail order ad is a sales test. In mail order, you can test copy, media, position in media, and season - all by sales results. Hence, mail order advertisers know a great deal about the realities of advertising. Much of this knowledge is applicable in those forms of advertising which cannot be accurately tested.

37. The most accurate test is a mail order split-run test where two ads - Ad A and Ad B - are tested under identical conditions. Many publications offer split-run copy testing. They do this by splitting the press run. Ad A runs in half the circulation. Ad B runs in the other half of the circulation - same issue, same page, same position on the page. If a news dealer has 100 copies of the publication, 50 copies will contain Ad A and 50 copies will contain Ad B. Thus each ad has an equal chance to get results.

38. Testing copy is fun, exciting, rewarding. I recall working on ads for a finance company that offered small loans. Several of us wrote ads and we tested them in newspapers by counting phone calls from prospects. For example, one ad would

say "Telephone this number and ask for Miss Smith." Another ad would say "Ask for Miss Miller," and so on. Thus we could tell exactly how much business each ad brought in. Then each copywriter would bet a dollar that his ad would win. Testing copy became a game we all enjoyed. It was as thrilling as betting on a horse race. We learned a lot. And the client benefitted.

Account Handling

39. When you are soliciting a new account, don't tell the ad manager how bad his ads are. You may be talking to the man who wrote the ads.

40. In starting work on a new account, you are sometimes faced with the tough problem of beating the client's best ad - an ad that he has used successfully for years. How do you proceed? One way is to include in your ad every good thing in the prospect's ad plus some good things of your own. Another way is to test, not just one new ad but ten new ads. Your chances of finding a winner are increased tenfold.

41. Here is a philosophy you can use when your ad is competing with somebody else's ad. If your ad wins, you can say to yourself: "My experience paid off." If your ad loses, you can say, "I learned something."

Socrates used a similar philosophy in regard to marriage.

He said: "If a man has a good marriage, that is a good thing. If he has a bad marriage, he becomes a philosopher, and that is a good thing."

42. Clients often tire of ads before the public does. Hence advertisers who cannot measure sales results frequently demand a new campaign every year or so. Mail order advertisers repeat an effective ad till it wears out. Max Sackheim's famous ad "Do you make these mistakes in English?" ran for 40 years before it wore out.

43. Be honest. I recall serving an advertising manager who was the smartest client I ever met. I said to myself: "I can never fool this man. If I think a quarter page ad will be more efficient than a full page ad, I must tell him so, even though the agency makes only one fourth as much commission. If I try to mislead him, he will see through me. After that he will never trust me." This policy of honesty paid off. It was a happy account to work on for eighteen years. After I stopped serving this man, he continued to recommend my services to other advertisers.

44. Be flexible. I used to take train trips to Hartford to present new ads to the advertising manager of a large insurance company. It was a happy relationship. The ad manager became one of my best friends. We usually agreed on ads. But sometimes we disagreed. In those cases, I argued all morning for my point of view. But after lunch, I would remark: "There may be some-

thing in what you say. When I get back to my office, I'll try it your way."

45. Be diplomatic. A successful account executive said to me: "If the ad manager is in a rejecting mood, I don't show him any more new ads that day. I keep them in my brief case and show them to him some other time."

46. Don't feel bad if your client revises your ad. He will like the ad better and his revisions may improve it.

Miscellaneous

47. Bruce Barton, former head of BBDO, gave this advice: "Be polite to everybody, even the Western Union messenger. You never know when he may turn up as a client. If you are going to be mean to somebody, be mean to the chairman of the board. He won't be around very long."

48. Get out and meet new people whenever you can. Don't spend all your time with comfortable old cronies. One time I was having lunch with a BBDO associate. A man stopped at our table. It was Roy Durstine who was then president of BBDO. He said: "You men can't make any money talking to each other."

49. Alex Osborn, former vice chairman of BBDO said:
“Never have an open break with anyone. The memory of the break will linger on long after the object of disagreement has been forgotten.”

50. Find work you enjoy. My earliest ambition was to make enough money so I could retire at forty. But at twenty-five, I had the good fortune to get into advertising. Now that I am in my seventies, I never want to retire. The secret of happiness is enjoyable work plus helping others.

Ah, I love John Caples!

The article you just read contains pure wisdom. Read it and re-read it to absorb the 50 insights of one of the greatest ad-men of all time.

Now, before I end this lesson, let me tell you what happened when I called John Caples some twelve or so years ago.

I was working on my book *The Seven Lost Secrets of Success*. Because Caples had worked for Bruce Barton (the subject of my book), I wanted to talk to him. I wanted a few first-hand reports on what it was like to work for the celebrity businessman.

Of course, I also wanted to speak with the legend of copywriting: John Caples.

I called directory information (there was no Internet then) for New York City, where I suspected Caples still lived. To my surprise, the operator gave me the man's home phone number!

I held my breath, dialed his number and heard it ring.

A pleasant sounding elderly woman came on the phone.

“Yes?” she asked.

“I’m calling long distance for John Caples. My name is Joe Vitale.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Joe,” she said. “John died one year ago today.”

Yes, I was stunned.

And disappointed.

Not only that, but it turned out I was talking to John’s widow---on the anniversary of his death!

I quickly got off the phone.

In short, John Caples may be gone but his wisdom is alive and well---in his books, and in this lesson.

Study him.

HOMEWORK:

Your homework this week is to pull up an ad or sales letter you wrote and use John Caples’ checklist to analyze it. How does it look in light of Caples’ ideas?

Write up your insights and send them to me at joe@mrfire.com. Be sure to write “BOOTCAMP HOMEWORK” in the subject line.

Go for it!

Dr. Joe Vitale
www.mrfire.com