

**Confessions of an Advertising Man**  
**By: David Ogilvy**

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## **About the Author**

David Ogilvy is known as the father of advertising in many advertising circles. He attended Christ Church College, Oxford, but did not graduate. Instead he moved to Paris and became a chef at the Majestic Hotel. Later he became a door to door salesman where he wrote a Manual advising other salesman on how to increase sales. After the success of the manual, his brother who was working for Mather & Crowther convinced the agency to hire Ogilvy as an account executive.

After a working for the agency for a while, Ogilvy convinced them to send him to America for a year. After in America for a few years, and working various jobs, Ogilvy started his own agency in America with Mather and Crowther. Soon Crowther left and it was just Ogilvy and Mather. It was hard for him to get clients in the beginning, but he soon built a clientele that was very respectable, including Hathaway shirts, Schweppes, and Rolls-Royce.

In 1989, Ogilvy & Mather was bought out by WPP for a large profit. Ogilvy served as WPP non-executive chair for three years. Ogilvy died in 1999.

Ogilvy published several books while during his career, including *Ogilvy on Advertising* and *Confessions of an Advertising Man*.

## **Abstract**

In *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, David Ogilvy explains the rules in which he has used to create one of the most successful advertising businesses in the world. He goes through different areas with their own set of rules. He talks about all areas of advertising from how to get the clients that you want to how to write creative advertisements to how to take a small company and turn it into a powerful entity. Not only does he go through and explain all the rules which he has used, he also uses real life experiences to prove that he has implemented the rules and that is why he has risen to the top of the advertising world. This is basically a how to guide as to what it takes to make it in the business, and tactics that have proven to work in business situations.

## Summary

**The story behind this book:** Before the actual book begins; Ogilvy takes time to explain where he was coming from when he wrote the book, and to make a few adjustments to the context. He corrects three points made later in the book; place a coupon on the bottom right of an ad, there is a correlation between people liking an ad and its selling power, and that 200 words a minute on television commercial sells more than an ad with 90 words a minute. He explains the type of people that he looks for when hiring into the company, and the set of standards on which he expects his employees to follow. He admits that there are currently four problems that the advertising industry faces today.

1. Manufacturers of package goods are now spending too much money on price off deals instead of producing good advertising.
2. Many advertising agencies are only interested in winning awards and producing original ads, not in selling a product.
3. There is a rise of “Megalomaniacs” whose only interest is in the economic gain of the company, not on being creative.
4. Agencies are still making the same mistakes that they have always been making, and it’s costing the clients a lot of money.

Ogilvy ends the section with a brief overview of what he has learned, but all the points he make are present in the main section of the book.

**Background:** Ogilvy tells about his childhood and growing up. He talks about his father being against religion, but that people should still act like a gentleman. He talks about a conversation he once heard between a husband and wife, in which the man said “My

dear, nothing in this world is worth buying.” Ogilvy disagrees with this and thinks that almost everything advertised is worth buying, and he hopes that he can make people happy buying the products that he advertises, because he enjoys making the advertisements.

**Chapter 1- How to Manage an Advertising Agency:** Ogilvy starts out by talking about his former job as a chef at a Hotel in Paris. He talks about his former boss and the ways in which he inspired his employees to be the best they could be. His boss hardly ever complimented his employees so that when there was a compliment given, it was respected more than if he gave compliments out all the time. He also learned that you should always come through on your promises; otherwise you will lose the respect of your clients. The most important thing he learned from working as a chef was the work ethic that the leader of a company must express. As long as the boss is doing the most work, no other employee can argue about the amount of work he has to do. Ogilvy then goes on to again talk about the characteristics that he looks for in an employee that he hires. Basically this includes having high moral character and integrity with the work that you do.

**Chapter 2- How to Get Clients:** In the beginning of this chapter, Ogilvy talks about the importance of youth and gusto in the individuals who write the ads. He comments on the fact that when a business starts out, it is full of ideas and create very creative ads, but after years, they are out of creative ideas, and soon start making ads that do not uphold the integrity of the company. He continues to talk about his own personal experiences, and the struggles and opposition that he faced when first starting out. According to Ogilvy, the first clients are the hardest to get, but after you get a reputation of doing good

work, companies start to seek you. Another big rule introduced in this chapter was the concept of never work for competing companies. He talks about gaining the Shell account, and by doing so he had to let go of the Standard Oil account. He talks about how to always use the products that you are advertising and to never use competing companies because one will always feel shorted by the other's advertising. Finally he gets into the rules for obtaining and selecting new clients.

1. Only advertise products which you are proud to be associated with, never advertise a product that you don't respect and don't like.
2. Never advertise for a company that you feel has better advertising than you can offer.
3. Never advertise for a company that has had failing sales for a long period of time. This normally means that the advertising will not help the sales.
4. Make sure that the client understands that the advertising agency has to make money as well; don't make the client money while losing money from your own company.
5. Question any account that would not be very profitable. If it gives you a chance to show off your skills to other potential clients, then take the account.
6. Always find the motive for the client switching agencies, if he was let go from the previous agency, find out why.
7. Do not take clients that put little importance in advertising.
8. Never advertise for a product that is not yet on the market.
9. Never take associations as clients.

10. Only give in to the demand that a person be hired if you get the account if you feel that the person is capable of doing good work for your company
11. (not included in original list) If a company publicly announces the companies which it is considering to do their advertising, do not try to get the account, if you do not get it, you will publicly be known for being inferior to the successful company in some way.

**Chapter 3- How to Keep Clients:** Ogilvy starts by talking about the unfortunate conditions of firing people that produced good work, but the advertising failed. He has a few rules to try and eliminate the need for this to happen.

1. Appoint the best people possible to each account, and do not let executives go after accounts, it makes them greedy.
2. Avoid hiring unstable executives who are hard for people to get along with.
3. Avoid taking clients who change agencies on a regular basis.
4. Keep contact between the agency and the client on all levels of the business.

Ogilvy also talks about how it is a bad idea to never join two clients in one ad. Most of the time, one agency will get jealous of the attention the other is getting in the ad. Also, never keep a client who has reduced the quality of their product. When presenting an ad to the client, go word for word when reading from the presentation, it makes the presenter seem more confident and professional.

**Chapter 4- How to Be a Good Client:** Ogilvy starts by making the statement that “a million dollars’ worth of effective advertising can sale more than ten million dollars’ worth of ineffective advertising.” From here he goes into the rules that a company should follow if they wish to be a good client for an advertising agency.

1. Emancipate your agency from fear: if you are a company, make sure that the advertising agency you have knows that they trust in your work, and that if you have a problem, you will address it instead of switching agencies immediately.
2. Select the right agency in the first place: every company should have an advertising manager who knows enough about advertising to make an informed decision as to which agency will best fit the company.
3. Brief your agency very thoroughly indeed: make sure that the ad agency knows as much about the product as possible, that way they can have the best insight on how to advertise the product.
4. Do not compete with your agency in the creative area: you hired the agency to make creative ads, do not try and do creative work and force that work onto them.
5. Coddle the goose who lays your golden eggs: if an agency is producing good advertising, then allow them to continue to produce ads, and give them more responsibilities with products.
6. Don't strain your advertising through too many levels: do not allow too many people the ability to control the ad. The more people who can change the ad, the more complicated the ads become.
7. Make sure that your agency makes a profit: a company's account in an ad agency is not the only account, so if an account does not make the agency a profit, it will not get the attention that a profitable account will get.
8. Don't haggle with your agency: if you complain about the price of a certain area of the advertising, such as research, it is likely that you will end up without enough focus in that area.



9. Be candid, and encourage candor: if you have a problem with the agency, tell them, but do not threaten. If you explain exactly what you want and feel is needed, then the agency will likely do that to you as well.
10. Set high standards: be sure that your agency knows that you expect great things, and when they provide them, be sure to give them the praise they deserve.
11. Test everything: most products do not get out of test markets, so test the product as well as the advertising to make sure it will be successful.
12. Hurry: be sure to use time as a function of profit as well as money.
13. Don't waste time on problem babies: do not pour money into a product that will likely fail, spend money on making successful products even more successful.
14. Tolerate genius: do not be intimidated by advertising genius, accept it and cherish it.
15. Don't under spend: it takes more money to compensate for not putting enough money in an ad than it does to put the money in the ad in the first place.

**Chapter 5- how to Build Great Campaigns** Ogilvy starts by telling how many critics condemn all of his rules and say that the rules make dull advertisements. He argues that this is not the case and that advertising set within rules can be creative, and also more effective than those without rules. The rules to build a great campaign are as follows.

1. What you say is more important than how you say it: the information you give is more important to the consumer than the way you present it.
2. Unless your campaign is built around a great idea, it will flop: in order for people to be affected by the advertising, it has to be something new original.

3. Give the facts: information about the product is more important than persuading the consumer with adjectives.
4. You cannot bore people in buying: in order for an advertisement to be effective, it must make the consumer want to read what it has to say.
5. Be well-mannered, but don't clown: bad-mannered advertisements do not sell products, but advertisements should not always be funny and comic either.
6. Make your advertising contemporary: make sure that you are current with advertising and the information and ads will appeal to the current demographic.
7. Committees can criticize advertisements, but they cannot write them: good advertising cannot be a committee effort; it must be the effort of the individuals who understand the product the best.
8. If you are lucky enough to write a good advertisement, repeat it until it stops pulling: do not stop an advertisement just because you are tired of it, if it is still selling the product, continue to run it.
9. Never write an advertisement which you wouldn't want your own family to read: be honest and truthful with your ads, do not try to manipulate your readers.
10. The image and the brand: all ads should contribute something useful to the image and the brand the company is trying to sell.
11. Don't be a copy-cat: any time an agency copies another agencies ad, it is showing that it is an inferior company, and will lose the respect of others.

**Chapter 6-How to Write Potent Copy:** Ogilvy goes straight into the rules for this chapter.

**Headlines:**

1. The headline is the most important part of the ad; it is what gets the reader's attention and what makes them keep reading. Invite readers and do not say anything to exclude any readers.
2. Every headline should appeal to the interest of the consumer.
3. Try to put news in the headline. The words new and free are the most powerful words that can appear in the headline.
4. There are several other words that are effective: How to, Suddenly, Now, Announcing, Improvement, etc. Headlines can also include emotional words.
5. Five times as many people read the headlines and the body.
6. Include a promise in the headlines, and longer headlines sell more than short headlines.
7. If the headlines make the consumer curious, they will more likely read the body.
8. Do not try to write tricky headlines, be simple and to the point.
9. Do not use negatives in the headlines.
10. Always make the headlines have a meaning.

## **Body**

The main point of this section is to tell the advertisers to write the body as if you were recommending the product to a stranger. Do not try to impress the reader with big words, be simple and concise with the body.

**Chapter 7- How to Illustrate Advertisements and Posters:** The most powerful advertising illustrations are the ones that arouse the consumers curiosity. Make an illustration that a consumer can glance at and be compelled to find out what is being advertised. Make the consumer ask questions about the illustration. Another type of

illustration that is effective is the before and after pictures. They show the results and can help get the benefits across. Use illustrations and pictures that give the company a personality, and allow the consumer to relate to the company. If you make an advertisement look like an editorial page it will attract more readers than making it look like an ad. Another point worth mentioning is the fact that people read the caption under a photograph more than they read the copy of the article. There is a list of several tricks to try and make a long copy more readable, with the average tip adding about 10 percent readability to the copy. Never type the whole ad in capital letters; it is harder for a person to read. As far as posters and outside advertisements, passing people do not have time to read many words, so illustrations should get the point across fairly easily and quickly.

**Chapter 8-How to make Good Television Commercials:** “The purpose of a commercial is not to entertain the viewer, but to sell him.” The main thing about commercials is to make the pictures tell the story. The picture is more important than the words you present. One main difference between print ads and commercials is that in print, you have to attract the viewer, where television the viewer is already paying attention. Given the amount of commercials on television, you must make the commercial memorable, and make sure that the selling point stands out to the consumer. The biggest shock in this chapter is that Ogilvy is against jingles to sell a product; he would rather have the spoken word.

**Chapter 9- How to Make Good Campaigns for Food Products, Tourist Destinations and Patent Medicines:**

Food Products: Ogilvy talks about television being in black and white, so this is a little dated, but he questions how to make food look appealing on television. He narrows the

important factors down to 22 commandments, which are too vast to mention, but the main deal is that you should make the food appealing, give recipes when you can, and to try to include news and brand name in the ad.

Tourist Destinations: He uses his experience to come up with a few rules for tourist destinations as well.

1. Always portray the destination favorably.
2. Always include something special about the destination.
3. Give images and thoughts that will stay with the viewer.
4. People who travel are smart, do not insult their intelligence.
5. Help the reader understand that they can afford the trip.
6. Make viewers feel like going to the destination is the popular thing to do.
7. Convert consumer's dreams into action by getting them to go where they always wanted to go.
8. Consumers are out to get clichés, so give them that.

Patent Medicines: Again Ogilvy goes right into the rules he has established.

1. The ad must show the benefits of your product over the competition.
2. The ad must contain news, or at least news worthy events.
3. Make the ad show that the medicine takes care of a serious issue.
4. The ad should show authority, or doctor recommendation.
5. The ad should talk about the disease and the medicine.
6. The person wants to think you can help, so make them believe that you can.

**Chapter 10- How to Rise to the Top of the Tree (Advice to the Young):** The main point that Ogilvy makes is that in order to be successful, a person must be ambitious.

Nothing is going to be given to anyone, and everyone has to earn what they get. Again, he has several rules that apply to all businesses, not just advertising.

1. Sooner or later, you will be hurt and disappointed by a client, but you can not let that stop you from being great at what you do.
2. A person can get by just being the go between men, but in order to gain power and money, you have to have more aspirations.
3. No matter how good you are, experience is the best teacher you can have.
4. Any successful person has to make great presentations. They must be well written and well delivered.
5. Treat clients as friends, and truly act in their best interest.
6. Only fight for the clients and things that are worth fighting for.
7. Do not leak any information about anyone.
8. Conduct business in private, do not allow others to hear and steal your ideas.
9. If you can admit your mistakes, you will earn the respect of others.
10. Be sure to write concise and to the point inter-office memoranda.

Ogilvy then goes on to explain why advertising pays well, and talks about being careful about the decisions you make and to be conscious of how your actions make you look and affect other people.

**Chapter 11-Should Advertising Be Abolished?:** He starts out by talking about the different opinions of people. Talking about how many people feel that advertisers should give nothing but facts. He then goes on to talk about if advertising raises prices or not. And talks about how the debate on the topic is still on going. Many people feel that advertising helps create a monopoly, but according to Ogilvy, and researchers he quotes,

advertising is not a basic cause of monopolies. In Ogilvy's opinion, advertising can not push an inferior product on the consumer, and tells this from his experience with the issue. While he agrees that advertising was founded based on lies and deceptions, he feels that it is now an honest way to promote a product or service. As far as the question of whether advertising make people want to buy products they don't need, he feels that it is a matter of opinion. If you feel that people do not need a product such as deodorant or beer, then yes it can, but many people feel that they want these items, advertising just gives them the information to make better choices. Overall Ogilvy thinks that given the right rules and regulations, advertising can be a powerful tool to help a company succeed in any business. It is a foundation of society as we know it, and is a principal part of the economic system in which we live in.

## Review

Overall, I feel that *Confessions of an Advertising Man* is a great book for anyone who is interested in going into an advertising business. It talks about the struggles that many people face when coming into the business, and also gives certain guidelines to follow in order to overcome the obstacles that are faced.

As an advertising student, it helps to know exactly what you can expect when going into the business and how you can overcome the common problems. The main problem I have with the book is the arrogance that Ogilvy has when talking about the decisions he has made. He seems like all his decisions and rules are the only way to go about problems, and any other approach is wrong. If the book is read with an open mind and taken as a suggestion rather than a strict guideline it is a great book to help anyone starting out in the advertising business.

Most reviewers of the book credit Ogilvy for writing the first book that addresses the problems faced by the advertising agency today, and ways to overcome them. Many of the reviews talk about the advertisements he has created rather than the book itself though, calling him the creative force in modern advertising. There are only positive reviews on the book, and it is recommended for advertising students or anyone going into the business.

Overall the book is easy to read, and is well worth the time. It flows easily and does not include difficult language or complicated explanations, but the book is a bit dated and some of the aspects do not still apply to the world of advertising today.



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