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The Marketing Message: Being Broadcast Loud and Clear?

Communication lies at the very heart of marketing; but how well do marketers and marketing academics communicate? Academics, including those in marketing, have been criticized for putting their ideas across in a complex and unclear way. Marketing academics may have some valuable new ideas to "sell" to practitioners; but are they so product orientated that they are ignoring the communications needs of their potential customers? This paper tries to explore the importance of clear communications for academics and practitioners; and to survey how clearly we are communicating through the channel of marketing journals in particular.

Introduction

"The manner in which knowledge about business and management is developed, disseminated and utilized has become the subject of increasing scrutiny over the years."

So begins the findings of the AMA's Task Force on the Development of Marketing Thought (AMA 1988). This paper is part of a wider debate on the effectiveness with which marketing ideas travel between academics and practitioners. An earlier AMA and Marketing Science Institute sponsored report also studied the contribution of academic research to the development of marketing. They concluded that research in marketing "has had relatively little impact on improving marketing management practice." (Myers et al. 1980).

The AMA's task force agreed that marketing academics have not fulfilled their potential in contributing to better marketing practice. However, they stress that the academic community has much to offer and a key role to play.

"The academic constituency bears a heavy responsibility for defining and shaping what is known about marketing, for pushing back the 'frontiers' of knowledge, for communicating what is known to the other constituencies, and for taking a leadership role in the application of publicly available knowledge to improve marketing performance. . . . (They) are dedicated to communicating new knowledge publicly through published books and articles."

This suggests that ideas travel from academia to industry in a two step process; ideas are developed then communicated. However, it may be more useful to think in terms of three stages; idea generation, idea transmission and idea reception. This reflects classical communications theory, where a message is coded by a sender, transmitted and decoded by a receiver (Shannon and Weaver 1949).

The AMA report focused on improving the generation of marketing ideas, and opening up channels of communication between academics and industry. The question the report failed to address was, "How do we ensure that these new
marketing ideas are communicated effectively?" This paper attempts to pick up where the AMA's task force left off, by examining the importance of communications skills for marketing practitioners and academics; and by assessing how good both parties are at getting their message across.

**Barriers to Communication**

The AMA's Task Force, and other authors (Hammervik and Wirsall 1984, Connell 1987, Rothwell 1985) identify barriers between the worlds of academia and industry which hamper the development and spread of new ideas. The AMA found that, "Over time, barriers to the widespread dissemination of marketing knowledge have evolved. Some of these barriers have become institutionalised so that they not only prevent communication efforts, but also hinder the development of marketing knowledge." These barriers can generally be grouped under one of three headings.

*Barriers to the Development of New Marketing Ideas*

Various factors can discourage academics from starting or completing new research. The AMA identified four key areas:

(a) Insufficient resources invested in marketing knowledge development;
(b) The "sadomasochistic" journal review process. Destructive criticism from reviewers, and the time and effort it takes to get an article into publishable form can discourage authors. Peterson (1985) found that 66% of all authors in the Journal of Marketing Research had only ever written one article for that journal;
(c) Career and personal development conflicts for academics;
(d) An unreceptive attitude among fellow academics to new and "heretical" ideas.

There are also a number of distractions which can hamper ongoing research such as (a) consultancy opportunities, (b) increasing teaching and administration commitments, (c) joining editorial boards of journals, etc. There can also be inputs which are missing from the development of new ideas which limit their effectiveness. The AMA identify three areas where constructive inputs into research may be lacking:

(a) A lack of leadership from more senior academics who have withdrawn from active research to write books, consult or run departments;
(b) A lack of contribution from practitioners, who are not encouraged by their firms to contribute to academic research projects or rewarded for doing so. In particular, academics need to know what practitioners need to know, to make their research more useful.
(c) A lack of constructive criticism. This could come from colleagues, but their potential input is often ignored in the rush to get articles "out the door". It could also come from reviewers, but frequently fails to help because of what the AMA identifies as "the adversarial nature of the review process".
**Barriers Preventing Communication Efforts**

In order to contribute to the development of marketing, research must be completed, and must reach other people. The most common media for new ideas to reach people are journals and conferences. These channels have limitations which can also act as barriers to the spread of new ideas:

(a) The channels may be too narrow. Journals such as The Journal of Marketing and The Journal of Market Research accept only 10–15% of the articles they receive. This partly reflects their high standards, which some would regard as a quality filter rather than a barrier to communication. However, even if all manuscripts were of a high standard, no more would be published, since such journals are set strict page limits by their sponsors (Hunt 1988).

(b) Some channels may be missing. The AMA saw a gap in the US market for a journal for research in marketing aimed primarily at business people and students but also academics—a sort of marketing equivalent of the Harvard Business Review. This would form a bridge between academics and practitioners in a way which The Journal of Marketing has failed to do.

(c) Other channels are too "compartmentalized". For example, the AMA report notes that details on marketing education conferences are usually only sent to marketing educators. Conferences are an ideal opportunity for academics and practitioners to share ideas and experiences, but they all too easily become parochial.

(d) A failure to spread the word. The circulation of some academic journals is generally limited to other academics. Pelham (1985) observes that academic journals are little-read by practitioners. This leads to situations where the academic world is talking to itself more than to anyone else.

**Barriers Preventing Effective Communication**

Once a new marketing idea has reached the pages of a journal, or resonated through a conference hall, there is still a final barrier to overcome before the idea reaches the people. To communicate an idea successfully, one must overcome the emotional, perceptual, physical and semantic barriers which tend to distort all but the simplest messages (Munter 1987). A new idea may be successfully developed and disseminated by academics, but the message may weaken or distort in transmission. It may reach the wrong people, it may be misunderstood, or it may fail to generate the desired response. Several writers have attempted to define the differences between practitioners and academics which form barriers to co-operation and mutual understanding (Hammarkvist & Wirsall 1984, Connell 1987, Rothwell 1985). The main factors identified are:

(a) Time-scales and priorities. Academics usually work to longer time-scales and to more self-imposed deadlines.

(b) Criteria for success. The success of an academic project is judged in terms of the quantity and quality of publications, whereas business projects tend to be assessed against targets for sales, profits or other corporate objectives.

(c) Goals. The goal of academics is to advance and disseminate knowledge. The
goals of business people are based around developing their business to produce growth, profits and returns.

(d) The "not invented here" syndrome. Companies can fail to gain from academic research if they are generally slow to adopt new ideas which they have not developed or seen for themselves.

(e) Perceptions and expectations. Academics and business people often have unrealistic perceptions and expectations of one another. Academics have come under fire for failing to understand the obstacles to implementation which managers face. Managers also can have unrealistic ideas about the ability of academics to come in and change some aspect of their company. Gurney (1977—quoted by Punch 1981) goes so far as to view the academic and the manager as natural antagonists, because the academic's role is constantly to challenge the very assumptions which the manager depends upon for survival.

(f) Orientation. In recent years the "popular" view of management has moved towards Peters and Waterman's "bias for action"; away from the more "academic" view of management which still relies strongly on rational, analytical techniques.

(g) Language barriers. There is often a feeling among managers that academics use arcane or technical jargon or simply a barrage of long words which makes them poor communicators.

Once combined, these various differences create a very noticeable perceptual gap between the worlds of academia and industry.

**Bridging the Gap Between Academics and Practitioners**

The realization has been growing for a number of years that to improve understanding, this gap between marketing academics and practitioners must be closed or, at the very least, bridged. The AMA's report recommends joint conferences, joint workshops, more journals of common interest and joint efforts in closing the jargon gap, as key elements in building such a bridge. Similar concerns have been expressed in Britain. The analysis of British management education contained in "The Making of Managers" (Handy 1987) stressed the need for business schools and businesses to work more closely together. This has been hampered in the past by the scepticism of British managers towards the role of formal management education in developing better managers and management (Thomas 1989).

Various initiatives have been adopted with the aim of bringing industry and academia closer together. These include science parks, the Teaching Company Scheme, research companies and an increase in the use of industrial liaison officers and marketing units in universities and polytechnics. However, these have so far led to more joint pay-offs in technical fields, rather than in managerial disciplines such as marketing. When tackling the question "Why is it so difficult to get research in marketing used by practitioners?", Hammarkvist & Wirsall (1984) identified two key areas where academics researchers can improve their ability to help marketers: (a) by improving their understanding of the business context of marketing, so that they can better understand the barriers to implementation faced by managers in practice; (b) by improving their communications skills. The first point has been discussed by academics such as Piercy (1991) and Bonoma (1985), who
focused on the need for academics to temper their prescriptions for business with consideration of the real world constraints which marketers face. In the words of Piercy,

"one of the most significant frontiers for marketing in the 1990s will be that of implementation and the organizational changes required to achieve that implementation—in the manager's terms of 'we know what marketing is, but how do we do it?'"

The other dimension, that of the communication skills of marketing academics, has had less attention. It is, however, very important. There is little point in marketing academics developing better, more realistic answers to marketers' problems, if they fail to communicate them clearly. The AMA's report recommends that we should, "communicate without escaping into the relative security of technical or business jargon . . . and . . . use a clear, well organized, concrete and vivid writing style."

**Marketing and Communication**

"Communication" is clearly a key issue for marketers and managers in general. Its importance in managerial work has been the subject of several studies (Drucker 1954, Mintzberg 1973, Sayles 1964). They conclude that business people spend between 60 and 90% of their time communicating. According to David Ewing (former editor of the *Harvard Business Review*), "Management Communication is the number one problem in business today. While the technology of communication has advanced in leaps and bounds, managers' and academics' understanding of the substance of the process has not." This point is also made by Buttle (1990), who after a wide-ranging review of marketing communications theory suggests that we "have produced a contemporary literature which has failed to take account of recent advances made in communications theory generally. What we have is outdated, ill-informed, and in need of radical revision."

So we know that "communication" is important, but what does it really mean? The concept of communication has evolved gradually, often as the result of studies in other fields (such as mathematics, law or electronics) rather than from the study of communication itself. Lasswell (1948) defined communication as a question of "who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect." Shannon and Weaver (1949) took a more technical view of communication as a process of coding, sending and decoding a signal correctly; a process which Berlo (1960) put into a more behavioural context. Other writers stressed the importance of social environment (Ruesch 1953), while others focused on the importance of generating responses (Burke 1969, Wylie 1974). Over time the theory has developed from a simple, one-way technical process, towards a complex behavioural process. As Schramm (1971) comments "human communication seemed a simpler thing in 1952 than it does in 1970. (It has become) . . . an act of sharing, rather than something which someone does to someone else."

Munter (1987) combines the three underlying themes from the various theories (transmitting messages, social interaction and generating responses) to define communication as, "The process of sharing by which messages produce responses." This is an interesting concept because it seems a more far-reaching and active
process than the traditional academic pursuit of publications. Writing and publishing articles reflects Schramm’s original concept of communication as a “magic bullet” which transfers knowledge from one mind to another. If ideas are simply developed and then published, the process is one of dissemination, not communication. The emphasis of communication should be on “sharing” and on “response”, in other words it is about getting ideas across.

It is worth comparing Munter’s definition of communication with Kotler’s generic definition of marketing. “The core concern of marketing is that of producing desired responses in free individuals by the judicious creation and offering of values.” The unifying concepts of sharing/offering and producing responses shows that communication lies at the heart of marketing. However, this is a point rarely made explicit in marketing textbooks. Communication tends to be considered in a fragmented way, under headings such as advertising and promotion, market research, corporate PR or sales. Where it is considered, it relies heavily on traditional encoding/decoding models, and assumes that audiences are relatively passive (Buttle 1990). This habit of taking communication for granted until it comes to advertising and promotions strategy leads marketers to create their own communication gaps. Researchers have tackled the vexed question of why, after several decades of formalized marketing, consumer complaints are at an all time high. Some have concluded that the growing consumer dissatisfaction with companies’ product offerings is the result of false expectations created by a communication gap. As one commentator notes—“A major problem has been the general lack of communication among the four parties in the marketplace; individual consumers; consumer organizations; businessmen, business firms and their organizations; and government regulatory organizations.”

Another key similarity between the concepts of marketing and communication is the role of the customer or recipient. It is worth comparing Peter Drucker’s (1973) ideas on marketing, “It is the whole business seen from the point of view of its final result, that is from the customer’s point of view”, with his ideas on communications, “It is the recipient who communicates. The so-called communicator, the person who emits the communication, does not communicate. He utters. Unless there is someone who hears, there is no communication. There is only noise. The communicator speaks or writes or sings—but he does not communicate. Indeed, he cannot communicate. He can only make it possible, or impossible, for a recipient—or rather ‘percipient’—to perceive.”

So, marketing academics and practitioners face the same challenge; how to communicate their offerings to their respective “customers” clearly. Meeting this challenge revolves around answering two key questions—How can I make my messages clear? How can I measure and monitor the clarity of my message?

**Measuring Clarity**

In order to answer the second question first, a simple technique to gauge the clarity of written work was pioneered by a former newspaper editor, Robert Gunning (1952, 1962). His “Fog Index” was based on educational research conducted in the 1920s, and works by monitoring the length of sentences and use of long words to calculate a value for clarity. (Please note that the definition of “sentence” for Gunning’s index varies from the usual convention. His “sentence” is any unit of
words bounded by punctuation marks other than commas. He defines a long word as being of three syllables or more, other than proper nouns and words formed with hyphens, or a two syllable word plus a suffix. Many variations of this technique have been developed, and are still used by newspapers and magazines as a rule of thumb for pitching articles at the correct level for their audience. Gunning’s index is based on the premise that clear writing uses short words and concise sentences. Firms which have used and benefitted from Gunning’s advice on writing include IBM (although those who have tried wrestling the meaning from IBM manuals may think it has done them little good), General Motors, General Foods, Du Pont, Kimberly-Clark and over 70 US newspapers.

Over the years the clarity with which academics write in journals has come in for criticism. Randall (1966) complained that articles in Management Science were pretentious, verbose and obscure. Holbert (1976) observed that the writing of academic researchers was long and hard to read. Marketing journals have also been scrutinized. Parasuraman (1981) found that 41% of commercial researchers found marketing-related journals “difficult to read and comprehend”. Clark and Geisler (1986) used a Fog Index to survey 10 marketing journals for 20 years. They concluded that a masters degree was needed to read and understand the journals easily, and that the situation was worsening. The concept of clarity has also been applied to marketing practitioners. Clark, Kaminski and Brown (1990) surveyed adverts and articles in trade journals. They found that one third of practitioners’ writing would only be easily understood by graduates, and that the clarity of the adverts was varied by copywriters to reflect the readability level of the journals.

The authors decided to compare and analyse the clarity with which marketing academics and marketers communicate using a variation of Gunning’s Index. The test was applied only to messages found in one type of medium, marketing journals. The test could also usefully be applied to textbooks, sales and promotional literature or other product information.

Methodology

A sample of 20 articles each was gathered for both academics and marketers to assess their index of clarity. The articles were chosen at random from journals including, the Journal of Marketing (JM), the Journal of Marketing Management (JMM) and the European Journal of Marketing (EJM).

The only major difference in the selection process was that the practitioner sample dates from further back than the academic sample. The main reason for this is that practitioner contributions in academic journals are fewer and farther between. Academic articles were taken from 1988 and 1989, whereas the practitioner articles date from as far back as 1984.

In order to obtain an index of clarity, a sample of 200 words was taken from each article firstly to assess the average number of words per sentence, and secondly the average percentage of long words per sentence. Added together these figures give us the clarity index, which for the previous paragraph would have been: 19:3 average sentence length + 22:4% long words = 41:7.

Using this variation of Gunning’s approach, the optimal clarity score for a piece of written work intended for a professional audience is between 30 and 35. As the score approaches 40, the message will begin to suffer from “interference” caused by lack of clarity.
Results

Before conducting the sample, the authors’ first thoughts were that academic writers would tend towards a higher index than the marketers. Oddly enough the sample showed little distinction between the two groups. Considering academics first; their range of scores goes from a lowest of 32.5 (in JMM) to the highest of 59 (also in JMM). The mean score for the whole sample was 45.7.

For the marketers, the lowest index was 33.5 (EJM) and the upper index was 57 (also EJM), with the mean score for this sample being 44.5. These results suggest that both academics and marketers could communicate their ideas more clearly via academic journals. The sample also showed no significant difference in the index for different journals. So clarity appears to vary with the individual writing, not with the academic journal they are writing for; or the side of the academic/practitioner fence they sit on.

One question that these results prompt is, “Do contributors adopt a verbose style because they are writing for academic journals?” To explore this, the authors checked the clarity of writing in journals aimed at practitioners. The sample was repeated using articles written by academics and practitioners, published during 1988 and 1989 in Marketing Business and Marketing Week. The articles were typically of shorter length, and had a range of clarity scores from 33.5 to 43, with a mean score of 37.6.

These results suggest two key points:

(a) Marketing academics and practitioners can and do vary the clarity of their writing depending on the channel they are using, and the audience they are targeting.

(b) Communication among marketing academics and practitioners could be made clearer in both types of journal.

Why Are We So Unclear?

The results of this sample prompt the question, why does our writing tend to lack clarity? Several writers have suggested possible causes of unclear writing. Drucker (1970) does not see a lack of clarity as a problem in itself, but as a symptom of unclear thinking. He suggests that a complex sentence reveals that the idea it is trying to express has not been clearly thought out. Improving clarity in his view, is about re-thinking rather than re-writing.

Gunning (1962) thinks that lack of clarity is often caused by our desire to impress. he states, “The temptation to write in such a way as to show that you are an engineer, a chemist or an accountant (and presumably a marketer or academic) is almost irresistible. Each profession and trade has its ‘professional’ jargon that clogs the paths of communication and fogs understanding.”

This point is developed further by Becker (1986), who identifies the use of an “academic” writing style as reflecting the elitism and hierarchy of academia. He suggests that, “The arcane vocabulary and syntax of stereotypical academic prose clearly distinguish lay people from professional intellectuals . . . Learning to write like an academic moves students towards membership in that elite.” Hertz (quoted in Becker 1986) sees this “elitist” writing as a deliberate method of keeping knowl-
edge within academic circles. She suggests, "Academic writing is not English but written in shorthand that only members of the profession can decipher. . . . I think it is a way to . . . maintain group boundaries of elitism. Ideas are supposed to be written in such a fashion that they are difficult to understand. This is scholarly writing." According to Mills (1959), "lack of ready intelligibility (in scholarly writing) I believe, usually has little or nothing to do with the complexity of the subject matter, and nothing at all with the profundity of thought. It has to do almost entirely with certain confusions of the academic writer about his own status . . . Desire for status is one reason why academic men slip so easily into unintelligibility." Mills concludes with the neat summary that "To overcome the academic prose, you have first to overcome the academic pose."

Implications for Marketing

If marketing ideas are not being communicated clearly, what does this mean for the future of marketing? Firstly, good ideas may reach the journals, but go unnoticed or be misunderstood because they are written in a complex and impenetrable way. Secondly, marketers may be put off reading or writing for academic journals because of their "academic" style and language. The shortage of practitioner articles within these journals was certainly evident in our sample. These are more likely to appear in the more journalistic press, which prefers shorter, simpler articles. This segregation can become a self-reinforcing process; where academics and marketers end up talking among themselves through their respective journals.

Academics have a key role to play in the future development of new marketing concepts and tools. But it is marketers who have to put these new ideas into practice. For marketing to move forward, marketers' needs and opinions need to be fed back to academics, who can then develop and contribute new ideas to aid marketers. Our survey suggests that the language and writing style we use in trying to communicate these ideas may be acting as a lock which keeps people away from them, rather than as a key which opens them up to all.

Scott (1986) notes that where writing has an average sentence length of over 28 words, over 80% of the population could not follow it readily. The editorials in the Times for example, generally have an average sentence length of only 26–28 words. The majority of our sample of academic journals were articles averaging over 28 words per sentence. This means that academics may be screening-out part of their potential audience by their writing style. In applying his index to magazines, Gunning found that people rarely pay to read material with a score of over 30 on our index.

Marketing academics strongly promote the concepts of customer service and good communications. However, if we think in terms of marketing ideas as a product, and marketers as the customers, it is clear that academics are not practising what they preach. People prefer to read material which doesn't contain too many long words, long complex sentences or jargon. This is not what they get.

In order to move towards a better flow of ideas between academics and practitioners, several steps could be taken. Firstly, academics and practitioners could find more common ground on which to meet and exchange ideas. The AMA suggests that conferences could be planned and promoted to attract both parties, and include special themes for joint practitioner/academic papers. Secondly, there is scope for a new or existing journal to become a better channel between academia
and industry. An existing journal could re-position itself away from the traditional academic article and book review format to include more items from, or of specific interest to, marketers. If marketers could respond to articles through letters or commentaries in journals, we could move towards the sharing and response involved in real communication. A new journal could also be set up to form a bridge, such as the AMA's call for a "Harvard Business Review" for marketing. Lastly, academics and practitioners could put more effort into communicating their ideas with greater clarity.

**Developing Clarity**

Of course there is more to good, clear communication than using concise sentences and short words. Clarity (in the technical sense) does not give any guarantees of coherence. It is possible to write nonsense in a short and snappy fashion. Several other factors need attention to ensure that a writer's message comes over clearly (Munter 1987, Gunning 1962, Sigband 1976) including: (a) using words which are appropriate and consistent; (b) structuring the message well (this includes grouping ideas logically into common themes and using sub-headings as "signposts"); (c) ensuring the text is clearly laid out and presented—underlining, bold typeface or italics can make key ideas stand out clearly; (d) developing the style of the message to suit the target audience and medium; and (e) avoiding jargon or abbreviations which may be unclear to some readers.

Describing all the elements that make up good, clear writing is beyond the scope of this article. Gunning, however, produced a good summary:

1. Keep sentences short on average.
2. Use the simple rather than the complex.
3. Select familiar words.
4. Avoid unnecessary words.
5. Use active not passive sentences.
6. Write in a natural style, close to your style of speech.
7. Relate your writing to readers' experiences and use terms they can picture.
8. Keep your writing varied.
9. Write to express, not to impress.

For those who feel inspired to find out more, the work of the authors mentioned above is worth reading, along with that by Gowers (1954), Zinsser (1980) and Elbow (1981).

**Clarity Versus Style**

Many people feel that there is something of a trade-off between clarity and style in writing. A nice example of this is provided by Munter (1987) who suggests, "A professor might think it sounds more academic to say 'Realization has grown that the curriculum or the experience of learners changes and improves only as those who are most directly involved examine their goals, improve their understanding, and increase their skill in performing the tasks necessary to reach newly defined goals. This places the focus upon teacher, lay citizen, and learner as partners in curricular improvement and as the individuals who must change, if there is to be a curriculum change'—instead of—'If we are going to change the curriculum, teachers, parents, and students must all help.'"
Although "The cat sat on the mat." is clear and functional, it is also rather lacking in style. Obviously something so "clear" can sound disjointed and uninteresting to the point where the message becomes instantly forgettable. On the other hand, long words and convoluted sentences can sound very stylish; and yet produce a message which is hard to grasp and recall. To quote Jean Cocteau "What is style? For a great many people it is a complicated way of saying simple things. From our point of view it is a very simple way of saying complicated things." It is all too easy to assume that clarity and style are mutually exclusive, and that one must choose between them, or compromise at best. This is easy to disprove. A random sample from Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" (for many the best novel ever written), gave a clarity index of only 31.6 (well below the lowest score we encountered among academics or marketers).

A balance is needed to make a written message clear and yet interesting, with a good sense of "flow" to it. There are no hard and fast rules to follow because, as Gunning states, "Instead of rules you (need) principles. For example, it is a good principle to avoid long, involved sentences. On the other hand, there is the principle that readable writing contains much variety. To have all short sentences is monotonous and to have all long sentences would be tiring. So we balance the principles by varying length of sentences—keeping them short on average." To emphasize this point, it is worth noting that the sample from "Anna Karenina", revealed that Tolstoy's sentence length varied widely, from five to 59 words.

In general, people appear to write most clearly by writing much as they would speak. This tends to produce a "natural" sounding style, and gives a reasonably low clarity index, since normal speech averages an index of around 30. A very simple test is to read one's own writing aloud. It will tend to reveal any flaws in the style, and where asphyxiation sets in, the clarity is probably poor.

Conclusions

The idea of tailoring the content of writing to match the needs of readers is not a particularly new one. It has been common practice in journalism and publishing for several years. Publishers change several variables to target different readership segments, including writing style; the length of a passage that readers are expected to digest; and the technicalities of layout and printing. This can be shown by Scott's (1987) summary of the differences between newspapers aimed at broadsheet (Times, Telegraph, Guardian) and tabloid (Sun, Mirror, Star) readerships.

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<th>Broadsheet readership</th>
<th>Tabloid readership</th>
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<tr>
<td>Average sentence length</td>
<td>27 words</td>
<td>16 words</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average paragraph length</td>
<td>3.5 sentences</td>
<td>1.1 sentences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of passive verbs</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Words per editorial</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>225</td>
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<tr>
<td>Layout</td>
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<td>Massive modulation</td>
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<td>Use of different type</td>
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<td>Change of case, bold, stars, asterisks and underlinings</td>
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The need for good, clear communication has never been greater than today, in
the age of the information explosion. Marketers face a daily barrage of new facts, figures and ideas. This makes it vital for those trying to get their message through to them to communicate clearly. Despite its importance, the role of communication is often taken for granted, and not only within marketing. Fielden (1964—quoted by Munter 1987) states that, "billions of dollars are spent in US industry on written communications . . . by contrast the amount of thinking and effort that goes into improving the effectiveness of business writing is tiny. . . . By executives' own vote, no aspect of a manager's performance is of greater importance to his success than communication, particularly written communication. By the facts, however, no part of business practise receives less formal and intelligent attention." In talking about taking things for granted, it is worth noting that the AMA study was into "developing, disseminating, and utilizing marketing knowledge": the word "communicating" does not appear.

The point of this article is to make marketing academics and practitioners think again about how clearly they communicate their ideas. For academics this is important because of what the AMA refers to as their "leadership role in the application of publicly available knowledge to improve marketing performance . . . through published books and articles." It would also seem to be important because our survey shows that new ideas are not being put across very clearly at present. There is really no excuse for poor communication among marketing academics and practitioners, since communicating with clarity is simply meeting the needs of the customer.

Improving the clarity of your writing does not mean having to calculate and improve your clarity score as you write. Having been introduced to the basic principles, it is very easy to scan a first draft looking to make simple adjustments such as, (a) splitting very long sentences into two, (b) replacing several words with one (e.g. the authors found they had written "through the means of" when "via" would have done), (c) replacing a long complex word with a short simple one.

Writing an article criticizing how articles are currently written is probably a suicidal thing to attempt. It would be very easy for the un receptive reader to use every weakness in the way this article is written, as a reason to ignore its central message. This would be a pity since our research suggests that most people who contribute to journals would benefit from thinking about the clarity of their writing.

To repeat Drucker's (1973) words, "The so-called communicator, the person who emits the communication, does not communicate. He utters. Unless there is someone who hears, there is no communication. There is only noise."

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