

OPEN TO PERSUASION

Getting the message across.

When First Sport say they are 'First for replica shirts', we know instantly what they are offering and to whom.

When 20th Century Fox ask 'If you had the opportunity, would you?', we know what Unfaithful is about.

A single minded offer is essential when you have so little time to get your message across. Your advertisement has to stop readers in their tracks but, having got their attention, you need to tell them instantly what you are offering. If you don't, they will turn the page.

The National Gallery tells us exactly what's in the tin: 'Golden Opportunity – free events to celebrate the Golden Jubilee'. The Theatre Museum, however, have so many different things to tell us about that the overall message is one of confusion (particularly because the ad has a subheading 'Free entry' above some ticket prices). This advertisement doesn't tell readers what they need to know – what The Theatre Museum is about and what kind of experience they might expect. The Natural History Museum's ad certainly catches the eye as it hoovers up the text on the page. But the copy line that makes the all important offer, 'Play with the forces of nature', is tucked away in tiny type at the foot of the page.

The Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park offers us 'Evenings of pure pleasure', Opera North promise 'A bloody good night out', My One and Only will make you 'Glad to be alive' and the Royal College of Art is 'Open for inspiration'. But

other ads seem to be saying 'This is on, take it or leave it'.

A single minded offer also increases the effectiveness of leaflets and brochures. Why pop into Islington's libraries? Because they have '100 extra books every week'. Why go to the Edinburgh Rush? Because it's 'A new festival, by Edinburgh, for Edinburgh, in Edinburgh'. Why

Some I interviewed talked of reading their brochures on the loo because it was the only peace and quiet they got. They skim their copy glancing at images and headlines that stand out. They make a mental shortlist of events that interest them and then go back to read more about those events – and only those events. Everything else is instantly forgotten.

go to the International Children's Theatre Festival? Because it offers 'The best children's theatre the world has to offer'. Why get involved with The Dance House? Because it promises you 'great teachers', a 'friendly atmosphere' and a 'wide range of classes' (although it's not until

page 4 that they tell you it's in Glasgow).

Research commissioned by Eastern Touring Agency showed that potential audiences sent a dummy season brochure couldn't remember what was in it unless something about the event or performers was familiar. Why? Because most readers have very little free time. Some I interviewed talked of reading their brochures on the loo because it was the only peace and quiet they got. They skim their copy glancing at images and headlines that stand out. They make a mental shortlist of events that interest them and then go back to read more about those events – and only those events. Everything else is instantly forgotten.

In a venue brochure, a title like Running Girl by a company like Boilerhouse will only attract the attention of enthusiasts who have seen them before. Many potential audience members will miss them off their shortlist. But Boilerhouse have added a bold headline to their copy that makes a single minded offer:

In the time it takes to bleed to death...
A speed-crazed thriller, cinema made flesh

And become instantly memorable.

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