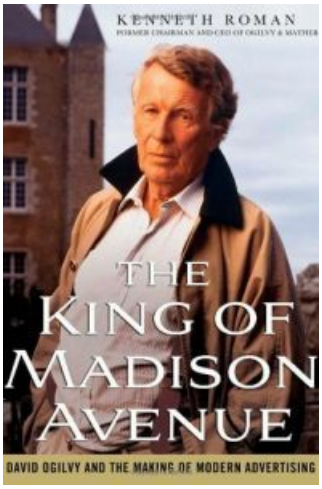

Book The King of Madison Avenue

David Ogilvy and the Making of Modern Advertising

Kenneth Roman
Palgrave Macmillan, 2010
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Recommendation

Author and adman Kenneth Roman worked for and with David Ogilvy for a quarter century at Ogilvy's groundbreaking ad agency Ogilvy & Mather. Thus, Roman is uniquely placed to understand Ogilvy in the context of his time and achievements. He presents Ogilvy's life and work, and explains what both meant at the time and now. Despite some unevenness in Roman's writing style and information flow, Ogilvy emerges as a singular hero in this saga of eccentricity, perseverance and native genius. *BooksInShort* recommends this fast, insightful book to those who write advertising, those who want to, and those interested in the history of advertising and popular culture.

Take-Aways

- David Ogilvy saw himself as an outsider, struggled as a student, was expelled from Oxford, failed as a chef – yet he succeeded in revolutionizing the world of advertising.
- In 1948, at 39, Ogilvy moved to New York to launch his advertising agency. He had never written an ad.
- In tandem with George Gallup, Ogilvy was a pioneer of scientific market research.
- He worked as an analyst for British Intelligence during World War II and helped set up America's first spy service, the Office of Strategic Services.
- After WWII, Ogilvy launched the ad agency that would become Ogilvy & Mather.
- He popularized the concept of the "Big Idea," and his biggest marketing idea was that nothing matters as much as a brand.
- He saw every ad as "part of the long-term investment in the personality of the brand."
- O&M became famous for its clever, boundary-breaking, cutting-edge ads, including campaigns for Helena Rubinstein and Hathaway Shirts.
- His bedrock rule: "The heart and guts of every ad" is its "basic selling proposition."
- Ogilvy's operating philosophy was clear: "We treat our people like human beings."

Summary

"The Big Idea"

David Ogilvy came to New York City to launch his advertising agency in 1948. He was 39 and had never written an ad. Five years later, trade magazines sang his praises, and five years after that, he became "the most discussed and publicized adman in a generation." His fame reached beyond America and his native United Kingdom; he was well known in Europe, India and South Africa. Widely credited with launching the primacy of brands, he became a brand himself.

"If Ogilvy came to America for lucre, he found other things, including a family and a fully formed view of advertising."

Ogilvy broke many traditions on Madison Avenue, among them the unspoken restrictions that limited Jews to jobs with certain agencies and clients. He had his own style of communication, either talking nonstop or nodding. Ogilvy produced memos after every meeting and though he avoided confrontation, these missives could be very stern. He popularized and lived by the "Big Idea," and his most enduring Big Idea was that nothing in marketing mattered as much as a brand.

An Early Outsider

David Mackenzie Ogilvy was born in 1911 on his father and grandfather's birthday, June 23, and grew up in West Horsley, in Surrey near London. In an England where breeding determined fate, Ogilvy's paternal line was Scottish and his maternal family was Irish. Ogilvy referred to himself as a "Celt, not an Anglo-Saxon." From an early age, he branded himself an outsider.

"Before he was finished, this immigrant Englishman would improbably rewrite many of the rules of Madison Avenue and become a brand unto himself."

When his aristocratic family fell on hard times, Ogilvy became a scholarship student at a Dickensian boarding school, St. Cyprian's, his father's alma mater. One day, the headmistress publicly humiliated Ogilvy for wanting a peach since she saw such fare as too extravagant for scholarship boys. He performed terribly at the school and escaped at age 13 to the relative haven of Fettes, a school near Edinburgh. With its Gothic architecture, "pinnacles, gables, buttresses and gargoyles, it is said to be the model for Hogwarts School...in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books." Though comfortable there, Ogilvy proved a mediocre student; he was easily distracted, undisciplined and bad at sports. Years later, addressing Fettes' student body, Ogilvy said: "Fellow duds, take heart! There is no correlation between success at school and success in life."

"Ogilvy brought salesmanship and good taste together for the first time in American advertising."

Owing to a family connection, Ogilvy entered Christ Church, a college at Oxford University in 1929. His family's financial desperation forced him to take an exam to qualify for a scholarship. Ogilvy found himself still distracted at university. He switched his course of study and finally, in 1931, suffered the indignity of being "sent down" – he was expelled from Oxford.

Paris and Francis

After wasting a year attempting to succeed as a chef in Paris, Ogilvy turned to his older brother Francis – Ogilvy's bête noire, sponsor, mentor and rival. Unlike David, Francis was a star athlete and scholar, a natural charmer at ease in the world. He had all the qualities David yearned for and lacked. Francis secured a position for David at Mather & Crowley, a venerable London advertising agency where Francis was enjoying a rapid rise. Given his culinary background, David's first job was selling the revolutionary Aga Cooker. His extraordinary success led the agency to assign him to write Aga's sales guide. "The Theory and Practice of Selling the Aga Cooker" was the first glimpse of Ogilvy's marketing genius. He once said of that time: "At 25 I was brilliantly clever...I have learned nothing new in the subsequent...years."

"Advertising had to be judged on its ability to sell rather than entertain."

Ogilvy became an account executive in 1938. The firm sent him ("in steerage") to the US to study advertising. He immediately fell in with well-placed company, and he even spent weekends at the home of Alexander Woollcott, a founding member of the Algonquin Round Table and one of the day's foremost wits and hosts. Ogilvy went back to England anxious to relocate to America.

George Gallup and Hollywood

Ogilvy began his US career in Hollywood, California, working for the seminal pollster George Gallup. Together, Ogilvy and Gallup offered the movie studios an innovative service: pretesting movies by polling audiences at screenings. They promised to find out if audiences knew about a film prior to its release and to determine which movie stars people adored and which ones were box office poison. From 1939 to 1942, Ogilvy was Gallup's point man in Hollywood, writing numerous reports and changing the face of the movie business. Though it's regarded as a more recent insight, Ogilvy's research determined that "people under 30 bought 65% of all tickets, and people under 20 accounted for half of that number." Ogilvy's time with Gallup made him both a pioneer of and a great believer in scientific market research.

War

In 1942, newly married to Melinda Graeme Street, with whom he fathered a son (his only child, though he married twice more), Ogilvy joined British military intelligence. His boss, Sir William Stephenson, was a dashing figure, the model for Ian Fleming's fictional spy, James Bond. Ogilvy's asthma and weak constitution rendered him ineligible for combat, but he proved a natural-born intelligence analyst. Ogilvy studied "economic information" about Latin America and potential Nazi economic allies there. He utilized his polling experience to generate American popular support for England. Working at the British Embassy in Washington, DC, Ogilvy helped the US establish its first spying agency, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). He wrote little about his time as a spy and, uncharacteristically, never bragged about it.

Back to Advertising

After the war, Ogilvy bought a farm in the Amish country near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Fond of the simple – no electricity, no internal combustion – farming lifestyle of the Amish, Ogilvy lived as a gentleman farmer, renting out his land, growing tobacco and attempting to live a quiet life. He soon learned that the quiet life was not for him and returned to New York.

"Build the advertisement to the simplest possible structure with the fewest possible bricks."

In 1946, Crawley & Mather made Ogilvy their US sales representative. As C&M's rep, Ogilvy wrote his well-known "'Thirty-Nine Rules' for headlines, body copy, illustrations, layouts and use of humor." His bedrock dictum: "The heart and guts of every ad" is its "basic selling proposition. Everything else is mere technique."

> "Brands took on greater importance as products became increasingly similar."

September 1, 1948, Ogilvy launched his new agency Hewitt, Ogilvy, Benson & Mather, Inc. At his own behest, Ogilvy became second-in-command. He knew he was best at pure thinking and client relations, and he did not want the day-to-day grind or accounting responsibility of heading the agency. Instead, his titles included research director, secretary and treasurer. Ogilvy put $6,000 into the start-up, the smallest amount of all the investors.

> "The consumer is not a moron. She is your wife. Don't insult her intelligence."

Ogilvy's first hugely successful Big Idea was for Guinness beer. The agency then attracted Sunoco Oil and Chase National Bank. Ogilvy scored an individual coup by charming the legendarily difficult makeup queen, Helena Rubinstein. She insisted on holding meetings from her bed and was fierce in her criticisms. After Ogilvy created an ad for her that brought in 12 months' worth of business in three weeks, Rubinstein remained his client for 16 years, until she retired when she was 90 years old.

"The Man in the Hathaway Shirt"

Hathaway, a small shirt company, had never advertised. With one Big Idea, Ogilvy made Hathaway an enduring national brand. The idea was a "middle-aged mustached man" standing tall in a Hathaway shirt. The man wore a black eye patch. In every ad, Ogilvy wove a different tale of mystery and adventure around "The Man in the Hathaway Shirt." The ad, said Ogilvy, "made Hathaway instantly famous. Perhaps more to the point, it made me instantly famous, too."

Rules

Ogilvy adhered to a straightforward formula for advertising graphics, one so widely copied it became an industry standard: Always use large photographs and never use original art. Place a short caption under the photo and under that, run three columns of type, always in dark type on a light background, and never in the reverse.

> "When I write an ad, I don't want you to tell me you find it 'creative.' I want you to find it so persuasive that you buy the product – or buy it more often."

Ogilvy refused all clients he disliked. After his Rubinstein success, Charles Revson of Revlon tried to hire the firm. Finding him unlikable, Ogilvy turned him down. He dumped Thom McAn Shoes because he felt the company treated its employees poorly. Ogilvy would hire only "gentlemen with brains" and insisted on mannerly conduct. He became more convinced of the primacy of the brand and saw every ad as "part of the long-term investment in the personality of the brand." His other maxims included "Content is more important than technique" and, in terms of using television, "What you show...is more important than what you say." His most basic philosophy remained: "Don't compromise. Be strong...Go the whole hog."

Rolls Royce

Advertising giant Leo Burnett regarded Ogilvy's Rolls Royce campaign as "not only the best automobile ad but perhaps the best ad of all time." Utilizing Ogilvy's signature graphic design, the headline leapt out beneath a glamorous photo of a Rolls Royce: "At 60 Miles an Hour the Loudest Noise in This New Rolls-Royce Comes from the Electric Clock."

> "The triumph of 'Confessions' lifted Ogilvy above most of his peers in to the company of the small group of thought leaders in advertising...thinkers as well as practitioners, who led with their vision and insights."

In 1957, Ogilvy abruptly left Melinda and soon married Anne Flint Cabot. He moved with Anne and her children to an Upper East Side brownstone that became a social center for cultural, advertising and media figures. In 1963, to his shock and that of many other people, Ogilvy's autobiography, *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, became "the best-selling advertising book of all time," selling more than 1.5 million copies. Advertising professors still use it as a textbook.

> "Herta said that living with [Ogilvy] was like living from one storm to the next."

The agency, renamed Ogilvy & Mather, continued to flourish, winning every possible award and gaining larger and more lucrative clients. Ogilvy took the firm public and made a small fortune from his stock. In 1965, upon his election to the Copywriters Hall of Fame, Ogilvy proclaimed: "I detest awards except when I win one." In 1967, he was named a Commander of the British Empire. This award ranks just below a knighthood, which Ogilvy always wanted and never received. Also in 1967, Ogilvy purchased the Château de Touffou in France's Loire Valley. He told Anne about the château after he bought it. She visited briefly; he stayed as much as he could, supervising renovations. In 1973, their 16-year marriage ended. Ogilvy semiretired to his château, where he continued writing his daily memos, referring to himself in exile as "The Holy Spook."

Semiretirement

Ogilvy married Herta Lans de la Touche in 1973. She and her children moved to the château and led an active social life. During their first year in residence, "348 guests stayed at least two nights." Ogilvy traveled extensively and wrote. He worked on the World Wildlife Fund, but found its royal patron, England's Prince Philip, intolerable. Prince Philip reciprocated the feeling, and that animosity might have been the main reason Ogilvy never received a knighthood.

> "Ogilvy's goals were wildly ambitious: nothing less than to change the advertising business."

The age of supermergers swept through the advertising world. The English agency Saatchi & Saatchi bought several US agencies. As other American agencies merged among themselves to avoid takeovers, Ogilvy snorted contemptuously, "Megamergers are for megalomaniacs." Talk of a purchase of Ogilvy & Mather fueled a rise in its stock in 1987. After an 18-day battle, Ogilvy shocked his firm by advocating selling it to the WPP Group. Ogilvy told his colleagues, "I'm hard up. I've mismanaged my money. I have a castle and a young wife, and I need the money." The sale ended Ogilvy & Mather's reign. Ogilvy did not profit as much as he had hoped; he'd sold

most of his stock prior to the sale. By 1997, "Alzheimer's had taken over," and "the mind" that launched the Big Idea had faded away. David Ogilvy died at his château in 1999, at the age of 88.

Principles

Ogilvy's operating principles were clear: "We treat our people like human beings." He hated "ruthlessness," "superficiality," "hierarchical bureaucracy or rigid pecking orders," and "office politicians, toadies, bullies and pompous asses." He admired those "who work hard," have "gentle manners," and "are honest...in argument, honest with clients...and honest with the company."

About the Author

Kenneth Roman worked with David Ogilvy at Ogilvy & Mather. Roman co-wrote *How To Advertise* and *Writing That Works*.