



He's told this lovely story so many times, confesses LUCIAN CAMP that, to be honest, he's beginning to wonder if he may have made it up.

It's the best mailshot I've ever received

Over the years, whenever I've been asked to say anything on the subject of "engaging" consumers with financial services, I've always replied by telling the same story.

It's the story of The Best Financial Mailshot I've Ever Received. Or maybe it's just The Best Mailshot I've Ever Received, financial or otherwise – it really is that good.

It all happened a long time ago – so long, in fact, that at the time my job title was still Creative Director, which it hasn't been since 2001 (that point will turn out to be relevant, by the way).

The mailing came from a very small IFA firm, based near my office in Victoria. It aimed to persuade me to fix a meeting to talk about my own financial planning needs, and also about the employee benefits that I and my colleagues were currently receiving.

It came in a plain white DL envelope, and consisted of a three-paragraph letter, typed on the firm's letterhead and signed in ink by the principal. No enclosure, no pictures, no free gifts, no nothing – except those three short paras – and, one other thing: a brilliant headline to draw me in and make me read them.

Before I tell you what that headline said, let's consider a few of the things it didn't say. It didn't say: Is your money working as hard as you do? – probably the grimmest, dullest, corniest of all financial planning headlines. It didn't say: How your firm could benefit from better benefits. It didn't say: No-one plans to fail – but many fail

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to plan. In fact it didn't say any of the stupid, vacuous things that IFA mailings usually say.

It said this: Are other creative directors earning more than you?

Frankly, I've always thought I should end my little story at that point. Because if you can see why that's an irresistibly engaging headline then I've made my point – and, if you can't, then I'm afraid you're not going to get very far with this engagement business.

But since I still have quite a few words in hand, I'll go on. It's a great headline because it expresses the subject the writer wants to talk about – financial plans and employee benefits – in a way which is absolutely personal, relevant and compelling to the reader.

Of course I want to know if my peer group is doing better than me (and, as the letter went on to explain, that's not just a question of salary, it's also a question of pension and other benefits). And of course I want to have a meeting with someone who knows the answer (and, as the letter went on to explain, since the IFA in question specialised in advising people in ad

agencies, he'd been able to build up a detailed report on the state of play).

The story usually ends with me agreeing to meet the bloke, and asking him out of curiosity how well his mailshot had performed for him. "I sent out 50 letters," he tells me, "and you're my 43rd appointment."

But just this once, I'll add an extra ending to the ending, if you see what I mean.

The fact is that over the last ten years or more, I've told this story so often that I've completely forgotten how much of it is actually true, or what actually happened. It may be that it's all true. It may be that it's a total fabrication. Perhaps most likely, it may be that it's half-true – I may have read about a similar mailing, and sexed it up a bit by claiming it had been sent to me.

And that 43-out-of-50 statistic? I'm pretty sure I made that up. But it sounds reasonable, doesn't it, for a proposition as compelling as that?

Anyway. It doesn't really matter. The thing is, I wanted to engage you in what I had to say about engagement. And by telling you a story, by making it interesting and personal, by using a few straightforward devices like a bit of intrigue, and a bit of humour...well, this is the last sentence and, if you're still paying attention, I guess I succeeded.

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