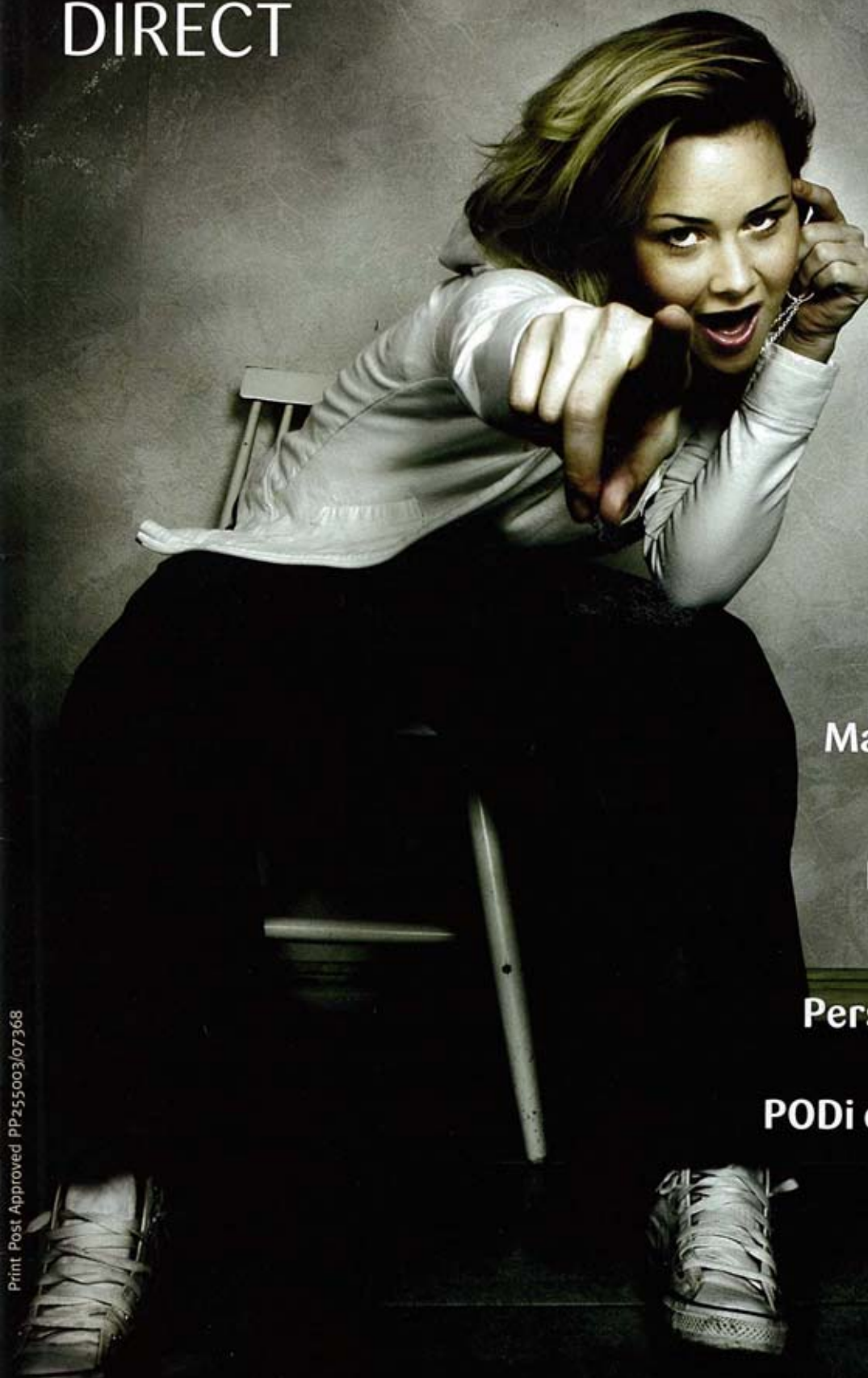# 21
Print in Direct Marketing
DIRECT

Make the connection
VDP languages
for direct marketing

Personalised URLS
Digital snake oil
or next big thing?

Personal plastic cards
Getting into their wallets

PODi comes to Australia
Sydney 16-17 October

Direct Mail vs junk-mail
Respect your customer or pay the price

Beware the
Digital Voodoo

Like the original dotcon, the latest internet gold rush has spawned a new breed of digital spruiker who'll do anything to get marketers to part with their budgets. Typical is the claim that you need specialist *digital* copywriting skills for the internet—skills that of course only binary scribes possess. With due respect, what a load of old bollocks.

Malcolm Auld

There is only one skill needed to write copy for online advertising, website content or email messages. It's the skill known as *copywriting*. And you need to be a *copywriter* to possess it.

What has binary code got to do with copywriting and communications? Next you'll hear claims you need specialists to write copy for ads on the back of toilet doors, or for writing stairway advertisements at railway stations. Or does it mean a digital copywriter is not skilled to write for press, radio, outdoor, television, mail, brochures or other analogue media?

One of the biggest shortages in the marketing industry has always been talented and experienced copywriters. In particular, direct response and retail writers—which are the type of writers you need for online advertising and content. The internet is a pure direct marketing channel, as every ad and much of the editorial content seeks to get readers to click-through and respond in some way. So your writer needs to know how to use words to make this happen—not an easy task in any media.

And, as it has been for decades, the copywriter adapts the content to the medium. Because internet users are likely to scan web pages and emails (miraculously in the same way they scan printed newsletters, mail, press ads and articles) the writer must use headlines, sentence and phrase structure, cross-heads, sub-heads, indents, bold type, bullet points, layout and other techniques to attract and keep the attention of the reader.

As key word density becomes even more important for site optimisation, real old-fashioned copywriting skills are going to become more essential. It's not easy writing a comprehensible paragraph when your keywords have to represent 15 percent of the content.

If you subscribe to any professional copywriters' email newsletters you'll discover that many of them produce their newsletters in text format. They publish them with serif fonts and often many pages long. They do this because they know their craft and they conduct tests. They discovered for example that content published as text can often work better than HTML for newsletters and email messages. That's because often their readers print the newsletters to be read and stored as hard copy, or because text formatting is regarded as more personal.

I recently saw a test where the text version of a newsletter achieved over 320 percent higher response rate than the identical newsletter delivered as HTML.

But ask any alleged digital copywriter about testing and you'll likely receive a blank stare—they've never done copy or creative tests. To quote David Ogilvy, "they haven't tasted blood". Yet digital marketers perpetuate the claim they possess amazing black magic that poor simple analogue marketers don't understand.

Much of this magical skill, such as HTML programming, is learned in high school these days. And, as far as I can tell, most copywriters of all persuasions already use a digital technology to write their copy—it's called a keyboard.

It seems that getting a *digital expert* to write your copy is like getting a software programmer to write the ads for a new computer brand, or a mechanic to write the brand plan for a new vehicle launch. Why would you risk it?

So beware the digital voodoo and avoid any spruiker who claims mystic digital copywriting powers. Look for copywriters who are experienced in all media, not just online—you'll get much better results and avoid the mumbo jumbo. ●

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