

In 1948, David Ogilvy founded the agency that would become Ogilvy & Mather. Starting with no clients and a staff of two, he built his company into one of the eight largest advertising networks in the world. Today it has 359 offices in 100 countries.

Ogilvy & Mather was built on David Ogilvy's principles: in particular, that the function of advertising is to sell, and that successful advertising for any product is based on information about its consumer.

Adroitly combining the pragmatic with the romantic, Ogilvy's copywriting was at the heart of many of advertising's most famous campaigns, including perhaps the best-known headline ever written for an automobile ad: "At 60 miles an hour, the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock."

His three books, *Confessions of an Advertising Man* (1963), *Blood, Brains & Beer* (1978), and *Ogilvy on Advertising*, provide the basic principles of modern advertising. [[link to specific book pages in Books pop-up](#)]

David Mackenzie Ogilvy was born in West Horsley, England on June 23, 1911. He was educated at Fettes College in Edinburgh and at Christ Church, Oxford (although he didn't graduate).

After Oxford, Ogilvy went to Paris, where he worked in the kitchen of the Hotel Majestic. He learned discipline, management – and when to move on: "If I stayed at the Majestic I would have faced years of slave wages, fiendish pressure, and perpetual exhaustion." He returned to England to sell cooking stoves, door-to-door.

Ogilvy's career with Aga Cookers was astonishing. He sold stoves to nuns, drunkards, and everyone in between. In 1935 he wrote a guide for Aga salesmen (Fortune magazine called it "probably the best sales manual ever written"). Among its suggestions, "The more prospects you talk to, the more sales you expose yourself to, the more orders you will get. But never mistake quantity of calls for quality of salesmanship."

In 1938, Ogilvy emigrated to the United States, where he went to work for George Gallup's Audience Research Institute in New Jersey. Ogilvy cites Gallup as one of the major influences on his thinking, emphasizing meticulous research methods and adherence to reality. During World War II, Ogilvy worked with the Intelligence Service at the British Embassy in Washington. There he wrote enormously, analyzing and making recommendations on matters of diplomacy and security. He extrapolated his

knowledge of human behavior from consumerism to nationalism in a report which suggested "applying the Gallup technique to fields of secret intelligence." Eisenhower's Psychological Warfare Board picked up the report and successfully put Ogilvy's suggestions to work in Europe during the last year of the war.

After the war, Ogilvy bought a farm in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and lived among the Amish. The atmosphere of "serenity, abundance, and contentment" kept Ogilvy and his wife in Pennsylvania for several years, but eventually he admitted his limitations as a farmer and moved to New York.

In 1948, he founded the New York-based ad agency Hewitt, Ogilvy, Benson & Mather (which eventually became Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide), with the financial backing of London agency Mather & Crowther. He had never written an advertisement in his life. Thirty-three years later, he sent the following memo to one of his partners:

Will Any Agency Hire This Man?

He is 38, and unemployed. He dropped out of college.

He has been a cook, a salesman, a diplomatist and a farmer.

He knows nothing about marketing and has never written any copy.

He professes to be interested in advertising as a career (at the age of 38!) and is ready to go to work for \$5,000 a year.

I doubt if any American agency will hire him.

However, a London agency did hire him. Three years later he became the most famous copywriter in the world, and in due course built the tenth biggest agency in the world. The moral: it sometimes pays an agency to be imaginative and unorthodox in hiring.

In his agency's first twenty years, Ogilvy won assignments from Lever Brothers, General Foods and American Express. Shell gave him their entire account in North America. Sears hired him for their first national advertising campaign. "I doubt whether any copywriter has ever had so many winners in a such a short period of time," he wrote in his autobiography. "They made Ogilvy & Mather so hot that getting clients was like shooting fish in a barrel."

In 1965, Ogilvy merged the agency with Mather & Crowther, his London backers, to form a new international company. One year later the company went public – one of the first advertising firms to do so. Soon Ogilvy & Mather had expanded around the world and was firmly in place as one of the top agencies in all regions.

In 1973 Ogilvy retired as Chairman of Ogilvy & Mather and moved to Touffou, his estate in France. While no longer involved in day-to-day operations of the agency, he stayed in touch with the company. Indeed, his correspondence so dramatically increased the volume of mail handled in the nearby town of Bonnes that the post office was reclassified at a higher status and the postmaster's salary raised.

Ogilvy came out of retirement in the 1980s to serve as chairman of Ogilvy & Mather in India. He also spent a year acting as temporary chairman of the agency's German office, commuting daily between Touffou and Frankfurt. He visited branches of the company around the world, and continued to represent Ogilvy & Mather at gatherings of clients and business audiences.

When, in 1989, the Ogilvy Group was bought by WPP, two events occurred simultaneously: WPP became the largest marketing communications firm in the world, and David Ogilvy was named the company's non-executive chairman (a position he held for three years).

At age 75, Ogilvy was asked if anything he'd always wanted had somehow eluded him. His reply, "Knighthood. And a big family – ten children." (His only child, David Fairfield Ogilvy, was born during his first marriage, to Melinda Street. That marriage ended in divorce (1955) as did a second marriage to Anne Cabot. Ogilvy married Herta Lans in France in 1973.)

He didn't achieve knighthood, but he was made a commander of the British Empire in 1967. He was elected to the US Advertising Hall of Fame in 1977 and to France's "Order of Arts and Letters" in 1990. He chaired the Public Participation Committee for Lincoln Center. He was appointed Chairman of the United Negro College Fund in 1968, and trustee on the Executive Council of the World Wildlife Fund in 1975.

David Ogilvy died on July 21, 1999 at his home in Touffou, France.

Ogilvy remains one of the most famous names in advertising and one of the handful of thinkers (Raymond Rubicam, Leo Burnett, William Bernbach, Ted Bates) who shaped the business after the 1920s.