

# THE GARY HALBERT LETTER

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From:  
WAY West of Jewfish Creek

Dear Friend & Subscriber,

Let's hustle our bustles! We've got a brand new year stretching out before us and, if we get moving right now, we can leave everybody else biting the dust!

Say, wait a minute. Do you remember how I said in my November letter that, more often than you would ever believe, a lot of postal workers simply throw your mail away without bothering to try to deliver it? I wonder, did you think I was being a little too paranoid?

I wasn't. I was simply stating the ugly truth. That issue of my newsletter was dated November 1, 1986 and 2-1/2 weeks later on November 18th the little article reproduced below appeared in the Los Angeles Times.

## Postman Convicted of Destroying Mail

*From Reuters*

MINNEAPOLIS - A postman who said he was tired of hauling around stacks of junk mail was convicted Monday of trying to destroy 93 bundles of it.

A federal court jury found Stephen Spoerner, 36, guilty on three counts of destroying mail. He could face up to 15 years in jail and a fine of up to \$750,000.

He was arrested last year when a nursing home janitor found undelivered stacks of advertisements and solicitations dumped in an incinerator.

Postal inspectors said Spoerner dumped the mail three times and undercover agents caught him in the act the third time.

When he was arrested Spoerner said, "I made a bad judgement error.... I only did this on

occasions of heavy mail  
volume.

I told you so. I told you so. Now let's go on to fresh business. Last month I promised you that this month I was going to reveal to you the most powerful and important technique of all when it comes to writing copy. I am now about to keep that promise. As I explain this technique, you will also learn why I said in my DM pitch for my newsletter that the most important element of good writing is physical and not mental.

To begin, I want to tell you about a concept I consider so important that I believe you should write it down or tape it to your desk or shaving mirror or wherever else you are sure to see it nearly every day. Here is that concept:

**More Answers Will Be Found  
Through Movement Than  
Will Ever Be Found Through  
Meditation**

Let me "unpack" that thought a little so you'll be able to see how it applies to writing copy. Most copywriters, when they sit down to work, deliberately try to be creative. They try very hard to be clever. They struggle and struggle to "dream up" an ad or direct mail piece that will make people buy.

No good. This is a very dumb way to go about trying to sell goods and services.

Would you like to know what really separates a world class copywriter (or in-print salesman) from his lesser brethren? It's nothing mysterious. In fact, it's really quite simple: You see, when it comes to copywriting or, for that matter, any type of selling, what really separates the pros from the bums is one simple ingredient and...

**This Ingredient Is The Willingness  
To Become Intimately Involved With Your Market!**

Listen: You can't learn what's going on in the hearts and souls and minds of your customers or prospects by sitting around trying to be clever. No. What you must do, my friend, if you really want to learn how to sell, is you must sally forth and go out amongst them. You need to walk with them, talk with them, eat with them, weep with them, laugh with them and, in general, do whatever you can do to get to know your customers as well as possible. Here are five steps you can take that are guaranteed to make you a far better copywriter (in-print salesman) than anyone who does not take these five steps.

**Step #1:                      Get A Printout Of The Names And Addresses  
   Of Your Customers And Best Prospects  
   And Then Sit Down And Read That Printout**

Doing this will give you a preliminary "feel" for your market. Look at the names of your customers. Are there more women than men or vice versa? Does there seem to be an unusually high percentage of names from a certain ethnic group? Are your customers more likely to be Spanish than Jewish? Or more Jewish than Christian? Do your customers most often use their full names or do they hide behind initials? Look at the addresses. Do your customers tend more to live in urban areas or do they live out in the sticks? Do a lot of the addresses have apartment number or do most of them seem to live in individual one-family houses?

Here's a way to make this little exercise even more illuminating: Get a printout of all the customers who live in a geographic area with which you are familiar. This way your "mind's eye" will be able to see those neighborhoods (if any) where your customers tend to cluster. Do a high percentage of them live in high income areas like Bel Aire or Beverly Hills? Or do most of them seem to live in blue collar neighborhoods? Do many of them live in the slums? Say, by the way, remind me sometime to tell you what Martin Baier (of Old American Insurance) found out when he first did a zip code regression analysis of Old American's customers.

Onward.

**Step #2:****Look At The Mail You  
Receive From Your Customers**

Note: I didn't say read it; I said look at it. And make sure you look at the envelopes along with the letters. Take a few days and look at all the mail they send you including both orders and "white mail." Do most of them use a typewriter or is most of your mail hand-written? Is the stationery imprinted or embossed or do most of them use plain paper and envelopes or maybe those little return address labels? What can you tell by looking at the handwriting? Does a lot of it look like arthritic chicken scratching painfully scrawled by old people on pensions and social security? Or is most of the handwriting clear, firm and strong? How is the postage put on the envelopes? Is it metered or stamped? Does a lot of your mail come stuffed with those little printed religious tracts that are nearly always mailed out by miserable people with pathetic little wet brains?

Do your orders come in the form of cash, money orders or even stamps instead of checks? And speaking of checks, look at those too. Are most of the checks you receive from married people with joint accounts or are most of them only imprinted with one name?

Listen: At this point, don't bother trying to get too analytical or form any precise conclusions about your customers. Just keep pouring over your mail and keep saying "Hmn?" every once in a while. Your focus, at this point, will still be quite fuzzy but let's face it, a fuzzy focus is certainly better than no focus at all, isn't it?

But since it's not good enough, let's press on.

**Step #3:****Now Start Reading Your  
Mail And Start Taking  
Telephone Calls  
From Your Business Customers**

I mean you should do this! Not your secretary or one of your assistants. Put out the word in your organization that you personally want to take (if possible) every customer call and read every letter that comes in for a period of two to three days. Take calls and read letters from people who want to order. Take calls and read letters from people who want more information about your company and your products! Take calls from people who want a refund and, when you take those calls, really talk with them. Ask them questions. What made them buy your product? What made them send it back? What would make them like your products better? Is this the first time they called or the second or third or ninth or tenth?

Want to do something really instructive and profitable? Try this: Spend a week taking telephone orders and, after you take the order, play around with trying to upgrade that order. Find out what works. Will they order more if you give a little gift for multiple orders? Or maybe a discount? Will they pay extra to have the item personalized? How does it work if you say "Buy two and I'll send you a third one free!"?

Consider this: If you read last month's issue, you know that my work and travel schedule is a little on the heavy side. However, if you've ever written me or telephoned my office, you know that I respond to my mail promptly and that I almost always am very happy to talk to anybody who calls. I also accept speaking engagements with considerable regularity.

Why do I do this? Well, you tell me: How in the hell else am I going to know what goes on in all those demented marketing minds with whom I am trying to communicate?

**Step #4:****Start Making  
Telephone Calls  
To Your Customers**

Next, send every one of those customers a personally typed letter with a dollar bill attached to the top of the first page. Tell your customer that you are doing this (attaching the dollar bill) because you have something very important to tell him and you wanted to make sure you caught his attention.

4/6

often the men and women who own their businesses and have had to learn to write copy themselves because they couldn't find a "pro" who could do the job for them. I'm talking about guys like Ben Suarez, Joe Sugarman and Drew Alan Kaplan.

Whatever. I've just given you five very powerful techniques for learning more about your customers and what turns them on and what turns them off. This list is by no means complete. There's a lot of other stuff you can do. You can send out questionnaires (weak but better than nothing); you can hire someone to do a phone survey (sissy-like but somewhat instructive); you can hire a high-priced ad agency to get some of your customers together in a "focus group" (the agency's real focus will be on getting your business rather than selling your goods); or, if you wish, you can simply go back to trying to "dream up" solutions to your marketing problems.

### Three Inspiring Examples

Is getting to know your customers really worth the time and trouble? Listen up. Many years ago, a certain food company (I think it was Pillsbury) came out with an instant cake mix. All you had to do was add milk or water, stir it up a bit, and pop it in the oven. The advertising then was:

#### "We Do It All For You!"

The campaign was a flop. Can you guess why? Probably not. And, almost certainly not unless you understand what goes on in the minds of women who love to bake cakes. Anyway, in this case, what happened is, that the food company decided to hire a very famous (and deservedly so) marketing psychologist by the name of Ernest Dicher. What happened next is that Dicher discovered (by actually talking with the company's customers) that when a woman bakes a cake it is for her an act of creation; it is like giving birth. Therefore, these cake-baking women were turned off by the idea that the "creative process" of baking a cake would no longer require their involvement.

And so, after Dr. Dicher discovered this little golden nugget of insight, the theme of the campaign was changed to:

#### "We Do It Together"

Bingo! Hundreds of millions of dollars in instant cake mix sales!

Another example: Once upon a time, Sir Gary Halbert lost his social security card (I'd lose my nose if it wasn't stuck to my face). When I went to my local social security office to get a new card, I was appalled. Most of the other people in the office were elderly and they were there because their social security checks were late or missing or because they had questions.

I'm telling you, those people were treated like dirt! They were given numbers like supplicants in a bread line, made to come back day after day and, in general, treated like troublemakers instead of tax payers. A few days later I was visiting someone who worked for the Akron Beacon Journal and I was telling him about my experience when he told me something very interesting. He said they used to publish, as a public service, the Social Security form that is called "**REQUEST FOR STATEMENT OF EARNINGS.**" He then informed me that they no longer published that form because too many people filled it out and sent it back to the paper for forwarding to Social Security headquarters. In fact, as I recall, he told me that even when they buried the form at the bottom of page 74 that they got replies from 17% of their circulation!

Which of course caused Gary "The Prince of Print" to sit up and take notice and to promptly write an ad headlined:

#### How To Collect From Social Security At Any Age

The ad had a double coupon. The left half of the coupon was a reproduction of the REQUEST FOR STATEMENT OF EARNINGS which we offered to send to the Social Security headquarters for the customer. The right side of

the coupon was an order form for our book (same title as the headline) which would tell him how to maximize all those benefits he had already paid for.

Did it work? Lordy! Lordy! That ad pulled an average of 35 orders per thousand circulation from almost every newspaper in which it ran. Best of all, that ad made me, Sir Gary "The Ace of Space" \$800,000.00 in net profit.

And ripoffs of that ad are still running today.

What's that? You say, \$800,000.00 is peanuts to you? O.K., Mr. Smarty pants, I'll give you a "big money" example. As you may or may not know, my first successful mail order product was a "Family Name Research Report." This item was a simple 8-1/2 x 11 parchment-like sheet of paper that told you the meaning and origin of your surname and had a line drawing of the family crest that was recorded with that name.

I tried and tried and tried to sell those reports. I wrote letter after letter after letter. Failure. Failure. Failure.

Then I had an idea. I put a bunch of the "Miller Reports" into my briefcase. Then I got out the phone book for Canton, Ohio and I looked up the address of everybody named Miller. Then I went out and knocked on their doors and showed them the reports and got their reactions to this product.

So what happened after this little "field trip"? I'm glad you asked. What happened is I came back and sat down and wrote the most widely mailed (140 million) sales letter in history. And that letter, based in part on the insights gained from my field trip, created more than 7,300,000 customers and built a business that eventually employed some 700 people and did perhaps \$140,000,000.00 in business!

So there.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Halbert  
In-Print Salesman  
The "Ace of Space"  
The "Prince of Print and all-around Bon Vivant

P.S. You know what? I'm getting a little tired of teaching everybody how to do it right so next month under the subject of:

**Does Your High-Priced Ad Agency  
Do Any Of These 10 Stupid Things?**

.... I am going to teach you how to do it wrong!

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