

# Master Copywriter Reveals His Secret Technique for Crafting an Attention-Grabbing Headline

Dear MCG Reader,

One of the great things about reading *Monthly Copywriting Genius* every month is that you get to see the proven techniques that master copywriters use to make millions of dollars for their clients.

This month's copywriting genius shares a technique he's perfected that makes it easy for you to come up with an attention-grabbing headline.

He refers to his technique as an exercise... but who cares what it's called? The point is, it works. It's helped him create controls that have produced stellar results. In fact, the control he shares in this month's issue increased revenue per name by as much as 19% in one version and 68% in the foreign language version.

I'll tell you more about his headline-writing technique in just a minute, but for now, let me introduce you to a copywriter who knows more than a thing or two about producing winning controls.

## **From Odd Jobs to Buying Out His Hometown Newspaper**

Bob Knight's copywriting career began fairly early. He had a few odd jobs, such as driving a cab, working as a shipping/receiving clerk, a secretary and an in-house brochure writer. Yet prior to these jobs, as a teenager, Bob wrote short stories and articles... and sold them to make extra money.

It seems writing has always been a big part of his life. Bob's life-long goal was to become the world's greatest novelist. Yet it wasn't too long before he was hired by an advertising agency.

But even before the agency hired Bob, he worked for his local hometown newspaper doing a little writing and selling ads. Here's what makes this so fascinating: Bob eventually bought the newspaper himself and ran it for four years.

For most people, an endeavor like this would be outright frightening. But Bob already had exposure to being “self-employed.” You see, his parents owned an appliance store. When Bob was about 12 years old, they tried doing a mailing to customers.

The mailing worked like gangbusters. For future mailings, Bob got the job of folding the letters and stuffing them into envelopes. Talk about a world of experience – and at such a young age!

## **His Love of Copywriting Begins**

Bob says his first “real” direct marketing experience began when the Franklin Mint hired him.

His responsibilities included writing the pamphlets that accompanied their collectible medallions and editing other writers’ work in the same area. Bob credits working at the Franklin Mint as his introduction to advertising and DM. While there, he was able to see what the mint’s ad agency was coming up with to sell the collectibles.

Bob adds, “By the way, initially I was horror-struck at what they were writing. Where was the proper grammar? Why was there so much repetition? Why were there initial caps on words that should have been in all small letters? I drove the agency nuts because I didn’t understand the difference between literary writing and copy that sells. I still feel guilty.”

Bob also credits Don Smith, his former creative director, with helping him succeed as a copywriter.

It was while working with Don that Bob wrote an ad for one of Canada’s leading department stores. On the teaser copy of the envelope, Bob wrote, “Only 59% of the people who receive this will bother to open the envelope.”

In the letter, Bob followed with a few more statistics on how many people would read the first paragraph... the second... the third and so on.

Bob didn’t realize that what he had written wasn’t fact-checked or reviewed. The agency liked it so much they printed it as is. But Bob confesses, “I was astounded to hear that the package was already in production... and no one had changed a word. I was also horrified, because I’d made up all the stats! I figured we’d now be charged with false advertising. The client would sue the agency. I’d be fired. My career, I was sure, was over almost before it began.”

As it turned out, the package worked incredibly well. The store had never had so much traffic. And, apparently, all kinds of the people went into the store holding

the DM piece and asked the clerks, “Is it true that only 14% of people get as far as the last paragraph?”

What a lucky break (and learning experience) for Bob! In today’s DM environment, it would be hard for any direct letter to make it all the way through production without someone questioning the statistics the copywriter uses.

Of course, today, whatever copy Bob writes is authentic and true. And his track record for producing winning controls is a reflection of how much he’s learned in his 30-plus years of writing copy.

## **A Technique You Can Use to Make Writing Headlines Easier**

So what exactly does Bob do to create as many controls as he’s produced over the years?

Bob explains, “I read and reread the briefing to drive into my mind what I’m supposed to achieve, who the target audience is and what restrictions there might be (There’s no sense dreaming up some wild and expensive concept if there’s no budget for it.)”

On top of that, Bob looks through the client’s previous mailings and goes through his swipe file, checking out what the competition’s been doing. He also goes to the client’s web site and those of their competitors.

But here’s a technique Bob invented that makes writing headlines a lot easier: He also uses this technique to help him develop the theme of the promotion.

Bob explains his technique; “I’ll often start by writing down a single statement that encompasses the reason for writing about this particular subject, at this particular time to this particular audience. Hemingway once said that, when he was stuck, he’d write one true sentence and the rest of the words would start flowing. And he was right.”

But there’s more to his technique. From there, Bob jots down words and phrases related to the subject matter. It’s during this jotting down of words and phrases that an especially catchy or compelling theme line or headline will appear somewhere on the page.

Bob says, “And somewhere in my mind an invisible creative director will shout, ‘Bingo!’”

This sounds like a very useful technique. Obviously, it works. Bob’s current control for Cancer Research is direct proof.

Bob wrote four versions of the letter for various segments, with three based on psychographic profiles. The version we reviewed this month was written for the more general audience with a profile similar to most donors to charities: older, with a skew towards women.

The package introduced people to the newly established Environment-Cancer Fund. Bob says one of the reasons it worked so well is that it featured actual news, instead of just a typical plea for a donation.

You can read the letter yourself. When you do, you'll see right away what Bob is talking about. You'll also notice that Bob's writing is concise... to the point.

Writing with clarity is one of his trademarks. As Bob says, "On more than one occasion I've produced work that's been tested where the research directors literally couldn't believe the high scores and re-tested at great expense. Now, getting your message across clearly doesn't always ensure record-breaking success, but it rarely spells failure."

In the interview, Bob also gives us some good tips on finding work. You might want to read that section very closely.

Until next month,

Sandy Franks  
Editor, Monthly Copywriting Genius

P.S. As you read the interview, you'll realize that Bob's 30-years in the business have paid off. There's a lot of good information in the interview. Please read it all the way through.

# How to Use Hemingway's "One True Sentence" Technique to Make Your Copy More Powerful

**MCG:** What was your job prior to becoming a copywriter?

**Bob:** I had a few before an ad agency gave me my first copywriting job. My goal had been to become the world's greatest novelist, so – to fund that quest – I'd worked as a cab driver, shipping/receiving clerk, secretary and in-house brochure writer. Later, I did a little writing and ad-selling for a small newspaper in my home town and eventually bought it and ran it for four years. Plus, since the time I was a teenager, I'd been selling some short stories and the occasional article on the side.

**MCG:** The fact that you had your own newspaper is pretty incredible. I'm going to ask this question anyway... although I think I know the answer: Did you know what copywriting or direct response/mail was before you became a copywriter?

**Bob:** I didn't know much about copywriting but I knew about the power of direct mail. My parents owned an appliance store, and when I was about 12, they tried doing a mail-out to customers. It worked gangbusters. For future mailings, I folded the letters and stuffed them into envelopes. That's given me a real appreciation for the job that lettershops do.

But I learned about professional DM at my first writing job, which was with the Canadian division of Franklin Mint. I wrote some of the pamphlets that accompanied their collectible medallions and I edited other writers' work in the same area. I got introduced to advertising and DM by seeing what the mint's ad agency was coming up with to sell the collectibles.

By the way, initially, I was horror-struck at what they were writing. Where was the proper grammar? Why was there so much repetition? Why were there initial caps on words that should have been in all small letters? I drove the agency nuts because I didn't understand the difference between literary writing and copy that sells. I still feel guilty.

**MCG:** Bob, I love everything about your background. Not only did you own your own newspaper, but you understood about direct response from your parent's store. Good stuff here. So, really, your first job copywriting was when you worked at the agency, correct?

**Bob:** Like I said, I had some writing experience, having sold some short stories and children's articles, having written pamphlets for the mint and also having run the weekly newspaper.

At one point I decided that if I were to have a writing career, I needed to focus on it 100%. So I moved to Flin Flon, Manitoba to get away from the big city and write the great Canadian novel. But after a few months I hadn't even succeeded in writing the great Canadian paragraph. Having realized that, I started sending out resumes to newspapers, ad agencies and any other kind of organization that hired writers.

Fortunately, one of my resumes landed on the desk of a top-notch creative director named Don Smith. He offered me a job and I moved to Edmonton, Alberta. And I discovered that I loved the ad business.

### **Training From Two of the World's Best...**

**MCG:** Would you consider yourself self-trained, or did someone help you? Did you have a mentor?

**Bob:** My mother's been a freelance writer since she was a teenager, so she encouraged me and guided me from when I first showed an interest in writing. When I was 13, I had a children's article published, and within a few years, decided that I wanted writing to be my career. She's been behind me all the way. She's now 90 and is still selling articles and features all over the world, thanks to the Internet.

My major influence in advertising and direct marketing was Don Smith, who really showed me the ropes. We still keep in touch regularly.

**MCG:** Let's back up for just a second. How long have you been writing copy?

**Bob:** I've been writing ad and DM copy for about 30 years now.

**MCG:** What was the first project you worked on as a copywriter?

**Bob:** It was a small space ad for a product called "Slip Not," and the objective was to get hotels to use it in their bathtubs instead of rubber bath mats.

I really didn't have a clue how to write an ad for a product like that, so I banged out about a dozen different headlines and concepts and presented them to boss Don. The winner: "Slip Not Stops Slips."

**MCG:** What was the first success you had as a copywriter?

**Bob:** A few days after the Slip Not ad, I was given the assignment of writing a direct mail package for one of Canada's leading department stores.

As the envelope teaser, I wrote, "Only 59% of the people who receive this will bother to open the envelope." I figured that would get everyone to tear into it. On the letter, I ran through a bunch more stats about what percentage of people wouldn't make it past the first paragraph, second paragraph, etc.

A few weeks later, I asked Don what he thought of what I'd written. I figured he'd hated it or he would have said something complimentary earlier, but I wanted even negative feedback in order to learn.

I was astounded to hear that the package was already in production... and no one had changed a word. I was also horrified, because I'd made up all the stats! I figured we'd now be charged with false advertising. The agency would be sued by the client. I'd be fired. My career, I was sure, was over almost before it began.

After hours of stewing, I finally confessed to him, fully expecting him to hit the roof and pink-slip me on the spot. Instead, he just chuckled. "Hey," he said, "who's going to know the difference?"

As it turned out, the package worked incredibly well. The store had never had so much traffic. And, apparently, all kinds of the people had come into the store holding the DM piece and were asking the clerks, "Is it true that only 14% of people get as far as the last paragraph?"

**MCG:** Ok, now that's a story (or confession) for the record books. What copywriter would admit to making up the statistics? That's certainly a memorable project... but is there one project that stands out as your favorite?

**Bob:** I have a number of favorites. How about if I mention two?

### **A Clever Way to Get Yourself Hired...**

**MCG:** We will take as many as you want to give. Please tell us.

**Bob:** I wrote some direct response ads for a company that sells a variety of low-cost items through people who host in-home parties. The campaign beat everything they'd



done for the previous 50 years. But there was something about the assignment much more gratifying than that.

The account exec and I visited the factory and all the workers, in sequence, stopped working to stare at us and then smile and nod as we walked across the floor. It was like that scene from Norma Rae. Apparently they'd been told that we were responsible for the increase in sales. That meant they'd have jobs for the foreseeable future, so they were showing their appreciation.

This next example ensured that *I* would have work in the foreseeable future. I was about to leave my job as the creative director of an agency but didn't have a job lined up. So, on the company letterhead, I wrote to creative directors at other agencies saying, "I don't usually recommend writers to competing agencies but I have to make an exception in this case."

Through the rest of the letter I wrote glowingly of this wunderkind writer and said that I'd enclosed his resume. Then I signed the letter with my title. And whose resume did they find attached? Mine of course. It brought me in a number of job interviews that I never would have had otherwise.

**MCG:** Very clever technique. Sounds like it would work today. Hopefully MCG readers are paying close attention here. Sometimes you have to think outside the box. So that's how you got work then, but how do you drum up clients now?

**Bob:** Most of my work now comes from referrals. But I get some business through the articles that I write for DM publications, through my weekly blog (<http://directmarketingweekly.blogspot.com>), my newsletter and my web site ([www.symbiomarketing.com](http://www.symbiomarketing.com)).

On occasion I'll target a single client or a group of prospects in a particular category and write to them. Usually just a simple letter.

**MCG:** What do you like most about copywriting?

**Bob:** As far as being a copywriter goes, I really like the flexibility. You have the ability to work your own hours and, thanks to email, to live wherever you want.

As far as the task of writing goes, I love creating something out of nothing. After all, no tangible materials go into the writing of a direct mail package. You only have an objective to achieve, a strategy that will help you reach it, some background information, your experience and your imagination. And out of that, you arrange some words in a particular way to motivate people.

### **Why You Should Avoid Humor in Your Sales Letters**

**MCG:** What one thing did you learn (or take away) from a package you wrote that didn't work as well as you had expected or hoped?

**Bob:** I learned early on not to be overly cute or, especially, use humor. I've had great success writing humorous radio spots and print ads. But it only rarely works in direct mail. That's because people aren't being exposed to your message a number of times like with a TV or radio commercial. With the mail, you have one shot at clinching the deal. If you aren't clear about why you're writing and what the recipient needs to do, they won't invest enough time with you.

**MCG:** Was there a moment in your career where you knew you had made – or could make – good money writing copy?

**Bob:** It was probably during my first agency job. Without any experience, I was doing pretty well and the raises kept coming. And it paid better than driving a cab.

## About Methodology

**MCG:** Let's take a few minutes to talk about your methodology. What's the first thing you do when you get an assignment?

**Bob:** I read and reread the briefing to drive into my mind what I'm supposed to achieve, who the target audience is, and what restrictions there might be – there's no sense dreaming up some wild and expensive concept if there's no budget for it. Then I look through the client's previous mailings and, if I have any samples in my swipe file, check out what the competition's been doing. I'll also go through the client's web site and those of their competitors.

If there's time, I then like to leave that project for a few hours at least. When I come back to the assignment, I've usually only retained the relevant info.

**MCG:** What do you need the client to supply you with?

**Bob:** Some of their past mailings and the results. I used to go through their other printed materials too but, nowadays, you just need to check out their website. And if I don't know who their competitors are, I ask about them and will visit their web sites. I also need to know if there's something like an anniversary coming up, or some big news involving the client. And last, but far from least, who's their target audience? Loyal customers or donors? Prospects? Young? Old? Male or female? Any details about what values or beliefs they might hold.

**MCG:** Has a client ever supplied you with too much information? Enough that it bogged the project down or was too overwhelming?

**Bob:** Yes. Sometimes a client will try to be helpful, but in doing so, provides way too much information. That was especially true before websites, and you might be handed a dozen or more brochures and annual reports. I'd usually skim through the material and

pick out the relevant info. But a couple of times I'd return the material, telling the client that they either have to do some editing of it themselves or end up paying me a lot more money than they should.

**MCG:** How do you get to know the target audience?

**Bob:** It's usually up to the client to supply me with information on the audience. And this is a case where you can never have too much information. An excellent DM consultant, Gilles Roy, who hires me a lot, works with a psychographics segmenting company to deliver incredible insights into a target's mindset.

When I've worked for a retail client, I've gone into their store and nosed around, seeing first-hand what their customers are like, what they think of the place, etc.

### **Getting to the Heart of the Promo**

**MCG:** We've covered a lot of ground here on your process. Let's talk about how you come up with the theme or idea for the promotion?

**Bob:** I'll often start by writing down a single statement that encompasses the reason for writing about this particular subject, at this particular time to this particular audience. Hemingway once said that, when he was stuck, he'd write one true sentence and the rest of the words would start flowing. And he was right.

Then the fun part begins... jotting down words and phrases related to the subject matter. Usually an especially catchy or compelling theme line or headline will appear somewhere on the pages during the exercise. And somewhere in my mind an invisible creative director will shout, "Bingo!"

**MCG:** Do you develop the headline first or start with the body copy?

**Bob:** The majority of the time I'll write the headline/Johnson box or envelope teaser first. That's not surprising, because it often contains the essence of the message. And if, before you put pen to paper, you don't know what message you're trying to get across, you're in trouble. Sometimes, though, a good headline will come out in the body copy so I'll use it.

And while we're on the subject, here's some ad trivia for you: Coke introduced "the real thing" as its theme in 1969. But the words first appeared in the body copy of an ad way back in the 1930s. I stumbled across it one day when Coke was a client and I was checking out their history.

**MCG:** What happens when you finish a draft? Do you let it rest for a day or so and then re-read and make edits?

**Bob:** I like to if there's time, or at least let it alone overnight. It's amazing how your brilliant words of Tuesday afternoon don't look quite so magnificent on Wednesday morning.

**MCG:** Do you ever show your copy to another copywriter for comments and suggestions?

**Bob:** Not now. I used to run copy past my creative director-bosses when I worked for agencies. But now that I'm on my own, there's only me, myself and I to pass comment on the copy. And we always think I'm wonderful.

**MCG:** Do you specialize in writing for certain products? If so, which ones?

**Bob:** Until a few years ago, I did a lot of work for financial institutions, telecommunications companies and tourism-related clients, among others. But then I started doing more and more work for non-profit organizations. They've really been dominating my assignment sheets the past few years. But I still do commercial work, too.

## What Makes His Work Stand Out

**MCG:** How would you characterize your style of writing?

**Bob:** If I had to choose one word I'd say it's writing with 'clarity'. On more than one occasion I've produced work that's been tested where the research directors literally couldn't believe the high scores and re-tested at great expense. Now, getting your message across clearly doesn't always ensure record-breaking success, but it rarely spells failure.

**MCG:** Do you make suggestions on what things the client could test on your package, such as alternative headline, lead or offer?

**Bob:** Yes. I'm a testaholic. The problem is, with smaller mailings, there just isn't the budget to invest in testing. That's a shame, because a test can help you make more money and save more in the future.

**MCG:** Nothing wrong with being a testaholic. How about design? How involved are you in the design?

**Bob:** In most cases, I'll have some idea of what might work visually. I'll pass that thought on to the designer but say that if they have something better, to go with it. And they usually do... which is why they're the designer. But I'll often have suggestions about a finished layout, and the designer and I will have some back-and-forth. Sometimes they see it my way; other times I see it their way. The main thing isn't who's right or wrong or who thought of something; it's have we, as a team, succeeded in creating a great package?

**MCG:** If you could divide your work up in parts, how much time do you devote to research, to writing, to editing?

**Bob:** With research, it really depends on the assignment. Sometimes many hours of research are needed. But sometimes I don't need much at all because I've worked on the same kind of project before.

As far as writing and editing are concerned, it's maybe 40% writing the copy for the first time and 60% revising and editing. I'll often do a dozen versions of a letter. Some of the revisions involve whole paragraphs, but most of the editing time is spent changing a word here and there, or breaking up paragraphs in different ways.

Once in a blue moon I'll write a letter, tinker with it, and then realize that it's never going to work. So I'll throw it out and start totally fresh.

**MCG:** How do you figure out all the benefits a product offers? Do you list them out, do you talk with the client, do you use the product yourself?

**Bob:** I'll compile a list based on what the client's told me and add any that I come up with on my own. Then it's a matter of prioritizing them and determining whether it's better to focus on one or to promote the extensive list of benefits. What the competition's doing has a big bearing on which strategy to use.

Of course it's quite a different process when writing fundraising copy.

## **Understanding the Mindset of Online and Offline Readers**

**MCG:** Do you think there is a difference between online prospects and direct mail prospects?

**Bob:** There aren't many differences between the prospects per se, but there's a big difference between the mindset of an online prospect and an offline one. For example, offline, people can be relaxed; online, they're in a hurry.

You can rarely go wrong striving for short words, short sentences and short paragraphs when writing direct mail copy. But when you're writing to an online audience, in 95 cases out of 100, you really have to keep everything short. For one thing, people online won't give you the time. For another, a computer screen is much more difficult to read than a printed page.

### **Special Tips and Techniques for Boosting Response**

**MCG:** Do you have any special tips or techniques for boosting response?

**Bob:** There are so many, it really depends on the situation. If you're writing a lead generation piece, keep the copy short; if you're actually selling through the mail, write long copy. If you're promoting a low-priced item you can use hype; if it's a high-end product it's usually best to take a quieter approach. If you're writing fundraising copy, touch people's hearts more than their minds.

A few years ago I developed a methodology that I've trademarked as *SymbioMarketing*® and it's really worked well. In fact, it's the centerpiece of my website.

**MCG:** Well let me just stop here and ask MCG readers to visit your website and check out *SymbioMarketing*. But I don't want to get too far off topic here, so let me ask you this: Is there a special thing you do to come up with headlines for your projects?

**Bob:** I kind of addressed this earlier in the interview. Once I have all the relevant info in my head, I start jotting down words and phrases that relate to the project at hand. It's really free-associate time at this point. Then I sit back and read what's on the page(s). Usually one or two words or phrases jump out. If not, I take a break, and then repeat the process.

**MCG:** Is there ONE thing that every package you write always has?



**Bob:** A letter. Yes, self-mailers can work in certain situations but they're not 'packages'. It always amazes me when I receive a direct mail package stuffed with a brochure and maybe other inserts, but no letter... because the letter is what carries the most compelling sales message and the call to action.

**MCG:** How do you build credibility for the product?

**Bob:** Testimonials are great, especially for appealing to the target's heart. And independent research stats do a good job of addressing the mind's needs. In neither case, though, do they do the selling. They just reinforce the conclusion that the reader makes after reading the sales message. They help them rationalize the purchase decision they're about to make.

**MCG:** How do you stay in touch with the marketplace?

**Bob:** I read consumer magazines and newspapers, and watch movies and TV shows to keep in tune with the public and its tastes. When it comes to writing for a business audience, I'll try to read a couple of the publications they tend to read. The idea is to walk a mile in the target audience's shoes so you can "talk" like you're one of them.

### **About The Cancer Research Promo**

**MCG:** Can you describe the target audience to us?

**Bob:** I wrote four versions of the letter for various segments. Three were based on psychographic profiles. The sample I sent you wasn't; it was written for the more general audience with a profile similar to most donors to charities: older, with a skew towards women. But CRS donors tend to be a little more rational than typical donors; they don't respond as well to highly emotional appeals.

And, of course, the recipients consider cancer research to be important (Obviously. That's why they're CRS donors.).

**MCG:** How familiar were you with this target audience?

**Bob:** Fairly familiar. I'd written to them on a number of occasions, checking response rates to learn what kinds of things they respond to best.

**MCG:** What's the dominant emotion needed to appeal to this group?

**Bob:** I'd say "hope." The hope that research will lead to more people being able to prevent cancer and to more people being cured of it.

**MCG:** How aware is the audience of the Environment-Cancer Fund and did you have to overcome the hurdle of this being such a new program?

**Bob:** This package introduced people to the newly established Environment-Cancer Fund. It was featured on the web site ahead of the mailing, but most recipients wouldn't have known about it.

**MCG:** Would the letter be more effective if it were longer... to describe the fund in more detail or is shorter better for this audience?

**Bob:** A longer letter might have been worthwhile testing, but we were already testing writing the kind of letter I did against ones written to specific psychographic profiles.

Given the choice of longer or shorter, I opted for shorter for a couple of reasons:

- Two-page letters had proven effective with this group
- It would have been riskier writing something like a four-pager; they might not have been all *that* interested in the Fund.

- Plus, if someone wanted more info, they just had to visit the website.

**MCG:** Why not use sub-heads to break up the copy, as opposed to the star-like lines that separate pieces of copy?

**Bob:** I've used subheads probably hundreds of times in the past, but I was looking for a unique way to break up the copy this time. The original Johnson Boxes used to employ asterisks so I decided to adapt part of that technique as a way to make the letter look like something different from what we usually send. When using "Knight Trains" the paragraphs work together differently... less fluid and more like a mosaic.

I was disappointed to see how the letter was set up, though. I'd wanted there to be a line or two of copy after the last train on the first page.

**MCG:** Are the names mentioned in the letter - Melanie Doane and the Guzzo family - known to this audience?

**Bob:** Melanie Doane is a well-known singer in Canada who's been recording for about 15 years and has won a number of Canadian awards. The Guzzos are well-known in Quebec, where a lot of CRS donors reside. But I'm sure there were many people who heard the name "Guzzo" for the first time in the letter. But it didn't really matter whether they knew of the family or not. The main thing was that someone thought so highly of the fund, they were willing to cough up a lot of money.

**MCG:** What emotion were you appealing to in this letter?

**Bob:** Hope, coupled with enthusiasm: "Hey, we have this great new fund to look into new ways to prevent cancer. It could result in some valuable discoveries. So be part of it and donate today."

## **How to Combine Direct Mail and the Web**

**MCG:** Were you concerned about readers leaving the letter and exploring the website with the risk they wouldn't donate via the letter? Or is the push to the website deliberate?

**Bob:** The push to the website was certainly deliberate. There was indeed the possibility that people would donate online vs. through the mail. But CRS didn't care, as long as the recipients donated in droves.

Prior to this mailing, we'd sent people personalized URL's as an added incentive for them to visit the CRS site. So it made sense to urge them again to take advantage of their special web access. It also worked as a nice tie-back to what we'd written to them previously.

**MCG:** What is the average dollar amount you wanted the reader to pledge?

**Bob:** I don't think CRS will want to mention a specific dollar amount.

**MCG:** Why not go more in-depth into the research related to possible environmental links to cancer? Would that have built more credibility for the Society? Or because it is well known, it wasn't necessary?

**Bob:** The Fund was only established in the previous fall, so we couldn't say, "Look how much we've discovered already, thanks to your donations." And I believe projects were still being allocated.

CRS is Canada's largest charitable organization dedicated solely to basic cancer research, and these donors know the organization well. Plus, there was more information on the website for those who were interested in learning more about the Fund.

**MCG:** Why do you think this package worked so well?

**Bob:** Because I wrote it (ha ha). Seriously, I think it worked well because it featured actual news instead of just a typical plea for a donation.

**MCG:** Was it tested against prior control? If so, how well did it work?

**Bob:** It wasn't tested head-to-head against the control. But it did very well compared to the previous year, which was a good year unto itself... an improvement over its own previous year.

Among English speakers, revenue per name increased 19.2% and the number of donors increased by 13.5%. Among French-speakers, revenue per name increased 68.6% and the number of donors increased by 59%.

I believe the reason for the bigger jump among French speakers is that one of the letters spoke directly of Quebec. Previous efforts hadn't.

**MCG:** How many pieces were mailed and what was the response rate?

**Bob:** 600,000 packages were mailed featuring the four segments. CRS doesn't want to reveal the exact response rates, but they were certainly good (see above).

**MCG:** Was this your first time writing for the Cancer Research Society?

**Bob:** No. I've been writing CRS packages since 2004. I've also written a few dozen articles for their web site.

**MCG:** Did the results live up to your expectations – or hopes?

**Bob:** They exceeded them. I thought there'd be a lift, but not as great as it was.

## A Few Fun Questions

**MCG:** What's it like to work with you on a project?

**Bob:** That's a question you should ask my clients. But since they're not here... I have a number of testimonials from them saying that it was fun working with me and commenting on the contributions I was able to make with strategies.

And, yes, I'm flexible. And I'm a slave driver when it comes to meeting my deadlines. ("But Bob, it's 11 PM." "I don't care, Bob, get back to work.")

**MCG:** If you could choose another career besides copywriting, what would that be, and why?

**Bob:** No question about it. I'd be a meteorologist. I became fascinated by the weather when I was about 12, set up a weather station at home, made daily forecasts, and corresponded with a number of meteorologists across North America. Earlier, I mentioned selling my first article when I was 13 – it was about meteorology. Unfortunately, I fought the math system in high school and lost, and you've got to have math to get into meteorology.

Now if you ask my friends and family what I'd be if I weren't a copywriter, they'd be unanimous in saying "history professor."

**MCG:** What advice would you give up-and coming-copywriters to help them learn this trade?

**Bob:** Learn from the masters, past and contemporary. Read their books. Read their articles. It will save you years of learning by trial and error. And if you're going to work for an agency or company that does DM, find one that has a top notch creative director or DM manager. They can also help you cut your learning time dramatically.

When I was starting out I devoured books by the likes of David Ogilvy, Claude Hopkins, Rosser Reeves, Eugene Schwartz, and John Caples. I read every trade publication like – *Ad Age* – that I could get my hands on. And I listened to, and learned from, my creative directors.

**MCG:** Do you have any funny stories? Maybe an experience about an outrageous client and how you dealt with it?

**Bob:** I don't tell tales out of school, but this was so long ago, I'm sure none of the participants are with the company any longer. It was Coca-Cola, and it was an account held by an agency I worked for. This was during the height of the Cola Wars, so everyone was pretty tense. Plus the Coke people were really putting us to the test.

For example, one time my art director and I worked till 2 in the morning, then had to be back at the office by 7 AM so the account exec could make the presentation. He unwrapped the first of about two-dozen layouts, and they abruptly ended the meeting, refusing to look at any more of the materials. Why? The layout didn't have "Trademark Registration" on it.

Another example: One time I wrote an ad, and it got rejected. So I came up with different copy, but it got shot down, too. And on it went, until 13 of my ads had been serially sent to the trash bin. At that point, the marketing manager instructed our account exec to fire that bum of a writer and get Bob Knight to write it. (Wisely, the AE didn't tell him that I'd written all 13.) I was totally out of ideas so I re-submitted the first ad I'd written. And it was accepted without so much as a comma changed.

**MCG:** Good stories. And a good lesson, too! Tell us about the funniest copywriting experience you've had.

**Bob:** I'd sent copy for a 2-page letter to an agency I did a lot of work for. I hadn't heard back from them in a while, so I called my contact, David Zand, at the agency to ask what their client had thought of it.

"Well," he said, "they didn't like all of it." Trying to salvage something of my ego, I asked him, "But they *did* like *part* of it?"

"Yes," David confirmed.

It took a while but I finally mustered up my courage and asked, "So...which part did they like?"

There was a breath-holding pause before he replied, "The part that read, 'Dear Friend.'"

It wasn't so funny to me at the time but I get a chuckle from it now.



## **Monthly Copywriting Genius #60**

### **Copywriting Comments**

1. Secret of Make It New: Position the product as brand new.
2. Secret of Staying Current: Refer to a recent event to make your promotion seem timely.
3. Secret of the Big Story: Let your reader behind the scenes or make them feel they are seeing events unfold before their very eyes.
4. Secret of the Four-Legged Stool: Show track record, build credibility, have a strong idea and a strong promise (or benefit). In this instance, the promise is that policy makers will enact legislation to protect the public.
5. Secret of Flatter the Reader: Make a statement or comment that “flatters” readers, appeals to their vanity or creates a common bond with the author of the letter.
6. Secret of Show, Don’t Tell: Use stories, events or analogies to show the reader how the product works; the benefits they’ll derive from using it.
7. Secret of Exclusivity: A way to position the product or service where only a select group is allowed to participate or receive it. Appeal to the prospect’s desire to be part of something unique.
8. Secret of Call to Action: A paragraph or sentence written in a way that makes the reader feel compelled to take action right now. It “pushes” the reader to pick up the phone, fill out the reply form or make a donation .
9. Secret of Accentuate the Positive: Focus on the positive aspects of the product’s benefits.

### **Design Comments**

1. Notice how the letter is made to look important, as if it was printed using a special type of printer/paper.

2. The line breaks are used to separate the different sections of the copy. Normally, sub-heads would be used to pull the reader into the copy. But line breaks are used here for the same purpose.
  
3. Notice how extra large type (and bold) is used on the return envelope.

**1**

The Cancer Research Society

March 2007

ID:12345678 (5487) /4810

Mr. John Q. Sample  
402-625 President-Kennedy Ave  
Montreal, QC H3A 3B5**1****The new Environment-Cancer Fund.  
It's a milestone in Canadian cancer research.**

Dear Mr. Sample,

**2**

I don't know if I've ever been as excited about a cancer research program as I am about the recently launched Environment-Cancer Fund.

Its purpose is to fund research that will investigate links between certain agents in our everyday environments and the development of cancer. Why?

Researchers are suspicious that many household products – from kitchen and bathroom cleaners to furniture and carpets – are releasing chemical vapours that can cause cancer. But there hasn't yet been sufficient research to prove it.

The same was once true about the link between tobacco smoke and cancer...diet and cancer. Scientists suspected a cause and effect, then conducted research that confirmed their suspicions.

**3**

As soon as the link was proven, campaigns were launched that reduced the percentage of Canadians who smoked and who were subjected to second-hand smoke. And with research into foods, people were given healthier dietary choices.

**4**

Once a link is established between our everyday environment and cancer, health policy makers will be able to enact legislation to protect the public...and everyone will be able to make more informed decisions.

\* \* \* \* \*

**2**

Through your donations, you and our other loyal supporters were instrumental in making the dream of the Environment-Cancer Fund a reality. Now we need to sustain it.

**5**

I'm hoping we can count on you to make a donation today to help keep the Fund and our other research going. Perhaps \$25...\$30...or \$40. Or considering the importance of this new fund, maybe you'll choose to make an even larger contribution.

\* \* \* \* \*

402 President-Kennedy Avenue  
Montreal  
Montreal, Quebec H3A 3B5  
T: (514) 961-9317  
F: (514) 961-9319  
WWW.CRS.SOCIETY.CA  
www.cancerresearchsociety.ca

(over please)



The Cancer Research Society

402-625 President-Kennedy Ave  
Montreal QC H3A 3B5

CLASS

 \$25  \$30  \$40  \$50  \$75  \$\_\_\_\_\_ Visa  MasterCard  Amex. Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

Card number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_

ID:12345678 (5487) /4810

Mr. John Q. Sample  
402-625 President-Kennedy Ave  
Montreal, QC H3A 3B5

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me more information on contributing to the Cancer Research Society through a gift.

- 
- In my will
- 
- 
- At the time of my death
- 
- 
- At the time of my death
- 
- 
- Other \_\_\_\_\_



The Cancer Research Society

402-625 President-Kennedy Ave  
Montreal QC H3A 3B5  
(514) 961-9317CONTRIBUTORS OF \$10 OR MORE  
ARE ACKNOWLEDGED WITH AN  
OFFICIAL RECEIPT

TEMPORARY RECEIPT

Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE DETACH THIS SHEET  
BEFORE MAILING I have already made a gift to myself to The Cancer Research Society. Thank you for your help! Please return this portion with your contribution.

Donation Registered (1510) 5229 860001

The number of cases of cancer is constantly increasing, largely because of our growing and aging population. Because that trend shows no signs of slowing, it's more important than ever that we learn about new causes of cancer...so we can develop new ways to prevent it.

We need to learn more about the possible cancer risk of exposure to physical agents like silica and radon...to common chemical agents like benzidine and vinyl chloride...and to biological agents like hepatitis B and C.

• • • • •

**6** The Environment-Cancer Fund will sponsor research into a variety of areas. For example, research teams will explore links between genetics, epidemiology and behavioural sciences.

And when a hazard is identified, we'll publicize the findings so that people's exposure can be limited in future...and lives will be saved.

• • • • •

**7** We've established an Advisory Board comprised of some of the best and brightest cancer specialists in the country. Nova Scotia musician and songwriter Melanie Coane has agreed to serve as our Ambassador at no charge. The Vincenzo Guzzo family donated more than \$1 million in February...

Leading men and women across the country are getting behind the Environment-Cancer Fund because they recognize how important it is.

I hope you'll join them and do what you can...by making a donation today.

**8** Thank you for being a loyal supporter of The Cancer Research Society. Thank you more than I can say for renewing your support today.

Sincerely,

Gilles Lévesque  
Executive director

**9** P.S. There's never been a major fund in Canada like the Environment-Cancer Fund for investigating the links between cancer and our home, school, work and play environments.

The Fund holds tremendous promise. It just needs the generous support of people like you for it to realize its potential. Thank you so much!

To learn more about the relationship between cancer and the environment, simply use your personalized web address recently sent to you to visit our web site, or go to [www.CancerEnvironment.ca](http://www.CancerEnvironment.ca)

We recognize any donation that you are able to give, but if you find automatic monthly deductions more convenient, would you please consider the following.

Your authorized donation can be automatically deducted monthly from your account in the amount you choose.

This will ensure that you:  
- eliminate multiple mailings  
- save paper and postage  
- receive one donation (as receipt) at the end of the year

Caution: No one can cancel or change your donation at any time.

1 888 786-2262

#### PRE-AUTHORIZED PAYMENT

I authorize a monthly donation to the Cancer Research Society in the amount of

\$5  \$10  \$15  \$20  \$25  Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

on the 1st or  the 15th of each month. Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Please send a cheque marked "RSD" or "R" in the banking institution.

Bank \_\_\_\_\_ Branch N° \_\_\_\_\_ Acc. N° \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Or  Visa  MasterCard  Amex

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

Card number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry date \_\_\_\_\_

To help us reduce the cost of supplying our donors, we occasionally exchange donor names with other charitable organizations. If you do not wish your name to be exchanged, please check this box.

# **FREE:** Your Guide to Writing a Will

There are many reasons why everyone should have a will.

A few include:

- it ensures that your last wishes will be fulfilled

- it makes things easier for those you leave behind
- it allows you to leave an enduring legacy to your favourite charity

If you don't have a will OR if you want to change it to include a gift to charity, please ask for our free booklet, **Your Guide to Writing a Will**.

*It's comprehensive, it's easy to read. And we'd be pleased to send it to you with our compliments.*

## **TO ORDER YOUR COMPLIMENTARY COPY**

Tick the appropriate box(es) below. Then return this form in the enclosed envelope

OR call us toll-free at 1 888 766-3262 extension 334.

**YES, please send me:**

- My free copy of **Your Guide to Writing a Will**
- Also, send me a free copy of **Gifts of Securities**





*Where there's a will  
there's a way...  
to leave  
a lasting legacy*

**Please**, send me with **no obligation**  
my **FREE** booklet, as indicated on reverse.

(Fill out below, if needed)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postal code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (     ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_



The Cancer Research  
Society



The Cancer Research  
Society

200-200 Avenue D  
Steak 01 100-100



ID:12345678 (PH07) 10010

Mr. John Q. Sample  
800-820 President-Kennedy Ave  
Montreal, QC H3A 3B5

3

**THE CANCER RESEARCH SOCIETY**  
402-625 Av Du Président-Kennedy  
Montréal, QC H3A 3S5