

THE GARY HALBERT LETTER

Cherrywood Publishing
Suite #2-355
2520 SW 22nd Street
Miami, Florida 33145

PHONE
(305) 534-7577

E-MAIL NOSEXGARY@AOL.COM

FAX
(786) 924-1694

The Boron Letters - Chapter 19

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Dear Bond,

Today, as I promised, our subject will be "You Never Get A Second Chance To Make A First Impression."

Listen to this: When a person goes for a job interview, the interviewer decides whether or not to hire that person in the first 40-seconds.

And this: In a jury trial, the members of the jury make up their minds as to whether the accused is guilty or innocent during the first half hour or so (during the opening argument) and they spend all the rest of the time the trial takes in finding ways to justify the decision they have already made.

And this: When a person falls in love it happens almost instantaneously. After that, minor things like the truth about the newly beloved are cast aside unless those "truths" happen to reinforce the wonderfulness of said love subject.

And this: You either hook a reader or lose him when he very first looks at your ad or DM piece. Not when he reads it, but when he first looks at it.

Now, of course, this rule is not 100% accurate. Sometimes a person will suddenly fall in love with a person he or she has known for years; sometimes a jury will change it's mind after the opening argument; sometimes an interviewer will decide to hire an applicant he had originally (in his mind) rejected. And, sometimes, a reader will read and order from your ad, even though he was turned off by it when he first saw it.

But don't count on this. Most of the time a person will never alter his original impression. Most of the time he will simply "edit" all new info that comes to him and "process" it in such a way as to validate his original opinion.

So; what does this mean when it comes to creating advertising? What it means is your ad or DM piece should give your prospect a life; should cause his pupils to dilate as soon as he sees it.

Did I ever tell you that good poker players often watch their opponent's eyes when they draw new cards? What they are looking for is to see the reaction of their opponent's eyes to the cards they draw. If their eyes widen, that is if their pupils dilate that means that they liked the new cards they received. If their pupils constrict it probably means that what happened is that they received cards of which they are not fond.

This is a totally involuntary reaction. Apparently, what happens is that when we see something we like our eyes open up so we can let in more light and see more of it. And, conversely, when we see something we don't like we do just the opposite; we try to cut down the flow of light so we don't have to see as much of it.

Well, I have a theory about all this and what I believe is that most (or many) of our decisions about how we like or dislike something are made not in 40 seconds or the first 4 or 40 minutes but rather in the first fraction of a second that we see something new.

And, I further believe that we unconsciously spend the rest of our so called decision making time not really making a decision after all but instead searching for justification for the decision we have already made.

And, that's why I'm so careful about the "look" of my DM pieces and MO ads. You see, I believe the "sale" or "no sale" decision is largely made the instant a prospect sees your ad and reads your headline.

I think that if your prospect gets an instant "lift" from just looking at your ad, then he will start reading it and looking for reasons to convince himself that the promise of your ad is true!

And, if you don't disappoint him then you have a really good chance of closing the sale.

Now, what kind of look will give the reader a lift? It's short of tricky, really. But I think one thing that helps is if your promotion has a "crisp" look about it. In other words, the layout should be clean, there should be a lot of contrast and it should look easy and inviting to read.

If you use pictures they should be, as a general rule, of an upbeat nature. Do you remember that ad with the before and after pictures of Christi Dean? You know, almost everybody liked the look of that ad because the "after" picture of Christi Dean was so uplifting.

By the way, before I forget one little-known fact that is kind of interesting is that women like to see pictures of women in ads and men like to see pictures of men.

I forget why. I just remember that surveys show this to be true.

Oh, here's something else. That writer that I told you about who wrote for Printer's Ink? Anyway, his pen name was Old Aesop Glimm.

Incidentally, when it comes to direct mail, there are a number of things you can do to make your package more likely to give the reader a lift. First of all, you should use good crisp white paper, both for the pages of the letters and the envelopes you are mailing.

If you are using label addressing (and later we will discuss when you should or not) you should use a tight white label on a matching envelope.

If you are using stamps (and if you follow my advice, you almost always will) you should, whenever practical, use large colorful commemoratives.

Your letterhead should be dignified and non-distracting. Your type face should be a serif face and you should make sure your original letter (the one you are going to use for camera ready art) should be typed with a carbon ribbon.

If you are going to use a second color in your letters to underline words or something you should use RED. If you enclose a photograph or a simulated photograph you should make sure it does NOT look cheap, limp and soggy. Instead, it should look crisp, clean, glossy and clear.

All those rules also apply to your enclosures.

I Love You And Good Luck!

Dad