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From:

South of Jewfish Creek

Dear friend and subscriber,

Let's do the twist!

You know, I've been writing this newsletter since 1986 and I've written a number of issues on how to write copy. However, there's at least one important area I haven't covered... and... at least to my knowledge, it hasn't been covered in other newsletters or books on how to write copy. What I'm referring to are known in the profession as "bullets." Bullets are little one line statements of what you'll learn about in the book the copywriter is trying to get you to purchase or some other product he's writing about. Bullets are usually preceded by a dot or an asterisk (the bullet) and they look like this:

**What question you must ask when you rent
a car to get the lowest price humanly
possible!**

How your military record can get you
extra Social Security money!

**The single best way ever discovered to
sell a house... and... sell it fast!**

How you can legally tape any telephone
call you get from a collection
agency... and... how to use that tape
to scare the hell out of them... and...
even use it (legally) to make them pay
you a big settlement!

And so on.

Listen, many of the most successful ads running today are nearly all bullets. Often there's a headline and then maybe two or three (or even just one) paragraph to preface the bullets. Here's an example of such a one paragraph preface:

"Are you troubled by prostate problems? If so, you may be interested in a new book just released by XYZ Publishing. Here's a small sample of what you will learn when you read this book:"

Then, of course, there are bullets, bullets and more bullets followed by ordering instructions. Let me tell you something: Many times a person will read an ad or a direct mail letter containing dozens and dozens of bullets and... he'll order just because one of them appealed to him. A long time ago (I think it was clear back in the '70s) I was doing some work as an outside consultant for *Entrepreneur Magazine* and I was writing an ad for one of their reports or something and, out of a tremendous amount of bullets there was one hidden in the copy that caused calls to come in for months and maybe even a year later. Here is that bullet:

- **FAKE COCAINE: a legal substitute that fools almost everyone!**

All that bullet referred to was a small part of the literature in the report or whatever it was in and, I'm not exactly sure who was responding to that particular bullet who would be reading literature from a magazine like *Entrepreneur*. Come to think of it, maybe it was entrepreneurs... only just those who were doing (or wanting to do) something illegal.

Had I to do it over, I probably wouldn't have included such a bullet because I sure don't think it attracted the target audience we were hoping to sell. But, this tawdry example does illustrate the pulling power of a single bullet even if it's buried in a large ad.

I started this issue with the words "Let's do the twist!" What I meant by that is, when you write bullets, you've got to take the facts about the product you're trying to sell and present them in a way that "teases" the reader into wanting the full scoop. Now listen, when I say "twist" I don't mean

distort! Your bullets need to be 100% truthful but you need to twist the way you write them so the reader gets a teasing glimpse of a particular benefit for what you're selling which makes him hungry for the rest of the story.

Writing bullets is a real art and I don't have a magic wand that will teach you how to do it. The only way you'll acquire this skill is through a lot of practice. However, what I can give you are examples of how it's done... and... give you those examples in such a way I bet it will be very illuminating for you. So then, here's Gary's attempt to give you a few "aha!" experiences on the art of writing bullets. The way I'm going to do this is to give you a number of real life examples taken from an ad for a book. First, I'll show you what it actually says in the book and then I'll show you the "teaser bullet" written to correspond to that section of the book.

What it says in the book:

"Buyers always ask how long a property has been on the market, and when they find out the home has been on the market a long time they smell blood. What's more, many buyers wonder what's wrong with the property since it hasn't sold yet. They have second thoughts about bidding on such a place, figuring if nobody else thinks the property is worth what the seller is asking, why should they? As a result, the seller can no longer get the kinds of offers he would have gotten in the past... if your home has been on the market for a long time, you may want to consider taking it off the market for a little while. When you put it back on, you can honestly answer it's been on the market a short time..."

The Bullet:

- How to sell your home faster by taking it off the market!

What it says in the book:

"The real estate brokers who come to view your home are in essence competing against each other for the listing. And those brokers who have been around for a while have learned from experience that very few new sellers are prepared to hear the truth about what their homes are worth.

"So rather than risk alienating you and losing the listing to a competitor, most brokers will tell you what they think you want to hear, rather than what your home is really worth.

"After a broker has secured the listing, he'll work hard on it for months, gradually getting you to lower your price further and further until finally the home is sold."

The Bullet:

- A dirty little secret many real estate brokers hope you never find out!

What it says in the book:

"If your interior designer has used your home to make a personal artistic statement, that's great while you're living there but don't expect it to translate well when you're trying to sell. Rather than overdecorating or overrenovating, try to create a neutral canvas onto which a potential buyer can project his tastes."

The Bullet:

- Why adding improvements to your home can lower its value!

What it says in the book:

"Make closets look larger by removing items that can be stored elsewhere. Arrange the remaining items in a neat, organized fashion. Brighten dark, dull closet walls with a coat of paint."

The Bullet:

- Something crucial (and unusual) you must do to every closet in your house before you show it to a would-be buyer!

What it says in the book:

"If you want to be extra aggressive, one thing you can do is to offer brokers a higher commission. Better yet, offer a cash bonus to the salesperson making the deal. (This tactic works best for lower-priced properties.)"

"You may find the idea of giving the broker extra money distasteful, even outrageous. But look at it this way: while the couple of extra thousand dollars you're parting with is a minute portion of the selling price, it's a huge portion of the salesperson's fee. Since it takes just as much work to sell an inexpensive property as it does an expensive one, why not give the salesperson a reason to work as hard to sell your property as he would one that was a higher price? Besides, if he's a good negotiator he'll be squeezing that extra couple of thousand out of the buyer (or more accurately, the buyer's bank!) anyway."

The Bullet:

- The single best investment you can make when selling your home!

What it says in the book:

"Another technique that is very effective in selling the hard-to-sell home is for you to provide financing for the buyer. If this

sounds unconventional or makes you feel uncomfortable, remember that back in the late '70s and early '80s when interest rates were in the high teens, seller financing was more the rule than the exception. And if the banks continue their trend toward tight money, it may become the rule again, no matter what interest rates are. So if you're one of the sellers who doesn't need all the cash, you may use seller financing as a way to make the deal more attractive."

The Bullet:

- How to make sure your buyer gets financing despite the credit crunch!

What it says in the book:

"Nine out of ten homeowners today are operating under a terrible misconception that is costing them a great deal of time and money. I call this misconception the 'fallacy of time.'

"The fallacy of time is the belief that in order to get top dollar for your home you must stay on the market a long time in order to hold out for the highest possible price. "In fact, the reverse is true. The less time a home sits on the market, the higher the price it's likely to bring. Homes that sell for above-average prices almost always sell quickly. And homes that sit on the market for a long time almost always sell for much less than they would have had they sold quickly."

The Bullet:

- What the "fallacy of time" is... and how falling for it can be hazardous to your health!

What it says in the book:

"And if you live in a state where real estate brokers aren't allowed to draft sales contracts, make sure your attorney doesn't drag his feet with the sales contract. In virtually all home sales, the contract of sale is preprinted form that the attorney or his paralegal can fill out in a matter of minutes. Remember that you are paying your attorney a significant sum of money; it is not unreasonable for you to expect him to send the contract out that day. And make sure the contract is delivered by hand. I can't tell you how many times deals have been held up because the attorney put the contract in the mail."

The Bullet:

- Why you should never mail a contract... and what you should do instead!

What it says in the book:

"Odors. It is a scientific fact that the human nose becomes impervious to a smell after it has been exposed to it for just a few minutes. Just because you can't smell an odor doesn't mean that a buyer first entering the home won't smell it. Pay special attention to the litter box and any other possible sources of odors in the home. Keep fresh air circulating by opening the windows or running the air conditioner. And you may consider providing a pleasant scent with fresh flowers, potpourri, or scented candles. If you really want to pull out all the stops, you can try old tricks such as baking bread, boiling cinnamon, or putting a drop of vanilla on a lit lightbulb before buyers arrive."

The Bullet:

- What you should do to the lightbulbs in your house that can dramatically help you sell it!

Are you beginning to get the idea? I could go on and on with more examples but, really the best way for you to get the "knack" of writing bullets is to read bullet-laden ads and then, order the book or product the ad is selling and study it till you are proficient in spotting the "source" of the bullet. All the above bullets are taken from an ad I wrote for a book titled *Sell Your House Fast*. Here are the rest of the bullets of that ad:

- **Seven questions you should immediately ask a real estate broker before you even consider letting him list your house!**
- How to overcome the single most difficult aspect of selling your home!
- **How to get more than your asking price! (You'll be amazed when you learn this!)**
- What colors you must never paint your house if you want to sell it fast!
- **3 strategies for selling hard-to-sell properties!**

- The single best way ever discovered to sell a house... and... sell it fast!
- **How to make sure your lawyer doesn't kill the sale!**
- How to get a "selling edge" even 9 out of 10 real estate brokers don't know about!
- **Why you should never even think about having an open house!**
- 5 deadly mistakes most homeowners make when selling their homes and how to avoid them!
- **Advice many attorneys give that is absolutely wrong!**
- Why you should almost never rent your home!
- **2 clauses you should almost never put in your contract of sale!**
- What you can do if your home is worth less than what you paid for it!

May I suggest something? Why don't you order this book and see if you can find the text in the book from which I extracted these bullets. The book is dirt-cheap and this will be an excellent learning experience for you. Not only that, it's the best book I've ever found on the subject of selling a house.

And listen: Another crucial part of an ad or a direct mail promo is the ordering instructions. They have to be crystal clear! So, to help you get an idea of how to do this aspect of your promotions, I'm reproducing below the ordering instructions I wrote for this book:

"Will this book help you? Will it help you sell your house fast (within 30-days) and, still get top dollar for it? Here's how you can find out without risking a single penny. Go ahead and order the book by mail. Keep it 30-days and read it and check it out. Then, if you are unhappy with it, send it back and the publisher will return your entire payment to you quietly and without question.

Not only that... you can even post-date your check or money order by 30-days. If you do this, the publisher promises and guarantees not to deposit it for at least that amount of time. Then, if you decide to return the book, the company will send back your uncashed check or money order with no questions asked. You can't lose.

To order, write your name and address and the words "Sell Your House Fast Book" on a piece of paper and send it with your payment of \$10.00 plus \$2.00 shipping and handling (total \$12.00) to:

Pathfinder Marketing 5839 Ponce Ct. San Jose, CA 95120

Your book will be sent promptly by return mail. If you have any questions, you can call (415) 858-7583. Checks and money orders should be made payable to "Pathfinder Marketing" and it is not a good idea to mail cash. Thank you."

Well anyway, whether you order the book or not, I hope what you've just read has given you some insight into how to write bullets and ordering instructions. You know, copywriting, when done well, is extremely easy to read but brutally hard to write. Writing is, I believe, the hardest job in the world. Especially if you do it right. And copywriting is the most difficult form of writing. When you're writing a novel, a short story or a non-fiction book or article, you can get away with a little slop.

Not so with copywriting. There... every word... has to count!

But don't despair, you can learn to do it. And, when you do, you can work anywhere in the world and the payoff can be handsome indeed.

I'd like to conclude this issue by telling you a curious story. Not long ago, an officer from the third largest bank in the U.S. spent two days in Key West with me trying to get me to create their advertising. He was flabbergasted when I refused. He said the bank had ad agencies standing in line to "pitch" the bank into being allowed to handle their account.

He was a nice guy, very sharp, and, when he left he understood, I believe, why I couldn't work on such an account. You see, what the bank wanted was more of the "same ol', same ol'." They run full-page ads in places like the *Wall Street Journal* with a picture of a guy in a rowboat and eight words saying something like this:

NATIONS BANK: The Power To Make A Difference!

I just checked with Nancy Jones and the cost of running just one full-page ad in the full circulation of the *Wall Street Journal* is \$114,605.28.

Can you imagine that? Paying that much money to print eight words having no selling power whatsoever? Think about it: That comes out to... \$14,325.66 Per Word!

It's curious to me. I bet Nations Bank has some of the sharpest executives in the world. I bet they watch every penny of their costs like hawks. I bet they measure everything from currency fluctuations to the square foot cost of each building they rent or buy. I bet when they make a loan, they learn everything about the buyer right down to the maiden name of his aunts. But, on perhaps their most important expenditure of all... their advertising... THEY OPERATE BLIND! I've never even seen them offer a booklet in their advertising so they can at least "semi-measure" the pulling power of their ads.

But then, sometimes, I think it's me that's stupid. Just think, if I handled accounts like this and charged the standard 15% like ad agencies do, I could make \$17,190.79 just for writing a lousy eight words every time they run an ad in the *Journal*.

Oh well, it's just not my bag. What I like to do is write ads that make huge profits for my clients. I don't always succeed but often, I put more work into writing one ad than a conventional ad agency does in doing 10-years of work for one of their institutional clients.

Do you have a project for which you need advertising written? If so, I strongly urge you to learn to write the advertising yourself or else hire a real copywriting expert to do it for you.

Someone like me.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Halbert

P.S.

I mentioned I had recently solicited some "Feedback" letters from people who had recently re-subscribed to my newsletter. Well, even if you haven't recently re-subscribed, I'd appreciate a letter from you telling