

Interview with a Pro:

Scott Haines on Discipline, Criticism and How to Find Highly-Successful Controls You Can Learn From

World-class copywriter Scott Haines has written sales letters and ads that have pulled in millions and millions of dollars in ultra-profitable sales over the last few years. He is a "go-to" guy for many of the top direct-marketing gurus in the world, including Gary Halbert, Jay Abraham, and Robert Allen. Recently, we talked with Scott about his career and his latest role as editor of "Monthly Marketing Genius."

TGT: Scott, what did you do to prepare yourself to become a copywriter?

SH: I kind of stumbled into it. I was going to school at Oklahoma State University. And, after about a year, I figured out that marketing was what I wanted to do. So, I started researching. I attended a few "marketing" meetings and talked to a friend who was already taking the classes I was going to take.

I was disappointed. It just didn't seem too exciting.

However, during this research/preparation period, something interesting happened. I found some classic advertising books in the library and started reading them. The good ones: Hopkins, Caples, Ogilvy, etc. And it was like flipping on a switch. I realized that, indeed, marketing and advertising is a very exciting profession. I also realized that I wasn't going to learn it in college.

When I met with one of the heads of the Marketing Department, he sat there all smug and asked me why I chose marketing and what I hoped to accomplish. I told him that I wanted to learn marketing because I wanted to start my own direct-mail company. And he actually laughed at me. He told me I'd have to get an entry-level job and work for years before I could ever hope to do that.

That was it. He may have been a tenured professor, but I knew he was totally out of touch with the real world. So, I started studying everything I could find on direct response and trying to run my own projects. Trying to achieve my dream.

TGT: Tell us about one of your biggest-selling letters. What market was it in and how well did it do?

SH: This question is a little tricky for me. Here's why: I work with a lot of niche marketers in small industries. So, I don't get the big-number bragging rights that sound good. This promo mailed 20 million pieces ... this one mailed 13 million ... and so on.

But, I do get big returns. Routinely, my letters for these smaller clients pull in at least 20 to 1 returns. That is, for every dollar spent mailing, 20 dollars come back. I have written a couple of financial pieces that have made considerable profits.

Mostly, I have carved out a niche for myself as a copywriter who can sell high-priced products: \$1,000 to \$10,000. I've had good success there. For example, the price for that stock service was \$1,985.

TGT: How did you approach the stock assignment?

SH: I read more than 20 financial "controls," watched CNBC (which I can't stand, by the way), read Investor's Business Daily, The Wall Street Journal, Barrons, etc. In a nutshell, I did a ton of research. I got "hip" to the markets and what people's emotions were at the time concerning them. Then, I developed a strategy based on that research and what I intuitively felt people really wanted. There are and were several things that I keyed in on. I put them all in the letter ... and it worked.

As for selling high-priced products or services, it's no different than selling low-priced things. You have to have a complete sales argument. Leave nothing out. One thing that may be a secret is to have confidence. I think a lot of copywriters are scared or uncomfortable about asking someone for thousands of dollars. I am not. And I believe that comes through in my writing. There are no hesitations in my promotions.

TGT: What kind of challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

SH: Discipline and dealing with clients correctly.

Discipline ... this is a big challenge for me. And I've struggled with it. One thing I do is force myself to get up and write first thing every day that I am working. I may only get in one or two hours... but I do it. Another thing that helps is deadlines, both real and self-imposed. Without them, almost nothing gets done. I set my own even when I don't have to.

Dealing with clients is another challenge. My only advice here is that you'll learn from experience. A good book to read is "Winning Through Intimidation" by Robert Ringer. Actually, that's my No. 1 reading recommendation for anyone who is in business in any way. (Which is everyone.) Don't let the title throw you. It's not about grabbing people by the lapels and forcing them to see things your way. Not at all. Just read it and you'll see.

TGT: You're also the new editor for Early to Rise's Monthly Marketing Genius. Having already had such tremendous success yourself, what's the main thing you've learned from the copywriters you've interviewed so far?

SH: Ah, Monthly Marketing Genius (MMG). This has been a godsend for me. As a freelancer, you mostly have very few peers that you regularly associate with. MMG has allowed me to communicate with other successful copywriters and marketers who I'd probably never meet otherwise. And I see a side of the business I don't always normally see.

These guys are sharp. And I'm amazed at the stuff they share. For example, John Carlton shared a huge secret that he got from Gary Halbert: "Just sell the damn book." That's good advice for every copywriter – and it can be applied to any product or service. Don't get hung up on the minutia. You already know how to sell ... so just start writing and use whatever formula you come up with. Don't worry about breakthroughs or coming up with some smash new concept. Just do the job and get on with it.

Arthur Johnson shared a great secret too – one he learned while working at the Franklin Mint: Having just one order option increases response. In other words, instead of saying "mail, fax, or phone in your order," just let them mail it. Or just fax it. Or

just phone it. Too many options delay response ... and delay is death of a sale – Very important for anyone who sells via direct response.

TGT: I think the best thing about being a freelance copywriter is the freedom. Tell us about your lifestyle.

SH: I absolutely agree. In fact, that's really why I've stayed a freelancer instead of running my own direct-response projects.

During the last five years or so ... I've lived in Miami Beach (right on Ocean Drive in the heart of South Beach). I've lived in the upscale Doral area of Miami ... walking distance from the famous Doral Golf Course. I've lived in Key West off Duval Street. I've lived in Hollywood just a couple of miles from the Sunset Strip. I've met movie stars. Hobnobbed with some of the biggest names in direct response. And I've done things I never dreamed I would do. Plus, I've been paid good money (six-figures a year for the last few years) while having all of these adventures.

Another thing ... I get up and go to bed when I want to. A childhood dream realized. I always hated schedules and school. Didn't like to go to bed at 10 p.m. I also never liked having a job. I didn't then, and I don't now, like to work every day. In fact, I work more like part-time ... a few days a week. Sometimes – a lot of the time – not at all.

What's most important is that I do what I want to do. And because I have worked extremely hard at mastering copywriting ... and applying my skills in the marketplace ... I'm afforded this luxury. Now, I'm not saying my lifestyle is the right one for everyone, but it's right for me. Work hard at copywriting and you too can live any way you choose.

TGT: Any final words of advice for our students?

SH: Yes. Don't let anyone steal your dreams. If you want to be a highly successful freelance copywriter, you must be immune to criticism from well-meaning family members, friends, or anyone else who doesn't believe in you. You wouldn't believe the trauma I had to endure to get where I am at now. Mostly from people who had my "best interests" in mind. Forget those people. Work hard and persevere. I did ... and when I finally broke down the wall, a whole new, exciting, fulfilling, and rewarding life and career awaited me.

And to wear out (even more) a tired, old – but nonetheless true – cliché: If I can do it, you can do it too!

Scott Haines is the editor of ETR's Monthly Marketing Genius – a service devoted to uncovering the secrets behind the strongest direct response promotions in the mail, in space advertising, and on the Internet today.

Every month Scott and his team of Michael Masterson-trained expert marketers analyze winning promotions for products in the financial information, health, fundraising and software services markets – as well as promotions for any other product that's being successfully sold through direct marketing. Through comments written directly on the promo and an in-depth Q&A with the copywriter, you can learn exactly how and why the winning writer did what he did to produce his blockbuster control.

To find out more about Monthly Marketing Genius visit:

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Such an inspiring interview.

Scott Haines was truly a Copywriting Great.

I'm going through his copywriting course again at the moment and it's packed full of timeless wisdom.

I can relate to him not jiving with the whole 9-5 typical work routine!

It was sad to learn about his passing.

May he be resting in eternal paradise and watching over us aspiring copywriters who wish to follow in his footsteps.

Truly a legend of the craft!

Guest (Puvan Kale) – over a year ago

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