

Using Assumptions and Presuppositions In Your Copy

By John Torre

Welcome back! I hope your week was a productive one.

This week we'll continue to examine the fascinating subject of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), which has to do with the science of how patterns of behavior are related to subjective experiences.

Yes, I know ... it sounds like something Sigmund Freud might have fun discussing over dinner, but believe me; we're not going to attempt to drill down that deep. For our purposes we just want to understand a few basic principles about NLP that we can use to strengthen our copy when the opportunity presents itself.

As I said in the last couple posts regarding this topic, while NLP techniques can be powerful tools, they can also be dangerous and unethical if used incorrectly, so be careful with how you apply them.

Last week we took a look at how to craft embedded commands. This week, we'll examine...

Assumptions and Presuppositions...

How many times have we heard someone say, *"I'm doing a million things at once!"* Well, as cool and self serving as it sounds, of course, it's just not possible. Our brains can generally only focus on one major thought or task at a time. Consequently, when bombarded with multiple stimuli, we're forced to deal with one thing while presupposing (or assuming) that ancillary suggestions given to us are facts.

Our brains are also compelled to answer any questions that are posed. Therefore, when you combine a question with a presupposed fact, the brain—being the nifty little information seeker it is—will begin an involuntary and spontaneous reaction as it goes to work answering the question while quietly accepting the fact posed to it as being the truth.

An example of presupposition might be, *"What will you do with the extra \$100,000 you earn from copywriting next year?"*

When you read that statement what do you think of first: How you'll earn an extra \$100,000, or do your thoughts turn to paying down debt, taking vacations, remodeling your home, or financing your kids' education?

Of course, it's the latter because we fixate on the results and we're willing to "presuppose" the reality of earning the extra money will somehow be accomplished.

Since a significant portion of language processing takes place subconsciously, by first asking the question, *"What will you do..."*, we force the subconscious mind to accept the fact that the money will be there while the conscious mind sets itself to work on answering the question that was posed to it. The fact that the money will be available is assumed, and sort of slides into the subconscious mind with little or no fanfare, and no questioning of authenticity.

This powerful technique works in web copy (or any copy, for that matter...) and can be just as effectively applied to virtually any other walk of life. (*Married life, for instance? ... We won't even go there...*)

For example, think about trial attorneys for a moment. Don't they often start off with leading questions that imply the existence of something when evidence of it has not yet been established?

When an attorney is grilling a witness and demands, *"Why did you steal money from the church?"*, isn't he or she presupposing that (1) there was a sum of money, and (2) that it was stolen, and (3) that "you" stole it, and (4) you had a reason to steal it? (The leading question of "why".)

When you look at it that way, that little sentence packs a lot of punch, doesn't it?

How about we use an example nearer and dearer to our hearts and take a look at Paul Hollingshead's "[Retire This Year](#)" letter that currently serves as the front-end acquisition control for selling the "Accelerated Course".

Paul's headline reads as follows:

Retire This Year!
...and Still Make More Money Than Most Doctors

You Can Do It — Once You Know the Proven Secrets to Writing a Simple Letter Like This One.

This powerful headline and accompanying subheads are both elegant and simple. Paul immediately gets the reader thinking about retiring in the same year as they're reading the letter, a goal that is generally unfathomable to the uninitiated. The brain goes to work thinking about what it would be like to "retire this year" before considering how that might be possible. Then the brain accepts the first subhead about making 'more money than most doctors' because you would indeed need that much money to retire, so it's assumed that it will happen.

It gets better...

Paul includes a second subhead that's actually known in NLP lingo as an "adjacent pair," where one fact is put forth ("*You Can Do It*"), and is followed by a response ("*Once You Know the Proven Secrets to Writing a Simple Letter Like This One.*")

In this example the conscious brain is preoccupied with the fact that it can be done, while the subconscious mind presupposes that the means to that end is by learning the secrets to writing a simple letter.

Game ... Set ... Match.

Did Paul consider all this NLP mumbo-jumbo when he wrote this letter?

I doubt it. But Paul is a world-class copywriter to whom this stuff comes naturally. For aspiring wealthy web writers like you and I, who are striving to learn our craft, developing at least a rudimentary working knowledge of these powerful psychological motivators is the first step in being able to integrate them into our copy.

Next week we'll take a look at another NLP technique before we move on to other things. Of course, keep your feedback coming because as I've always said, it's ultimately YOU that determines the direction your blog takes.

See you next week, and as always...

Good health and good writing!

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4 Responses to "Using Assumptions and Presuppositions In Your Copy"

Thanks for the tips and examples.

Karen Cioffi

KarenCV – over a year ago

I am learning a lot about copywriting here. Great post

John March – over a year ago

You're quite welcome, Karen. And thank you for reaching out and being a Wealthy Web Writer reader!

John Torre – over a year ago

I think that it would be interesting to examine some headlines that are being posted on some well-known websites or sales pages to debate the pros and cons of the approaches being used out there.

Chris – over a year ago

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American Writers & Artists Institute

220 George Bush Blvd, Suite D

Delray Beach, FL 33444

(561) 278-5557 or (866) 879-2924