

Empty Pages

By Don Mahoney

OK – anyone remember Traffic (the rock and roll group)?

And if, by chance, you do, do you remember "Empty Pages"?

Either way, it was a hit rock song in the early '70s.

You can read a lot of theories about what the song means, but I think one thing comes through loud and clear.

Writer's block. Staring at a blank piece of paper, trying to figure out the first words you're going to put on it.

This song has, ever since I first heard it in the early 1970s (OK, so I'm getting old ...) held a particular fascination for me.

I had made some attempts at writing, so I certainly knew about writer's block. But I also found meaning in the lyrics related to life – that life too was an empty page, waiting to be filled ...

But let's not go there ... we could be lost for days. Back to writer's block!

In those days, the empty page was not on a computer screen. Believe it or not, it was usually a notebook or pad and pen or pencil sitting in front of you. (How odd and antiquated!)

So now we get to the heart of it ... you either want to (because you have a creative side) or need to (because someone has paid you money to write – and you'd better start producing!) start getting some words down on that piece of paper.

You have to conquer that empty page.

So everyone who has ever written has faced the same dilemma at some time – an empty page staring at you ... daring you to put the first word on it.

Now, for someone who has been doing it for years, there are all kinds of tricks you can use on that piece of paper.

To help those who are new, I've set down a list of "tricks" you can use. It's hard to order them, because you can use one or several, or mix them up. So it's more of a "bag of tricks" for you to reach into, to conquer that damn page (and it will keep right on staring at you until you get something done, so the sooner you move, the better ...) ...

So, to start ...

- You can start by writing your name, the date, and the project name at the top. Now at least you've started – your page

isn't blank any more ... you've taken some of the power out of it already ...

- You can write an outline for your project. Include things like the back cover, or order form. The more you get, the further down the road you are.
- As a copywriter, you should have gotten a starter kit from your client. You can take some of the main points and just rough them out on paper.
- You can start copying some of the testimonials from your starter kit.
- If it's an email, start some subject lines that could catch attention. Remember, they need to be catchy but if they're not related to the subject, you're going to lose your prospect with the next click.
- Many people like to start with the offer. So you can write out the complete offer, just as if you were writing it for your promotion. Start with the close, and write all the way through the order device. Now you're actually making concrete progress on your assignment. That also helps because now you know exactly where you have to lead your prospect ... you've defined the "finish line" for the project.
- Pull out some strong points you may want to use as sidebars, and start writing them up.
- Take whole ideas – major copy points – and start writing them out. They don't have to be in order, just start somewhere. That usually leads to something else ... and so it goes ...
- This is my favorite part – work on the headline or how you're going to open the promo. What's the special hook that's going to grab your prospect and drag them into the promo? Get this part, and you've got a WHOLE LOT of your work done.
- Work on a whole list of headlines. A lot that won't wind up at the top will be strong subheads you can use.
- Make "thumbnail" sketches of how you see the package. Some of the most successful writers work this way – figuring out their main points of their promo, how it's going to fit together, and then starting to fill in the individual parts. This is especially helpful if you work with a particular designer, because you can stay on track all the way through the promo.

So there's a little "cheat sheet" to beat the "empty pages" – that beast that most of us will face at some time or other.

Maybe next time we'll tackle things like the power of the word, meaning, flow, revisions, building credibility, or the famous "Golden Thread," (which you WILL NOT find in ANY college writing course ...).

And, if you're coming to Bootcamp this year, I hope you'll be front and center for my presentation with Will Newman. We'll be giving a Master Class on headlines called ***Hidden Gateways into Your Promotion: How "Mini-Headlines" Lead Prospects into Your Package***. Specifically, we're going to show you:

- Why you need to intercept your prospect's "end around" before you lose him.
- How to identify the best places to connect to your prospect's hidden desires, fears, and passion

- And, why less can be more when leading your prospect through one of the gateways.

[Learn more about this year's big event, including our incredible lineup of speakers.](#)

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