

Know Thy Prospect

By Clayton Makepeace

At our Power Marketing Summit, an attendee remarked on how ethnically diverse my staff and closest friends are.

"Is that by design?" she asked?

The question caught me completely off-guard. I honestly hadn't thought about it before.

But yeah, now that I do think of it ... Carline – my cherished friend – is half Haitian. My ex-wife is Hispanic, which (unless my math is off) makes my older kids exactly one-half Hispanic.

... And yep, I'm whiter than rice: Half English and half French. Nothing more than a boring old flat-assed, white-bread honky who really, *really* looks idiotic trying to dance.

"No," I assured her. "No design. It just kind of worked out that way."

I had to smile to myself, though: "Dad must be tumbling in his tomb."

See, my dear old dad was a racist – and proud of it.

Not merely a lukewarm, garden-variety racist, mind you: In the 60s, Dad was actually a card-carrying member of the Ku Klux Klan.

There is a happy ending to the story, though — several of them, actually ...

First, in August of 1963 – at the ripe old age of 11 – I clicked on the TV hoping to find the latest episode of *The Fugitive*. Instead, I saw a man my father had often reviled giving a speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial.

Based on what Dad told me about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I expected the guy to be some kind of a radical nut; oozing hatred for "Whitey" and demanding a free ride for "people of color".

Imagine my surprise when all Dr. King wanted was for everyone to be treated equally and fairly. And by "everybody," he named Blacks, Whites, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics.

One sentence from that speech struck me particularly hard: "I have a dream," said Dr. King, "that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but *by the content of their character*."

"Wow," I thought. "Everyone plays by the same rules?" "Fair enough." "Done deal."

Second: Seven years later, as fate would have it, I married a girl of 100% Spanish descent whom Dad came to adore. Later, I watched as he fell in love with his grandkids – despite their "mixed" ethnic background.

Third – and this really cracked me up – when a cousin completed our family genealogy, she announced that many of Dad's ancestors had names like Solomon and Rebecca – and were buried in Jewish cemeteries.

Before I could say, "Mozeltoff!" – the old man was on a plane to Jerusalem to rub elbows with "his people" at the Wailing Wall.

And even though my brothers and I were adopted and couldn't boast a single drop of Semite blood in our veins – he brought back Menorahs and yarmulkes for the whole family.

Turns out, Dad's previous racist attitudes hadn't been born of evil; just ignorance. Once he *actually met* some of the folks he previously despised, he liked them. And once he found out he, his dad and his brothers were all part Jewish, the "Chosen People" became the salt of the Earth.

As for me, Dr. King's admonition to dispense with stereotypes and judge folks solely by the content of their character – one at a time – has brought me many of the most precious relationships of my life.

How ironic, then, that I would wind up making my living in an industry that requires me to not only use but *actually formulate* stereotypes ...

Confessions of a Stereotypical Serial Stereotyper

As silly as stereotypes are in our daily lives, they are *absolutely essential* to the creation of winning direct response promotions.

See, when I set out to create ad copy, I'm not just writing *about* a product; I'm writing *to* a person.

In order to decide which of my product's benefits are likely to resonate most powerfully with the greatest number of my prospects (the key to capturing attention and promoting readership of my message) – and therefore, which should lead the charge in my overall theme, headline and opening copy – I need to have a sharply focused mental image of the person I'm writing to.

Specifically, I need to:

1. Identify the fears, frustrations and desires that are present in the greatest number of my prospects
2. Identify which of those emotions are most active – most dominant – in the greatest number of folks who'll read my message, and ...

3. Craft my theme, headline and opening accordingly.

In short, I must create a *stereotype* of my ideal prospect, and then write directly to that non-existent person.

Now, right off the bat, I know any stereotype I create is going to be more wrong than it is right. That's OK. I don't need a 100% response rate. One percent and everyone's happy. Three percent and they'll probably throw a tickertape parade in my honor.

The good news is, I have some valuable clues going in. The folks who select the media (mail lists, e-mail lists, websites, print publications, etc.) can give me great demographic and psychographic profiles of the prospects I'll be talking to.

Maybe my prospects are all on mailing lists of people who currently subscribe to a financial newsletter. Or folks who have previously purchased a soft-offer book on personal finance. Or guys who have expressed an interest in self-defense courses or gambling systems. Or perhaps, people who subscribe to newsletters on natural health and healing techniques.

From the data cards, I can know demographic stuff: Sex, age, location etc. And I can know what they did – what they bought – to get on that list in the first place, which tells me something about their psychographic profile: Their interests, desires, fears, etc.

Now it's time to get inside their heads.

What's it like to be this kind of person?

What *other* fears, frustrations and desires are they likely to have that are not explicitly revealed on the data cards?

There are lots of mechanical ways to find clues. I can study competitors' most successful promotions. I can go online and search for surveys and polls for people in my prospect group. I can read my clients' testimonials and complaint letters. I can call some of my client's customers – and everyone I know who's in my prospect group – and give 'em a grilling.

And last but certainly not least, I can try The Stanislavsky Method: I can lean back, close my eyes and crawl inside my prospect's skin. I can imagine how I'd feel if I were in the same boat as the prospect – and let every thought and feeling I experience flow out through my fingertips to the keyboard.

I've found that actually going through the process of creating a comprehensive profile of my stereotypical prospect – a document that incorporates everything I've learned and everything I suspect to be true about him and/or her – is a huge help at every stage of the ad writing process.

A few months ago, for example, I created the following profile for a promotion I was about to write for an alternative health newsletter.

I'm hoping that sharing it with you will go a long way towards helping you climb inside your prospect's skin:

Health Newsletter Promotion

Prospect Profile

"I ain't as good as I once was ...
... But I'm as good ONCE as I ever was!

"I used to be hell on wheels
when I was a younger man

"Now my body says '*You can't DO this, boy!*'
"But my pride says, '*Oh, yes you CAN!*'"

– Toby Keith

I. Who is My Prospect?

My assumptions ...

- The data cards say about 60% of these folks are male and 40% are female. But since a significant number of women purchase health products from mail packages addressed to their husbands, the split could be closer to 50/50.
- Nearly 100% of them have already celebrated their 50th birthdays. Average age is 68 years. That means I'll be addressing lots of 70-year-olds and 80-year olds, too.
- Average age of 68 means my average prospect was born in 1938 ... in high school in the 50s ... in their 20s and early 30s in the 1960s. Cultural references from those periods should resonate powerfully.
- Judging from national statistics, I can assume that at least 30 percent are members of ethnic minorities and that somewhere around 10% are gay.
- 100% of my prospects have demonstrated an interest in better health by actually purchasing health-related newsletters, books and other products through the mail in the recent past (12 months or less).
- Judging from their average age and income level, I can assume that a significant number of my prospects are retired and on a fixed income, are politically conservative and fairly well-off.
- Since these people have purchased similar products in the past, it's a good bet that many are distrustful of the medical establishment and are eager for an alternative source of health advice.

II. Male Prospect Profile

A. Mental State: The average 68-year-old man still feels 18 inside. In his mind's eye, he still sees himself as healthy, strong, bullet-proof, sexy and virile.

Our typical male prospect tends to derive much of his identity and self-value from:

- His ability to obtain sex and to perform well ...
- His ability to prevail in physical competition with other men ...
- His ability to prevail in the competition for career and financial success ...

But his delusions are rudely shattered ...

1. When he stands before a shaving mirror and sees an "old, tired man" looking back at him ... or catches a glimpse of his hands and is shocked to realize they look like the hands of his father or grandfather ...
2. When the attempt to throw a ball or swing a golf club ... run a few steps or jog up a flight of stairs ... lift a heavy piece of furniture, spend an hour bent over working on his car or garden or indulge in vigorous love-making leaves him exhausted, breathless and/or in pain ...
3. When he notices that he can't read the fine print on the sports page or see well enough to confidently drive at night. Or that his fading hearing has him constantly asking folks, "What did you say again?" Or when he finds himself feeling mentally confused or suffering memory lapses more often.
4. When he realizes that the sight of a hot woman no longer takes his breath away ... that the ladies aren't returning his admiring glances like they once did ... that his sexual fantasies and dreams are fewer and farther between ... and that his once firm and frequent erections are becoming less "erect" and more rare.
5. When he finds himself dealing with the same irritating things that plagued his father: Insomnia, indigestion, joint pain, weight gain, energy loss, forgetfulness, grumpiness ...
6. When a doctor forces him to face the fact that his once-low cholesterol, blood pressure and/or blood sugar numbers are rising, putting him at risk for a serious age-related health problem ...
7. When a trip to the emergency room confirms that he has heart disease or has had a heart attack or stroke ... or diabetes ... or cancer.

B. Emotional State: Long periods of denial, punctuated by moments of intense frustration and sheer terror when confronted with the reality of his situation ...

1. Surprised, disappointed and saddened when confronted with the reality of his aging physical appearance ...

2. Frustrated, disgusted and angry about how his aging body limits or destroys his ability to perform the physical tasks he once enjoyed ...
3. Embarrassed in situations where his appearance, eyesight, hearing, mental lapses or memory make his aging condition apparent to others ...
4. Chagrined by his declining appeal to the ladies and alarmed about the continuing decline of his libido and sexual performance ...
5. Worried about the high cost and possible side-effects of the drugs he takes to address everything from his minor health irritations ... to his serious risk factors ... and to diseases he has actually been diagnosed with ...
6. Indignant and angry with his (younger) doctors who obviously view him as an old man ... who believe that his health problems are to be expected at his age ... and who give up too easily on him ...
7. Skeptical, cynical and suspicious of a medical industry that he clearly understands is set up to grow richer as he grows older and sicker ... fed up with alternative docs and supplement companies that promise real-world solutions but never deliver for him – and stubbornly determined not to be played for a sucker.
8. Scared spitless when he contemplates how fast his life has gone by so far ... how much faster each year speeds by now than when he was younger ... how many friends have died suddenly ... and he vicariously relives what his father must have experienced as decline and death took him.

His worst moments are when he does the math in his head: I'm 60. In 10 years, I'll be 70. 70-year-olds can't do any of the things I like to do. I only have a few good years left to enjoy my life!

Or worse ... "20 years ago, I was 40. Those years went by in a flash. 20 years from now, I'll be 80 ... pooping in my pants in a nursing home, or on my deathbed, or maybe even pushing up daisies."

9.

He wants, yearns, *passionately desires* to be freed from all of the above and ...

1. To halt the relentless march of time ...
2. To stop looking older with every passing month and start looking younger ...
3. To be able to work and play with the same skill, energy and stamina he had years ago – and to add 10, 20 or even 30 good years to his life ...
4. To relive the days when women noticed him and cast appreciative glances his way when he walked into the room – and to reclaim his former status as a sexual hero with his significant other ...

5. To be freed from his slavery to doctors and drugs, and from desperately hoping that supplements are working for him (but secretly wondering if they really are) ...
6. To stop obsessing about "the end" and begin living a richer, fuller life now ...
7. To be seen by others as the healthiest, strongest, most energetic, sexiest octogenarian ever ...
8. To find a doctor/advocate who believes in him ... who refuses to accept his age as an excuse for not healing him ... who has the qualifications and proven track record of fulfilling these same desires in other men who were once just like him.

III. Female Prospect Profile

A. Mental State: In her mind's eye, our female prospect also sees herself as she has been for decades.

For most of her life, our female prospect has derived much of her identity and self-value from her roles as:

- An object of desire – who derives power from her femininity ...
- An individual – strong, smart, capable, practical and independent (whether demonstrated in the home, at the workplace or both) ...
- A nurturer of others – personally responsible for the health and happiness of her partner, her children and other important people in her life ...

But her delusions are rudely shattered ...

1. When the signs of aging become ever-more apparent: More gray hairs and wrinkles, a thicker middle, and loose skin begins appearing on her neck and the backs of her arms ...
2. When her attempts to care for others – or to play with the grandkids – leave her exhausted, breathless and/or in pain ...
3. When she notices that her vision or hearing are fading and mental and memory lapses are becoming more frequent ...
4. When she walks by a construction site and nobody whistles – or worse, when strangers treat her with deference and matronly respect.
5. When she finds herself dealing with the same irritating things that plagued her mother: Insomnia, indigestion, joint pain, weight gain, energy loss, fuzzy thinking, forgetfulness, mood swings ...
6. When a doctor forces her to face the fact that she has risk factors for serious health problems ...

7. When she is told she has a serious illness.

On the other hand, women have a very different physical experience than men. Men tend to think about their health and the state of their bodies only when there is a significant problem. But from the moment a woman hits puberty, she is constantly forced to think about her body.

Unlike their male counterparts, women's bodies demand their constant attention due to their monthly cycles, the development and maintenance of their figures, regular gynecological issues and exams, pregnancy and nursing, pre-menopause, menopause and post-menopause.

For these reasons, it is impossible for most women to ignore the state of their bodies and of their health:

They are far more likely to have regular medical checkups and to see a doctor quickly when experiencing a health problem.

They are also more likely to follow a doctor's advice to the letter ... to take medication precisely as ordered ... and to consent to surgery when it's prescribed.

B. Emotional State: Still feeling 24-years old inside, but constantly aware of how her aging body affects her role, her power and her self-perceived value as a human being ...

They are likely to be less wary of the medical establishment than men and more likely to invest their doctors with greater faith and trust.

1.
Surprised, disappointed and saddened when confronted with the reality of her aging physical appearance ...
2. Frustrated, and guilty about how her aging body limits her role as a nurturer of her partner, children and grandchildren and fearful of becoming the one who needs nurturing ...
3. Disquieted by the loss of power that goes along with declining sexual attractiveness – and worried that it could decrease the affection of and intimacy with her partner or even the stability of her relationship ...
4. Concerned and feeling guilty about how the high cost of the drugs she takes will affect her budget on a fixed income ...
5. Frustrated with doctors who a) act as though her health problems are to be expected at her age and give up too easily on her and b) who, because she is a woman, treat her as though her problems are "all in her head" ...
6.
She wants, yearns, *passionately* desires to be freed from all of the above and ...
 1.
To halt the relentless march of time ...
 2. To stop looking older with every passing month and start looking younger ...

3. To be able to work and play with the same skill, energy and stamina she had years ago – and to add 10, 20 or even 30 good years to her life ...
4. To relive the days when her sexual power over men was palpable and to feel desired by her significant other ...
5. To spend less on health care ...
6. To be admired and respected by others for her strength and independence and value as a woman ...
7. To find a doctor/advocate who believes in her ... who refuses to accept her age as an excuse for not healing her ... who has the qualifications and proven track record of fulfilling these same desires in other women who were once just like her.

Can you imagine how having a profile like this could help YOU create promotions that directly connect with your prospects' most actionable fears, frustrations and desires?

Can you see how creating your sales copy in ways that connect your product's practical benefits with the most powerful emotions your prospects already have would help drive your response, revenues and profits through the roof?

My advice: Create a profile like this for every product you promote. Add every new smidgen of info you learn from your surveys and tests to it. And use it when selecting themes and crafting your copy.

Then, sit back and watch your response skyrocket!

Hope this helps ...

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3 Responses to "Know Thy Prospect"

Fantastic piece Clayton!

And thanks for the example!

Guest (Kevin) – over a year ago

I see the perspective of the reader in the copy, a new insight! Thank you.

Glen O Myers AmericanArtist and CopyWriter – over a year ago

Wow. This was amazing

ValeneA – over a year ago

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