

These Potato Chips Launched My Copywriting Career (Seriously!)

By Ed Gandia



The potato chip bag pictured holds a very special meaning for me.



Looking for a truly unique and delicious treat? Herr's has combined the great taste of smokey bacon with the spicy essence of horseradish to create the irresistible snacking sensation you now hold in your hands!

Our Secret? It's simple, really - we never cut corners at Herr's. We always start by selecting the very finest potatoes available. We then carefully cook them in vegetable oil to a perfectly crisp crunch. And finally, we top these rippled, golden crispy treats with just the right amount of authentic bacon and horseradish flavors.

The result is a flavor sensation that's sure to please with every bite!

So go ahead - give em a try. Once you do... you won't want to put them down! In fact, I'm so confident you're going to love this mouthwatering snack, you have my guarantee.

Jim Herr Founder

SATISFACTION

Recently, I listened to a talk by John Mackey, co-CEO of Whole Foods. He shared a very powerful insight:

"Fear does not exist in the present moment."

He explained that fear kills more dreams than anything else. Yet virtually every fear we experience is about the FUTURE.

It's not about this very second. It's not about escaping danger. **It's about something in the future that may or may not happen.**

That's so true! Think about it. When we worry about our finances, we're essentially worried about what will happen in a few weeks when bills are due.

We're NOT worried about what will happen now, in this very moment.

When we worry about prospecting for clients, we're worried about rejection. Or maybe about what will happen if a prospect responds favorably and wants to discuss a project with us.

What if they ask a question we can't answer? Or what if they want to see a writing sample for a type of project we've never done?

Yikes, what then?!

All these worries are about FUTURE events. Future events that haven't yet happened ... and might never happen.

These crazy little "mind movies" are all make-believe. They're imaginary — not physically in front of us.

Isn't that nuts? I never looked at it that way.

OMG, Someone Responded! What Now??

Okay, back to that bag of potato chips.

In late 2003, I was trying to get my freelance copywriting business off the ground. And I was striking out in the prospecting department.

Big-time! Seriously, I couldn't land a client to save my life!

As part of my "let's throw spaghetti at the wall and see what sticks" strategy, I mailed out hundreds of sales letters to random prospects.

That was scary. I mean ... what if someone replied? What would I say?

And what if they asked me questions I couldn't answer? What if they asked me about my experience writing X?

Fortunately for me, no one ever replied. So, in a way, I was relieved.

But a few months later, I got an email from the marketing director of Herr Foods, a snack company in the Northeastern U.S.

Turns out, she'd gotten my prospecting letter and held on to it. And she wanted to know if I'd be interested in writing some package copy for a new product they were launching.

I was so green, I'd never heard of "package copy." I had to ask a friend. Lol! (Package copy = copy that goes on the box or bag of a consumer product.)

Anyway, I said yes. I think I was trembling as I clicked the "Send" button!

But here's the interesting thing ...

She never asked about my experience writing package copy.

She never asked for samples.

She just asked if I was interested ... and if I'd take \$200 for the first one.

Uhhh ... heck, yeah, I was interested! :-)

I sent in my draft and she was thrilled with the copy. So she gave me two more to write. And then two more after that.

I think I ended up writing about 10 of them over the next few months.

The picture I posted above is one of the first few I wrote. I found the bag a few months ago while cleaning out some old files.

The First of Many Baby Steps

Here's why these little copy projects were instrumental in building my business:

They gave me the confidence to go after more clients. And once I landed another one or two clients, my confidence rose even further.

I wish I had a more exciting story about how I launched and built my copywriting business.

I wish I could tell you that Katie and Rebecca were so impressed with one of my Spec Challenge submissions, they booked the first flight to Atlanta (where I live) to hand me that \$10,000 check and BEG me to write for them.

Or that I was discovered when I was stocking shelves in a grocery store and a legendary copywriter took me under his wing. Or that Mark Ford was floored by the flyer copy I wrote for his favorite cigar shop.

But none of that happened ... to me. For me, it was all baby steps. I simply did my best with the limited confidence I had at each point in my journey.

Which is why John Mackey's quote about fear resonated with me.

If we let it, fear will take over our lives.

But when we realize that fear does not exist in the present ... and that it's about things that haven't happened ... (and will likely never happen) ... you can be free from its shackles.

So ... what fears are stopping you from going after what you want?

And be honest. How many of those fears are about the future? About things that haven't happened?

There you go. Now you know what you need to do.

Do you have any questions about conquering whatever holds you back in your copywriting career? Share with us in the comments below so we can help.

Ed Gandia is a successful freelance B2B copywriter and business-building coach. He helps B2B copywriters launch their business, land better clients, and earn more in less time.

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14 Responses to "These Potato Chips Launched My Copywriting Career (Seriously!)"

I've known for years that fear is in the future but somehow today it has struck a chord in me. Thanks for this Ed.

Guest (David Hands) – over a year ago

Ed - Great article! I'm a newbie and my biggest fear is not knowing what to say in my copy. Blank page blues! How do you find words to say in copy over and over, year after year? It's making me fearful that I won't be good enough and I'll never be able to do this. How do copywriters overcome this? Thanks for your wisdom.

Sandy28 – over a year ago

Excellent article; thanks, Ed. The fears that keep me back generally start out with "But what if..." and end with an improbable scenario. I have learned to ask myself, "So what?!" It always propels me forward. Take the risk; it may lead you to wonderful opportunities!

Lisa Bjornstad – over a year ago

I fear not having what it takes to learn the material I need to know in order to be successful. I fear not being willing to follow through to get to the place I need to be in order to be successful. I fear rejection in this industry..BUT I want it Bad and really Believe I can achieve being a B2B Copywriter and be Very Successful in the same Breath...Help me with My Fear!!!

Deborah Davis – over a year ago

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Deborah Davis – over a year ago

Great point, Ed.

There is no place for fear if we:

Learn from the Past.

Live in the Present.

Love the Future.

Now, if only I can remember that...

Jim Walbridge – over a year ago

This article was well timed for the point that I'm at. Trying to figure out all this stuff, and the learning curve seems steep. I appreciate that the people I have come to admire in copywriting share their stories of getting started. It's like a booster shot for feeling good about the career I'm about to launch.

Michelle H – over a year ago

I'm so encouraged by your potato chip experience and the comments posted by everyone here. It lets me know I'm not alone in this silly, irrational fear of the thing that hasn't even happened yet. It gets to the point of overwhelm and analysis paralysis and then I end up doing nothing. I know without a doubt that inaction will get me nowhere, but I am still frozen with fear. I need to learn to do it scared!

Guest (Myra N) – over a year ago

I have all the fears you mentioned plus the feeling of being overwhelmed. I especially felt that way moving through the Accelerated course. Now I've done everything you suggested; including choosing a niche, getting my website up and running, then attend Bootcamp & doing Spec Assignments. My latest fear is not being able to get clients!!

Guest (Ariella Safer) – over a year ago

Glad to hear this message resonated with so many of you! I appreciate the feedback. Trust me, I'm not fearless. I've had to get comfortable being uncomfortable. And that's taken years. But I still feel and struggle with fear. It's not about being fearless. It's about fearing less by taking baby steps.

Guest (Ed Gandia) – over a year ago

Ed, Great post and one I really needed this morning while I work on getting my business off the ground. Baby steps it is!

Ron Fowler – over a year ago

Great article. Very inspirational. My "fear" is that I am not a consumer...I shop little and need even less. But, a wonderful life of writing to sustain myself would be awesome.

How might one be a good content writer if they don't indulge in the product or concept?

Guest (Sandy) – over a year ago

Thanks for this timely article. I'm so glad to see that i'm not alone in this, I've had and still have the fear of failure, success and even rejection. I fear not understanding the course materials and flunking at this, as an introvert i fear that i may not be able to get clients, or may not make the best of bootcamp..all future events as pointed out in the piece.

I've also had worries and fears about spec challenges and not measuring up and achieving the kind of success others testify about

Guest (Kuphee) – over a year ago

Ed: Thank you so much for sharing your very timely article about fear--specifically, about John Mackey's awesome quote: "Fear does not exist in the present moment."

I couldn't help feeling so relieved because of the freedom I experienced immediately after reading that phrase and your further elaboration and explanation regarding it.

Now, after looking at fear from this new angle and perspective, fear no longer bothers me as it normally did in the past of which I'm so very grateful!

ROGER19 – over a year ago

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