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Clip #36

This is a wonderful conversation I had with Joe Vitale. Looking for hard to find classic marketing books and old reference books of great ads and classic material on advertising, marketing and how to write sales copy is a passion of mine. Joe Vitale has the largest marketing library in the world with over 5,000 books. Listen as we talk about his experiences as a professional writer, copywriter and marketer. In this conversation, he's going to give you some wonderful ideas and some wonderful reference of some of the real classics from the 90's and on. I hope you enjoy this.

Joe: Hello, this is Joe.

Michael: Joe, it's Mike Senoff in San Diego. I had a chance to look at your site. You have a lot of things going!

Joe: It's been busy, I've been prolific. But I've just been having fun. That's really all I've been doing. I get excited about a project, I pursue, I write it, I get it done and I go on to the next thing.

Michael: Exactly.

Joe: Basically, it's like a roller coaster ride with a lot of thrills and spills.

Michael: When you emailed me back and said "What are we going to talk about?" I did have to think about. We could talk about so many different things obviously and we only have so much time. I did think, and I did look at what people who visit the site are asking for, and I think we should talk about copywriting. I know that you have a great love for copy writing and you've done a lot of research. I've listened to a lot of your stuff, I've seen a video, and I know you're a real student of the old writings.

Joe: That's right, the old masters.

Michael: I think that's great. Maybe we can stick to that subject. As far as the format of our talk today, the whole concept of my site is I want to leave, for anyone who wants information on copy writing, direct marketing, business, how to make money, some of the greatest information out there available. We could sit and talk about things that are already in your book but I want to try and target my talks with people maybe a little more personal, because people want to see how Joe got to be where he is today. What are some of the things that led you there? Just kind of like your journey and your story. I think that's really interesting, and I know a lot of the people listening like that kind of thing. They can relate it to themselves. Well if these are the steps that Joe took to get to where he is

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and I want to be like him and write like him and sell like him and market like him, maybe if I follow these same steps I can do it too.

Joe: Got it.

Michael: They can go buy your books and we'll certainly direct them to your website and all your different things, they can go and hear it all for themselves, right?

Joe: That's exactly right.

Michael: Okay, so tell me where are you from originally?

Joe: I'm originally from Niles, Ohio. I spent the first twenty some years up there. I've been in Texas for the rest of the time, which is well over twenty years. I now live in the Hill Country outside of Austin, Texas between Austin and San Antonio.

Michael: How old are you?

Joe: I'm forty-eight. I'll be forty-nine in a couple of months.

Michael: What were you like as a kid? Were you entrepreneurial?

Joe: No, I was very much interested in a wide variety of things, so much so that it was confusing because I didn't know what I would end up doing. I wanted to be an actor, I wanted to be an attorney, I wanted to be a magician, I wanted to be a detective, I wanted to be a reporter, I wanted to be a baseball player, and I went through various cycles where I very sincerely pursued each one of those. I'm talking about as a kid, not as a young adult. I stumbled onto writing at one point and something shifted within me that said "You can be all of these different roles that you want to be if you are a writer", meaning that I could write fictional type work or plays, or even non-fiction books coming from all those different perspectives.

Michael: How old were you?

Joe: I was probably 14, 15 or 16 years old. I met Rod Serling, the creator of "Twilight Zone" when I was 16, and that was a turning point for me because I had idolized him for a very long time. I was a big fan of "Twilight Zone." It was one of the reasons that I wanted to become a writer. So when I met him it was a tremendous disappointment because he was human! I expected him to be super-human; I expected him to show up on the stage where he was speaking in Youngstown, Ohio and appear

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in a puff of smoke. Well, there was a puff of smoke because he was a chain smoker but he was a regular guy. I remember asking him if he was going to write his autobiography. And he thought about it and said “No, nothing’s really happened to me”! I thought here is this super star in television, this famous scriptwriter making all kinds of great money bringing out people to hear him speak and he didn’t think he had accomplished anything! He had self-esteem issues, he was just a little runt of a guy, he was afraid of a lot of different things. So anyway, it was an inspiration to meet him and because of the disappointment of seeing that he was human, I realized if he can do it, I can do it.

Michael: Absolutely, I’m the same way. Once you meet someone and really feel them out, and you have an image in your head that he’s a guru, the bottom line is you’re a man just like any other man. You have the same problems; your wife probably nags on you for leaving your underwear on the floor and not picking up your towel. We all have the same problems.

Joe: Yes.

Michael: So that was an inspiration in a way because you realized that if he could do it, you could do it and that gave you confidence.

Joe: Absolutely, that was a turning point for me. I began to more wholeheartedly pursue to career of being a writer. I really went after it with an intensity and a gusto that even humbles me today when I look back on it.

Michael: What were you doing?

Joe: I remember as a kid walking a mile and a half, which isn’t that big of a deal, but I would do it in the cold of winter as well as in the summer to go to downtown library in Niles, Ohio, which was a famous library because William McKinley, our 25th President was born in Niles, and they have a big museum there at the library for him. I would walk to that library and there were entire sections that I would go through book by book, reading those books, studying those books and I still have a visual in my mind of sitting at table in the library with all these books all over the place, with all these books opened up to different spots, with me having a notebook open and me writing out spots, passages, exercises whatever it was that I was coming across. I was doing such intense reading that it’s amazing I was such a poor student in school. In the public school, I wasn’t doing very well at all because it didn’t appeal to me, it didn’t excite me, it wasn’t speaking to my passions, to my heart interests.

Michael: What did your parents do?

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Joe: My father worked on the railroad, as a laborer, for thirty or forty years.

Michael: Did that influence you?

Joe: Yes, it definitely did. He had me working on the railroad when I was five years old. When I was five years old, he took me out, put me on the railroad tracks when he went out on jobs, put a pitchfork in my hands and taught me how to tamp ties, which is a very labor type thing to do and I did that for most of my life until I left Ohio in 1978 or 1979. I did that part time on weekends, sometimes on the evenings and almost every summer. What it did for me was teach me that I didn't want to do that for my entire life.

Michael: There you go.

Joe: I hated it! It was on some levels good exercise, on some level it was fun, on another level it was a learning experience, but I always remembered that I had this fundamental goal, this compass in me that said "You're going to do writing, you are going to pursue your career in writing. Anything you're doing whether it's on the railroad or anywhere else is only a passing phase, it's momentary."

Michael: How about your mom?

Joe: My mom was a housewife. She raised four kids and was always very supportive in that way in a very traditional role.

Michael: Okay, so you're in the library trying to devour everything you can. Were you all over the place or were you getting to a direction of a certain type of book?

Joe: Good question. I was very focused in a self-help area. I remember reading a lot of books on hypnosis when I was 15 or 16 years old and actually practicing hypnosis with a dear friend of mine, and even having a very scary experience one time when I put him under hypnosis and couldn't bring him out of it. I wrote about it in one of the articles on my website. It was a very influential experience.

Michael: I have a fear of that myself. I was in college and I went to a hypnotist and I was out there in the audience, and I'm probably pretty susceptible to that stuff and he was doing the whole thing and I came home back to my house with all of my roommates and I felt like I was still hypnotized. I had gone up to the Delmar Theater here in San Diego a couple of years back and I was there during the day, I don't know what I was doing, but I sat down

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for a hypnosis presentation and I got up for fear that I was going to be hypnotized and wouldn't be able to get out of it.

Joe: Well for anybody who still thinks that's what happened, you will always come out of the trance. Either you will fall asleep naturally or you will shake it off. It may last a little bit, but it's not something to be afraid of that it will be long term. But I didn't know that when I was 15 years old!

Michael: Were you trying to fix a problem that maybe you thought you had with yourself by learning some of this stuff?

Joe: That's a wonderful question. I don't know. I believe that I was interested in hypnosis, self-help, psychic phenomena, anything that had to do with the further reaches of the mind because something in me said that we could achieve far more than we ever thought possible. So I don't think I was coming from an "I have something that needs to be fixed" frame of mind. I was coming from the sense that what most of us experience in life is a limitation of what is possible. And I knew that intuitively when I was a kid. So I think my exploring was to explore what was possible.

Michael: Okay, let's move on from those libraries and intensive research times. How long did that last?

Joe: Oh, in many ways, it's still going on.

Michael: It is still going on. Okay.

Joe: I think it's one of those things I learned from martial arts, that you're never done. There is no such thing as a finished master who knows everything about copy writing or martial arts or anything that you can name.

Michael: Absolutely. At what time did you start focusing on copy writing?

Joe: I didn't focus on copy writing until the mid-70's or maybe 1980 or so.

Michael: When we talk about copy writing, how would you describe it? What is copy writing?

Joe: Copy writing is using words to sell. It's using words to influence and persuade people to buy something almost always.

Michael: Did you ever have a regular direct sales job?

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Joe: Oh, yeah, many of them. I worked as a car salesman. That was a very big learning experience for me when I first came to Texas.

Michael: Did you sell BMW's?

Joe: No, I didn't. I sold new and used Chryslers if I remember. I might even have that wrong. I hated that job. I hated it, and it was basically because of how the sales people were treated. I went through their training, and they taught us to make a profit off of every person who walked in the store, right down to if your mother comes in you sell her a car and you make a profit off it. And I did not like that.

Michael: What other direct sales jobs?

Joe: Oh, gosh, I sold biographical encyclopedias at one point, also in Houston, which also was not fun.

Michael: You probably recognize that some of the greatest most successful sales people all had direct sales jobs.

Joe: Right.

Michael: You hear Gary Halbert talking about how he sold encyclopedias. My very first direct sales job was selling cutlery for a Cutco Cutlery. Have you ever heard of that?

Joe: Yes.

Michael: That experience is probably a great learning experience, at least for me, that you couldn't leverage yourself because you could only make so many appointments during the day.

Joe: Oh, very good point. You were very much on a one-on-one basis. One of the reasons that I'm so much into writing, whether it's copy writing or writing the books that I do, I used to be on the speaking circuit quite a bit, especially back in Houston and while I could reach a certain number of people because I was speaking to crowds, I was wearing myself out doing it. Whereas if I write a sales letter or a news release or a book, I can remain sitting right here in my rocking chair looking out over my property in the Hill Country, never have to leave here, and reach people all over the world.

Michael: When did that light bulb come on?

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Joe: That was probably when I started experimenting with sales letters, the late 70's, 1980, somewhere in there. I was writing some books, my first book was "Zen and the Art of Writing" back in 1985. Somewhere before that I was experimenting with trying to make a living selling things through the mail. In order to do that I wrote my own sales letters, and I still remember the first time I got a check as a result of a sales letter I wrote, and the check was like \$200 in the mid 70's, and it was a miracle. It was exhilarating!

Michael: Tell me about it. What was the sales letter, or what was the product or the project?

Joe: The product was a software program that I wish was still around. Some people who have read my e-book, "Hypnotic Writing," see the sales letter for it in there and still want to buy that product because the sales letter was so strong. It was for a software program called "Thought Line," and Thought Line was this artificial intelligence program DOS-based, it's never been upgraded for Windows or Mac or anything else. It was DOS-based, which was what everybody was using at the time and it would ask you questions, it would host an interview with you. It would ask you "What are you going to write today?" or "What is your project?" or "What is your report?" or "What is your book?" You would answer and it would build questions based on what you answered. And when you were all done, it would print out a report that was functionally your outline, and once you had that, you could flush it out and you would have your writing done. I mean this was a remarkable tool. I still love it. I still think back to what a brilliant device that was. So I arranged to sell it. I was one of the first people to sell Thought Line to the public when it first came out. I wrote a sales letter for it, and that sales letter reflected my enthusiasm. You might be able to pick up some of my enthusiasm for that program even now when I'm talking about it.

Michael: Right.

Joe: Well think back to then when it was fresh in my hands, and I was thinking that this was like the Holy Grail for anyone who wanted to do any writing. So I wrote a sales letter to reflect that and the headline was something like "I Finally Found the Secret to Easy Writing," something along those lines. I wrote this letter with this high energy and this high enthusiasm. It was very direct, it was like two pages long full of enthusiasm and passion for this thing, and the orders started to come in.

Michael: Who did you mail to?

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Joe: I think I rented a mailing list of writers, and I don't remember if I, gosh, you're asking me to think way back, I think it was from Gordon Burgette who was on the speaking circuit and he may still be, talking to speakers and writers about writing books.

Michael: Do you remember how many you mailed out?

Joe: My test mailing was probably only a couple hundred. When I started to get orders, which was like \$200 for the software program at that time, which was eighty percent profit to me, it was amazing profit, and I tasted blood. I thought, "Oh my God what a wonderful world this is!" I didn't know this; I didn't even have to talk to anybody!" I wrote that one letter, which was my way of talking to them, I sent it out to all kinds of people, and they felt like I just spoke to them, they wrote checks to me. It was amazingly wonderful!

Michael: It's exciting.

Joe: Very exciting. I still am thrilled to think back to that.

Michael: I think people who listen to these don't have the confidence that this is really doable. You hear that you are one letter away from your next million and I absolutely believe that because you have the ability to duplicate that. If you were to try and convince someone, is this really real? Can you really make a living writing letters or sales copy to sell things?

Joe: The answer is absolutely. There is no doubt whatsoever that you can make a living doing this. At the same time I say that, I also admit that when I mailed my letter I did not know it would work. I mean I scrounged to get the money for the printing and the postage to put that out there just for a mailing at that time. So I didn't know it would work. I was taking a giant risk, and I thought "Is this worth it? If it does work, wonderful! If it doesn't work, I will think of something else. Life will not stop. I will not die. I will not lose everything because of this." So to answer your question, yes it can work. And I also understand when people are nervous or they're feeling risky or they're feeling like they don't know whether they can pull it off or not. Well you won't know if you don't try. Now, there are so many things that are rushing into my mind that I want to share. A couple of things that immediately come to mind are things like don't do the mailing, don't send the sales letter out until you are absolutely positive without any kind of uncertainty that it is the best that you can do. That means that you are going to get people to review it and you may ask some peer, you may ask some people in your target audience to read the letter first. You may ask another copywriter. You may pay somebody to

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critique it. But you may do a lot of different things to make sure that this letter is as strong as it can be based on everything you know and all you can do at this time before you send it out. I've seen far too many people who try it on their own, barely reading a single book on copy writing, barely writing any sales letters for practice, sending it out and then they send it out to 5,000, 10,000, 50,000 people and then tell me, "I got no response." Well there are a number of factors, everything from the list is of the utmost importance, and whoever you're sending it to is probably *the* most important thing in a copy writing formula. What you're offering them is the second most important thing, and then the copy, how you're expressing your offer to them is the third. So the copy is actually the least. All of these elements have to be looked at before you can do it.

Michael: Let's talk about research. Researching your market, how important is that? Use your example of the software you sold about your understanding what that product could do for a writer because of you using it yourself.

Joe: That's a good point. When it came to that particular product, when I was selling "Thought Line" I was and still am a writer, so I knew that audience. I could speak to them because I *am* them. I am one of them. So when I went to tell people about it, I knew what their trouble spots would be. I had also taught writing classes for quite a few years in Houston and had heard from a wide variety of people who said that writing was hard work. I remember one woman who said she was unable to write her entire adult life because when she was a teenager her father criticized something she wrote and she shut down. So I ran into those kinds of people and my letter was for those kinds of people. Buy my research had been a very living-oriented one. I lived it, I knew people who had lived it. I knew what their problems were, and I addressed them.

Michael: So if you're going to take on a writing project, let's talk about that. I saw your prices, your price list of what you charge and let me tell you, you're not cheap! For the average guy looking at what Joe Vitale charges for his services, it isn't cheap. I want to thank you for the advice here because I'm getting some good free advice that would cost other people thousands of dollars.

Joe: Oh, absolutely.

Michael: Do you remember how many pieces of that software you sold? How often did you continue to mail on that software project?

Joe: I continued to mail for probably six months, and I would have continued for far, far longer but a couple of things took place that caused me to want

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to stop. One of them was I could not keep an exclusive on the product, especially when they saw how many I was selling, how well I was doing. The manufacturer of it – I forget his name, and actually I think he ended up going bankrupt – he started to sell the rights to sell it to a lot other people and then all these other competitors started to sell it at various prices until it got to the point that within months other people were offering the same software that I was selling for around \$200, they were offering for \$19. It pulled the fire out of it for me.

Michael: Let's change gears a little bit. Who were your biggest influences when it comes to writing and copy writing?

Joe: I've been definitely influenced by two or three major players, and some of them haven't even been copywriters. I was influenced by the writings of Jack London and his very active engaging writing style is something I still use in my writing today. If you go and read any of his fiction stories, and even some of his non-fiction stories, a lot of people know he wrote "Call of the Wild" and "White Fang" but they don't know he wrote 55 books. Many of them socialist works, some of them autobiographical, but his writing style was very masculine, it was very vibrant, it was very energetic, it was very active, it was very engaging. And those are all things that I still use in my writing today and I learned it directly from Jack London.

Michael: So you emulated his style in a way.

Joe: Yes, and during that period when I said I would go to the library one of the things I was doing, and I encourage anybody who wants to write good copy to do today, is I would pull out passage of Jack London's work, as well as Mark Twain's and Ernest Hemingway's, and I would copy it word for word in my notebook because it was training my unconscious mind, as well as my conscious mind to adapt their rhythm to my own style.

Michael: Did you do this on your own, or did you read this as a good technique to be a good writer?

Joe: I did it on my own, but I might have read it at some point. I don't recall because it goes back so far. I was definitely a disciple of Jack London; I was definitely a disciple of Rudolph Flesch, who wrote "The Art of Readable Writing" and "The Art of Plain Talk." Those were wonderful books. He was all about speaking the way you would normally talk; write the way you would normally talk. Don't be fancy, don't try to impress anybody. If you use certain clichés, use them because that's part of your character, that's part of your personality. It was very, very freeing to listen to him. I still have his books beside me even here.

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Michael: What was he? Was he a writer?

Joe: He was an educator as I remember. He wrote numerous books that were geared towards parents teaching their children how to read and write better. I think the most famous book was “The Art of Readable Writing.” It’s still in print. “The Art of Plain Talk” is out of print but I always loved it. He created the readability formula, which I used to use on my writing which was a mathematical formula to find out just how complicated your writing was. I think “Thought Line” and there were a few other readability programs that came out at the time that were all software programs that would analyze a piece of your writing on your computer, and say “Oh, this is complicated; only an engineer could read it”, or “This is too simple; it’s for a grade-school child”. That all influenced me.

Michael: Who else?

Joe: Of course, the number one most powerful influence in terms of copy writing on me was Robert Collier. Robert Collier influenced me during my teenage years because of his metaphysical books. I have a very metaphysical side to me and I wrote “Spiritual Marketing,” which is very much from my heart. When I was a kid and I said I was interested in hypnosis and mind expansion, I read “The Secret of the Ages” and many other books, I think “The Wisdom of the Ancients,” or “The Ancient Secrets of the Masters,” I forget the other title.

Michael: Well, Robert Collier metaphysical self-help books!

Joe: Right. But I did not know until maybe 20 years after that that he was an ad man who wrote some of the most powerful sales letters of all time and he wrote a how-to book called “The Robert Collier Letter Book.” I still remember finding that. I was in Colleen’s Bookstore, which has since closed, in Houston, Texas rummaging around which is one of the things I love to do in bookstores, and there was this book called “The Robert Collier Letter Book”, a first edition, hard cover faded yellow cover. I looked at it and said “Is this the same guy? Is this the guy who wrote “The Secret of the Ages?” I took it up to the counter and I asked Colleen, and she said “Well I don’t know, but it could be.” As I researched, I found out it not only was but he told the story about writing those books in “The Robert Collier Letter Book.” That book caused me to be transformed as a copywriter.

Michael: When did you find that book?

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Joe: I probably found it around 1980. Somewhere in there, I can't be sure. But boy, I read that book numerous times and because of one passage that was in that book, it sent me on a trail that ended up with me writing another book of mine called "The Seven Lost Secrets of Success."

Michael: What was the passage in that book?

Joe: Robert Collier was talking about some sales letters he used to promote "The Man Nobody Knows" by an advertising writer by the name of Bruce Barton. And I read the letter and it said something about the book had been a best seller. I kept thinking "Who is this Barton? What is this book?" It planted a seed in me and it wouldn't let go.

Michael: Who was he?

Joe: Bruce Barton was a founder or co-founder of BBDO, Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn, one of the largest advertising agencies in the world. He was a best-selling author in 1925 and 1926, he was a congressman, he was almost as well known during that time period as David Ogleby was in the '60's and '70's. And I ended up writing "The Seven Lost Secrets of Success," the only book on Bruce Barton's advertising methods all because of "The Robert Collier Letter Book."

Michael: Was the book "The Man Nobody Knows" a book about his life?

Joe: No, it was about Jesus as a marketing person.

Michael: Really? And that was written by Bruce Barton?

Joe: That was written by Bruce Barton. It's still in print.

Michael: Really?

Joe: "The Man Nobody Knows" was a sell-out in 1925, number one bestseller in 1926, and an edited, washed-down version is still in print today. It was one of the first books about Jesus as a salesperson.

Michael: Is it a pretty good book?

Joe: Very much so because it's a very different look at what we've been about for the longest time.

Michael: And when he wrote it, was he already in his prime as an advertising man?

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Joe: Oh, yes. He was very famous. In fact, they probably put a lot of their advertising muscle behind making the book a best seller because it brought in a lot of clients and traffic to BBDO. Everybody would call and say “We want Bruce Barton to do our copy.” They hired a whole lot of Bruce Bartons to do it!

Michael: So your book, “The Seven Lost Secrets of Success,” were you successful with it?

Joe: Very successful with it. It was another one of those things where I was obsessed with learning about Bruce Barton. I pushed aside a lot of projects; I went on a two-year quest to learn everything I could. I found out who owned the copyright to his material. I went to the University of Wisconsin and looked through more than a hundred boxes of his diaries and his office papers that were left to the university. I did all of this research and self published the book, and it did so well, it’s now in its eleventh edition. One person liked it so much he bought 19,500 copies of it and gave it to everybody that was in his company. And that book is still in print. When people buy my program “The Power of Outrageous Marketing,” that book comes with it.

Michael: Who owns the rights to all that information, the university?

Joe: No, he gave the rights to everything he had created to the New York Institute for the Disabled. He had a daughter who was disabled; she lived in a wheelchair. In fact, she died by drowning. The wheelchair slid off into and pool and she drowned, and to help the disabled he gave all of his rights, everything to this institute in New York, and they had given me permission to use a lot of his work in my book.

Michael: So you were able to go through all his archival stuff and boxes? That’s great!

Joe: Yeah, I had a blast doing it. It’s still a book that’s from my heart.

Michael: Was it your first big success as far as a writing project?

Joe: It probably was. I had written “Zen and the Art of Writing.” I wrote “Turbocharged Writing.” I think I wrote “The AMA Complete Guide to Small Business Advertising” for the American Marketing Association. I think all of those came before “The Lost Secrets” book. So yes, “The Lost Secrets” was probably my biggest success at that point.

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Michael: Let me ask you this. You see in a book, first printing, second printing, and third printing. Is there a standard in the printing of books of how many runs or is it totally subjective?

Joe: That's a good question. It's subjective. That first printing could have been 100 books. Most likely, it's around 5,000 books but that is not absolute in any way.

Michael: Right, especially today because there are so many short-run printers.

Joe: Yes, there are short-run printers that will do one copy of a book, or a hundred or a thousand, so there's no way to know what that means without asking.

Michael: You get a book like that and you get that many copies out, what does that do for your business?

Joe: In the first level, it makes me famous. There are people who write to me that I never would have heard of. How do I explain this? I remember when I was still living in Houston, I got a fax one day from Germany, and this guy wrote this letter to me and faxed it to me that said "I just finished reading 'The Seven Lost Secrets of Success'. I think it is the greatest self-improvement book ever written for business people since 'Think and Grow Rich'". I had no idea where he got my book. Somehow, by having a book that has that many copies out there and that much publicity, *Success* magazine reviewed it, and many other magazines reviewed it, it goes out there and touches people and touches lives in ways the author never knows. But when they do come to me or they find me now online or something like that, there is so much respect and so much prepaid selling that I don't have to do anything but answer the phone or answer the email and I'm hired.

Michael: Exactly – that's great! How soon after did you start getting obsessed with P. T. Barnum?

Joe: I wrote "Cyber Writing" which was one of the first Internet marketing books, and I think I wrote that in '94 and '95. AMACOM, which is the American Management Association Publishing Division, came out with that book, and they wanted to know what else I had that I could write, and I had kicked around doing a story or something on P. T. Barnum. So I wrote and said "Well I'd like to do something on P. T. Barnum." They so quickly jumped with offering me an advance that it staggered me.

Michael: Can you share with us what maybe a guy thinking about getting into the writing business could make on an advance?

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Joe: Oh, advances for books these days are everything from nothing to \$250,000. The \$250,000 goes to the Stephen Kings and the Dean Koontz and some of the ones that are already established as best sellers. You don't hear about those too often.

Michael: Were you tied up in a contract with AMACOM to do writing for them?

Joe: My contract said they had the first vote on my next book. In other words, I would give them the first look on it. If they passed on it, I could go anywhere I wanted. So I told them about my P. T. Barnum idea and they loved it and they immediately said "We'd like to have you do it", and they made an advance, which was nothing to brag about, it was like \$5,000 or something like that, which is still pretty good in terms of what's out there. When I did the AMA advertising book, they offered me nothing in advance! I ended up getting more because of some negotiating but they started with zero. That's pretty bad! Anyway, I really wanted to do the book on P. T. Barnum. I had read part of his autobiography and fell in love with his charm and his cleverness, and I realized that he was probably one of the greatest marketing geniuses of early America, and he's an overlooked genius. People either remember him for the wrong reasons, like they think Barnum said "There's a sucker born every minute" and he never said that. He didn't write that, he didn't say that, he didn't think that. That wasn't his attitude to people at all. So I wanted to correct a lot of the misconceptions, I wanted to pay respect to him and I thought it would be a hoot to do the book! So sometime after doing "The Lost Secrets" and after doing "Cyber Writing" and seeing how enthused AMACOM was I signed on to do "There's a Customer Born Every Minute", my book on P. T. Barnum.

Michael: When you have a deal with a publisher like that, can you give an example of what kind of financial arrangement it ends up being if you have a success? What do you make on a book? What does the publisher make on a book? You don't have to get into details.

Joe: Well, there's good news and bad news with all of this. I really wanted to be published with AMACOM. I really wanted them to get behind my book and sell it. I really wanted them to do the Barnum book, and I really wanted to make good money doing it. They're a traditional, conservative publisher, so what they typically, and most publishers typically do this, is they offer you an advance, which could be nothing to several thousand to a lot of thousands. Typically, you get half of it when you sign the contract. You get the other half of it when you turn in a book they accept. From then on out, you earn royalties after they have earned back what they paid you in advance. The royalties are negotiable but are rarely above ten

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percent of the selling price of the book. Now, back to good news and bad news; I am very glad that they published me. That book ended up being a best seller at Amazon; I got on national television with it; A and E did a nationally syndicated biography of Barnum, and at the end of it they only held up one book, recommended one book and that was my book.

Michael: I saw that.

Joe: A lot of good things like that came from it, but in terms of money, I was making pennies, so the credibility I can take to the bank by doing some of my own marketing, but in terms of royalties that is nothing to brag about!

Michael: If you're a good copywriter and you can write and sell anything, you can be your own self-publisher.

Joe: Well, I am now at this point, I won't go to another publisher again unless they really do offer a lot of money up front and a better advance. For example, I have a dozen or more e-books at this point. I have made far, far, far more money with my e-books than I ever did with my *Nightingale Program* or any of my published works. The e-books are making me rich and in some ways famous.

Michael: Let's talk about e-books. Do people really read those things?

Joe: You know, Mark Joiner came to me about three years ago, he's the President of ESOP Marketing in Los Angeles, and he kept saying "Give me a book of yours and I'll put it online as an e-book and I'll sell it and we'll split the profits". He came to me for two years, just to show you how much of a futurist I am because I kept turning him down. I kept saying "Nobody is going to buy an e-book. I am a book-a-holic, I am sitting in my library right now, and I have 5,000 books all around me. I don't read e-books; I'm not going to write one; nobody is going to buy them." So he stayed after me for almost two years.

Michael: Was he already successful in selling e-books?

Joe: Yeah, he had an e-book of his own that had been downloaded something like a million times, so he had something. I don't remember if that was sold or if it was given away or what. But you know he was being fair and he was a nice guy and he seemed to be doing pretty good with his business. I just wasn't convinced it was worth my time. Finally, I said "Look I've got an old book called "Hypnotic Writing." I used to sell it in the back of the room at my cost. I've never published it; it's not online; I don't even do anything with it any more and I've quit speaking except for exclusive engagements so take that. He took "Hypnotic Writing," he put

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up a website called HypnoticWriting.com, he wrote a sales letter for it, and that sales letter was so good. I read that letter and I wanted to buy my own book! That's how good it was. Overnight there were about 600 orders for a \$30 e-book. That was overnight! Since then, we've sold tens of thousands of them.

Michael: Of the "Hypnotic Writing"?

Joe: Of the "Hypnotic Writing" alone. Again, that's an e-book; we're not printing anything; we're not fulfilling anything; we're not shipping anything. It's as automated as you can get because people read the sales letter, it's already on the website, they click to pay – the credit card transaction is all automated. They are automatically given a download site; they download it on their own. They don't have to talk to anybody.

Michael: Did Mark Joiner have an existing list that he sent the sales letter out to?

Joe: Yes, he had an existing list at the time and I have no idea how big it was at that point a couple of years ago. Today his list is over a half million names. He has 60,000 affiliates and a half million people on his mailing list, and it's probably much more than that. That was the number I heard maybe a year ago; probably far more than that.

Michael: Let's talk about the book "Hypnotic Writing." Tell me about it.

Joe: "Hypnotic Writing" was something I wrote intentionally for a back-of-the-room sale when I was still speaking and teaching writing classes in Houston. It's one of those things where anybody who has heard about speaking or done any speaking knows that if you've got anything to sell they're going to buy it right then and there because they want to take home more of you. If you did well, if they liked you they're going to want to buy your books, your videos, your CD's, anything you've got. Well I had a couple of books at that point but I thought "Well I want a higher ticket item." So I wrote this thing called "Hypnotic Writing" which I think was 120 pages. It had some fun chapters in there like "Milton Ericson's Techniques for Writing," and gosh, I don't even remember them all. I haven't looked at the book in a long time. It was like a hundred and some pages and I printed it out one-side only, spiral bound, gave it a cool title "Hypnotic Writing", gave it a pretty powerful subtitle, something like "Twenty Chapters That Will Super Charge Your Writing So You Can Easily Write Books and News Articles and blah, blah, blah", and I put a \$50 price tag on it. In my talks I would also say "I also have this book which you can't get anywhere else; it's privately printed, costs a few bucks but you can have it here today for \$30". So they felt like they got a deal, and I walked away with a lot of money.

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Michael: That's great! How long were you doing the group speaking presentations where you were selling product in the back of the room and stuff?

Joe: I did it in Houston for ten years.

Michael: Wow!

Joe: There was an adult education facility called "Leisure Learning" that's still there, and I started teaching probably in the early '80's and I did it as a way to help sell some of my books.

Michael: Okay, kind of like the Learning Annex?

Joe: Very much, exactly like that. And it helped make me famous in Houston. When I first started, I only had two or three people in a class, and by the time I was finishing ten years later, they had to get bigger rooms, and the classes were sold out to the extent that we had to divide them up and do two or three versions of the same class. They really prospered. Word of mouth did fantastic; I got a lot of promotion, and again I think on some level it made me famous in Houston.

Michael: That's great! I'm looking at your website and for anyone who wants to go to your website, you probably have several, but I'm looking at the one www.mrfire.com. Is that going to give somebody a pretty good idea of all the products and things you do?

Joe: Oh yeah, that's a portal to everything I've done. First of all, at mrfire.com, there are dozens of free articles on copy writing, on advertising, on publicity, on my thoughts about marketing, excerpts from my books. That's all there for free.

Michael: That's excellent. It's a beautiful site.

Joe: Oh, thank you.

Michael: I was reading a little bit about site designer who did that for you.

Joe: Yeah, Charles Lewis.

Michael: How long have you had this site up?

Joe: The site's been up since '95, but in this renewed version, it's only been up for about a year. I had kind of a plain vanilla one for the first year or two.

Michael: Where did "Mr. Fire" come from?

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Joe: That was a nickname that was given to me back in Houston, because sometimes I got so excited, so passionate about what I was talking about, they said I was a fiery speaker! That just led to someone saying “Oh, he’s Mr. Fire!”, and that just became my nickname. When I wanted a website it just seemed that everybody would misspell “Vitale” but they wouldn’t misspell Mr. Fire so we went with Mr. Fire.

Michael: Tell me about your library. You have 5,000 books around you?

Joe: I have one of the largest collections of marketing books in the world. I also have one of the largest collections of metaphysical books, so I have a foot in both of these worlds. I very much love the old masters. There are a lot of old books on marketing and advertising that are mostly forgotten.

Michael: Tell me your five favorite. You’ve already given me “Robert Collier Letter Book,” but I’m sure you have a couple stashed away that you don’t tell anybody about!

Joe: Well, let’s see. I may have to walk over and look at some of those.

Michael: Give us one that pops out in your head as a real gold mine.

Joe: I’ve always loved the works by Charles Austin Bates.

Michael: Who is he?

Joe: Charles Austin Bates was a copywriter at the turn of the century. He actually worked in New York City around 1901 – 1905, somewhere in there. He wrote several books, there is even a set of books that is very hard to find. I think they’re called “The Art and Literature of Business.” He did something that was really ahead of his time, something you’d see Jay Abraham and Dan Kennedy doing today. He did a book called “The Tailoring Book,” and I think that was in 1905, and it was nothing but a hardbound collection of ads that tailors could buy and use. It was like a swipe file.

Michael: Wow, do you have that one?

Joe: I have that, yes.

Michael: What’s it called again?

Joe: I believe it’s called “The Tailoring Book.” It’s all for tailors; there’s nothing but ads in there that he either wrote or he found that worked and

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the tailors would buy the book and then they would have ads that they could go and run.

Michael: That's wonderful.

Joe: So there's stuff like that. I'm a very big fan of John Capels, and a lot of people don't know that he wrote five or six books and I have all of his books including autographed ones. In fact, I found he taught an advertising course in 1950, and I found his handouts, which are at the Smithsonian Institution.

Michael: How did you find them?

Joe: All of his works, like Bruce Barton's were donated to the University of Wisconsin. John Capels widow donated all of his files, his diaries, his manuscripts to the Smithsonian Institution and they are sitting on a shelf in the back. You'd have to go there and ask for them and do research like I did, but it's all there.

Michael: Did he have books on different subjects besides how to write copy and advertising?

Joe: No, he only had those on writing advertising and copy. "How to Write Advertising that Sell" by Claude Bedell has always been one of my favorites. And if you want to know the book that influenced John Capels the most, which also influenced me; it's called "Advertising Copy" by George Hotchkiss.

Michael: Okay, that influenced John Capels?

Joe: Yep, John Capels openly says in one of his diary entries that he came up with the idea for his famous ad on "They Laughed When I Sat Down at the Piano and When I Started to Play." He got the idea for that from real "Advertising Copy," the book by George Hotchkiss.

Michael: Who was George Hotchkiss?

Joe: As far as I know, he was a copywriter in 1920. This book came out in 1925; I just reached over and picked it up. He dedicated it, George Burton Hotchkiss, Professor of Business, English and Chairman of the Department of Advertising and Marketing at New York University; this book came out in 1924 and he dedicated it to "The Anonymous Copy Writer."

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Michael: What do you think it is about these advertising men back at the turn of the century and in the 1920's and '30's and '40's that make them so valuable compared to our modern times of today?

Joe: I think the number one thing is they worked harder, or work harder if they're still alive! I think way too many people that are doing copy writing today or even writing the how-to books on how to do copy writing today are maybe not frivolous, but not real deep. These guys, the early boys, John Capels and David Ogleby even and Bruce Barton and George Hotchkiss, they wrote material that thoroughly taught you how to do copy writing. I think it was George Hotchkiss with his scientific advertising said he worked harder than any other advertising person he knew.

Michael: Yes, he did say that.

Joe: And I think that was one of his secrets to success. Capels and these other boys were all the same way. So when they wrote their books they were very, very thorough. There was nothing like a statement like "Write a good headline." Many people that are writing books today will tell you "Just write a good headline." That doesn't tell you anything. John Capels will tell you fifty ways to write a good headline and explore what a good headline looks like. I think that was the real difference. They worked harder; they were more persistent; they were more thorough; they were more determined.

Michael: Any other masters that really aren't well known to us in the direct marketing industry that you found as real gems as far as writing and copy writing?

Joe: Kenneth Goode wrote a whole lot of books back in the '30's. There was one of my favorites; I almost never tell people about this one, this is a real giveaway here, a real million-dollar tip! Kenneth Goode was a copywriter probably in the early '30's and I couldn't tell you too much more than that. He co-authored a lot of books like "Profitable Showmanship" and "Showmanship in Business", but the book I'm thinking of that he wrote by himself is called "How to Turn People Into Gold". I've always loved that title and I've always that book.

Michael: That is great.

Joe: What he talks about are the fundamentals of human nature that have never changed. This is something that I talk about from time to time in my talks and in my books, and I'll say that human nature has never changed. I've been researching ancient Roman history recently because my heritage is from there and I'm going to be going there and doing some research and

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I'm finding that they had the same emotions. They responded to the same appeals. "How to Turn People Into Gold" by Goode is where he talks about these hot buttons in people, and that if you do push these hot buttons in your copy or in your marketing you can turn these people into gold because they are going to buy from you.

Michael: Absolutely. How about back in Roman days, have you researched some really old writings on business and stuff like that besides in the 1900's, but even further back, anything impressive?

Joe: That's a wonderful question too. I'm just beginning to go that far back. I'm probably going to have to learn how to read Latin or Italian to do it in the most thorough way. I remember just recently I was reading a book called "The Golden Milestone," which is a whole book on Italian contributions from ancient civilizations through today. In ancient Roman times, Romans would make soap and they sold it to the Romans as soap. When they tried to sell it to the Germans, the Germans didn't believe in bathing, so they didn't buy soap, and the Romans just reframed it and said that it was a laxative and what you would do was eat it! It was the same product, but they reframed it for the market. And I thought that was brilliant! That was 2,500 years ago.

Michael: What magazines do you subscribe to and read avidly?

Joe: Not as many as I used to. They're actually more health oriented and magic oriented. Most of my material, or most of my work these days is all online, so I subscribe to EZ, and I read newsletters and things like that online, and I'll get Bob Blye's materials, he's a great copy writer and he's written great books. I highly recommend those. Or Dan Kennedy's "No BS" newsletter, I get that online, and Jay Abraham stuff, he's always cranking out things. So that kind of stuff all comes to me by way of the computer.

Michael: Okay, excellent. I think we're at about an hour of talking. You've given me an incredible amount of information, and I don't want to steal too much of your time away.

Joe: This has been great.

Michael: It has been great. I really, really appreciate it. What I'm going to do is I will get this up on the site in a hidden place for you to listen to, and I think you've given a lot and I really want to thank you for your time. It's been an honor.

Joe: Thank you, it's been fun. Did you get things that you hadn't heard before?

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Michael: Oh absolutely.

Joe: Okay.

Michael: Maybe down the road if we want to fine tune and do a session number two we can do that if you're open to it.

Joe: Oh, I'm very open to it. It was fun to do it. You ask great questions.

Michael: I really appreciate it, and I will be in touch with you.

Joe: All right. Have a great day.

Michael: Bye, bye.

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