How to Use Curiosity to Fascinate your Prospect

“$20K Secret” Report
An expanded look at a high-level secret that can boost your income by $20,000... or more

American Writers & Artists Inc.
How to Use Curiosity to Fascinate your Prospect

By Sandy Franks
Editor, Copywriting Genius

“Curiosity is one of the strongest of human incentives”.
– Claude Hopkins, Scientific Advertising

Curiosity is one of the most powerful emotions a copywriter can use to capture the attention of their audience. Humans are inquisitive by nature, and leaving a thought hanging, a question unanswered, a secret unrevealed or a mystery unsolved is almost irresistible for us to ignore... especially if we think we could benefit from the information.

Some of the most eye-catching headlines combine curiosity with self-interest. Headlines such as “Burn Disease Out of Your Body lying flat on your back using nothing more than the palm of your hand!” and “Read This or Go Broke!” just beg to be read.

Copywriters pour over headline copy for days and weeks in an effort to create a headline that stands out from the crowd... the one that yells “HEY YOU!” to the prospect.

And it’s often the curiosity headline that does just that. Just look at the headlines used by popular tabloids such as The Weekly World News:

- **MERMAN CAUGHT IN SOUTH PACIFIC. “There could be thousands of them down there!”**
- **POPE BEATS THE DEVIL – THREE TIMES! Pope John Paul II has personally fought with Satan at least three times – and won!**
- **You Think the Paparazzi Are Bad? THE MAMARAZZI ARE WORSE!**

The idea is to create a powerful magnetic pull that will draw the reader into the copy. What better way to do that than giving the prospect a captivating topic... without providing the details?
Curiosity is such a powerful driver that copywriters frequently reinforce their marketing packages with teaser copy... mouth-watering tidbits designed to make the reader want to rip open the package.

The secret behind good teaser copy has always been to include a hefty dose of curiosity that teases the reader with the benefits they will find inside. Teasers are often set up as bullet copy, and offer tidbits of information to grab the prospect. But never revealing all the information.

Here are three samples of teaser copy that might appear on the outside of an envelope...

- INSIDE: Secret loopholes the IRS doesn’t want you to know about
- Twelve delicious foods that could save your life – See page 5
- Uncovered: Secret government study that could save you thousands of dollars! *Find out how inside.*

You can see how these could tickle the reader’s curiosity, making it irresistible for the prospect to open the envelope.

Now, ask yourself what would happen to your response rates if you stuffed an entire marketing piece full of fascinating attention-grabbers that would guarantee to have your readers on the edge of their seats, page after page!

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**Words that arouse curiosity**

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Fascinating Possibilities for Teaser Copy

In the late ‘80s, Boardroom stunned the marketing community with a direct mail package like none ever seen before. Page after page was filled with fascinating tidbits that read very much like envelope teaser copy.

The curiosity level was intense. The reader was captivated over and over again as juicy nuggets of information were brought to their attention... without ever revealing exactly what the information was!

The late Mel Martin and Boardroom Reports founder Marty Edelston were the creative geniuses behind this new tactic, and it was a huge home run for Boardroom Reports.

Have you guessed which marketing package we’re referring to?

“What never… ever to eat on an airplane.”

This headline is as fascinating today as it was when it was written. But just imagine the response when it first mailed... at a time when airlines were routinely serving meals. The curiosity factor alone drove people crazy – even those of us in the marketing industry. It was simply irresistible to anyone who read it.

But the headline also contains a hint of self-interest. The reader is suddenly asking himself: “Gee, is it something that will make me ill? I’d better find out what this is before the next time I travel.”

The headline is quickly followed up with:

“The dirtiest, deadliest airline in the whole world!”

The reader is hard-pressed not to immediately think, “I REALLY better get this before I fly again!”

These two statements alone pull the reader in, because people just can’t stand to be left in the dark. But as the prospect continues reading, they find all six pages sprinkled with juicy tidbits that keep them enthralled.

- Get reimbursed for past stock losses.
• Deduct the cost of your hobby as a business expense, even if you never show a profit.

• How to get VIP treatment in hospitals. (All patients are not treated equally.)

• How banks play tricks with interest rates.

• A legal way to deduct gambling losses.

Any one of these could be placed on the outside of a direct mail package as teaser copy. But instead of saving them for the envelope, the copywriters liberally spread them throughout the entire copy of the sales letter.

These hard-hitting zingers have been dubbed “fascinations” by the marketing industry. Some folks still call them “teaser bullets” or “curiosity bullets,” but the fact of the matter is that they are intended to fascinate the reader. They’re short, pack a hefty punch and tantalize the reader without ever giving anything away.

They are simply fascinating.
What never...ever to eat on an airplane!

The dirtiest, deadliest airline in the whole world

TRY IT FREE

- How to get VIP treatment in hospitals. (All patients are not treated equally.)
- Cruise ship rapes: The uncensored facts which even the news media won't touch.
- How to find out if someone has a "past" — criminal record...bankruptcy...or whatever they’re hiding.
- The little-known casinos in Atlantic City and Nevada that offer the best odds.
- Deduct the cost of your hobby as a business expense, even if you never show a profit.
- How to get an Oval Office tour of the White House.
- Get a hotel suite...while paying for a room.
- How competent/incompetent are your lawyer and accountant? Check 'em out...secretly.

(And other surprising secrets you’re not supposed to know.)

Dear Fellow American:

This letter is about information that's "none of your business". For example...

Did you know that certain specific foods they serve on planes will lower your blood sugar count at high altitudes -- leaving you tired...cramped...headachy?

Now, perhaps you’re thinking, "Why would airlines want to make me tired and grouchy?" Well, they don’t want to, of course. But they do want to slice the cost of each meal -- so if it’s cheaper, and (artificially) tastier...then -- why not?!!

Let’s talk about survival. You think, perhaps, that air safety is minutely scrutinized by the FAA...that all airlines regard careful

A portion of the “What never...ever to eat on an airplane!” letter.
maintenance as sacred? Well, some do...but some don't. And if an airline is losing hundreds of millions of dollars a year (as some are)...and Wall Street is whispering "Bankruptcy"...then there's a strong temptation to cut corners -- a LOT of corners.

Talk to the flight crews on some airlines, and you'll hear some real horror stories. Talk to the FAA, off the record, and they'll tell you that budget cuts have left them stretched to the breaking point. Maintenance records are being falsified...much too much of the time.

I'm telling you all this to illustrate a point: They tell us we're living in the Age of Information...and we are drowning in information. Unfortunately, most of it's useless. On the other hand, you're not getting the information that really counts because it's "none of your business".

Would you like to know which airlines are filthy, over-aged, under-maintained flying cattle cars? Sorry, it's "none of your business".

Which airline foods could ruin your day (at the very least)? How do you recognize an Air Safety Alert? (Signifies an extra element of risk...but not so great as to cancel the flight.) Which airports and airlines have the best security? The worst?

It's "none of your business", and you know why? Because it's bad for business...bad for a company's stock price...bad (i.e., embarrassing) for the executive bureaucrats who run a company. Nor will you ever learn about these things in magazines or on TV. Media executives are terrified of losing their airline advertising.

Well, too bad! Now you can discover what's really going on.

TRY THREE FREE ISSUES OF 'BOTTOM LINE'

Twelve years ago, I started an unusual 16-page, biweekly periodical that was unlike anything then (or now) being published in the U.S.

Unusual? Well, consider this: BOTTOM LINE accepts no advertising...has no glossy photographs...doesn't even run any editorials or letters to the editor.

So why are there now well over a million fanatically loyal subscribers (larger than Business Week, Forbes, or Fortune)? It's simple. We give you what you can't find anywhere else -- covering all aspects of living...working...playing.

Let me show you what I mean -- with getting your money's worth...

. Where to find the best buys in a supermarket...positioned where you're least likely to look!
. Conventional wisdom: You can't push an insurance company when it comes to collecting money. Wrong! Here are two proven ways to get your check within days.
. Thinking of suing your lawyer for malpractice...or incompetence? There's the hard way (favored by most people) and the easier way. Here's how to prevail. Quickly.
. Canceled check for fire insurance premium proves you're

(continued...)
Teasers, Headlines, and Fascinations

A fascination is a juicy little nugget that piques the reader’s interest, builds suspense, appeals to self interest and captivates the reader by hinting at something that seems believable, while at the same time sounding almost impossible.

Writing a fascination is a lot like writing headline or teaser copy that is intended to stir the reader’s curiosity. In fact, many curiosity headlines and teasers are written as fascinations! So the same process can be used for both of them.

Michael Masterson once gave a great example on how you might write teaser copy for an infamous peanut diet, and the steps he goes through are just as applicable to fascinations.

Michael first asks the reader: “Let’s say you’re selling our infamous peanut diet book. What kind of teaser would you write? Would you say...

Want to Lose Weight? Look Inside...

Clearly this copy arouses very little curiosity and doesn’t really pique the reader’s interest. So he takes a look at the benefits “No starve-yourself diets... no rabbit food.” Then he thinks about the unique selling proposition “Someone’s figured out a way for you to shed weight by eating tons of peanuts”... and continues the process, coming up with a second try that reads:

Overweight? Love Peanuts? See details inside...

This one is vague and has something of a “disconnect” to it. After all, what do peanuts have to do with weight? That’s not the kind of curiosity we’re looking for. So Michael proposes another one...

You can lose 8 pounds a week eating peanuts. Details inside...

Not bad, but as Michael says, “One of your greatest challenges is to convince your prospect – quickly – that you can make the impossible happen.” There is nothing convincing... or impossible, about the above statement.
Finally Michael proposes one that he feels has a convincing promise and states an intriguing fact:

**Doctors Uncover “Lost” Study:**

**INSIDE: A proven way for you to lose 8 pounds a week – EATING PEANUTS!**

This final copy is interesting, intriguing and a little bit outrageous while still being possible. It gives away just enough to build curiosity in the reader, while not revealing exactly how this diet works.

The result: A wonderful fascination that can be used virtually anywhere in a marketing piece, not just on the envelope.

The same idea applies to curiosity headlines, which are also frequently written as fascinations. In the following article, Ronald Murphy explains how to write a headline in the form of a fascination.

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**Sales Headline Copywriting – Two Quick Steps to Success**

By Ronald A. Murphy

The headline to a sales letter is like the doorway to a store. The purpose of both is to draw people in. To get people in the store, a doorway has to be both attractive and inviting. To get people to read the letter, the headline has to both make the prospect take notice and make them want to know more.

When you write a headline to sell something, make sure it does these two things:

1. Gets attention
2. Arouses curiosity
How to Get the Prospect’s Attention

If you’re out in the street and you want to get someone’s attention, it’s easy enough. Just yell at them, “Hey, YOU!” They’ll turn and look at you to see what you want.

A lot of headline writers think they can do the same thing in print. They sprinkle “you” and “your” and “you’ll” around and figure that’s all it takes. It’s not that easy.

What gets attention is something that truly interests the prospect – it solves a problem for them or meets a compelling need.

For example, if you’re addressing someone who wants to get rich quick and easy, a headline like this could work “You’ll Make Millions Selling Our Christmas Cards Part-time.” Now this headline has some problems that we’ll address in a minute, but at least it would get attention if the prospect were interested in making millions.

Remember though: Interest – like beauty – is in the eye of the beholder. If you were sending a sales letter to monks and nuns, an appeal to their greed probably would not get attention. That’s why it’s so important to know your prospect. One way to do that is to research your product. Often asking what the purpose of the product is will give you insight into the prospect’s thinking. That’s because the product’s designers were trying to solve a problem or meet a need.

Golf clubs designed with gigantic titanium heads appeal to golfers who want a tool to help them hit the ball farther. They could probably do better by spending the money on lessons, but they want what they want the easy way. The headline can get their attention by acknowledging what they want:

“With Our Big Pig Titanium Driver, You’ll Hit The Ball At Least Fifty Yards Farther – Without Changing A Thing About Your Present Swing.”

This headline will get attention because it appeals to the prospects interest. But it shares a problem with the earlier headline. Maybe you already know what it is.
The Missing Element – Curiosity

The problem with both our headlines is that they don’t arouse curiosity. In the first case, we’re told how we can make the millions – by selling Christmas cards for the company. There’s no mystery.

In fact, if I’ve had any experience selling cards in the past, I’m liable to trash the letter because experience says it’s not a good idea. Your sales letter will never get a chance to weave its magic spell.

The same problem exists with the second headline. We’re familiar with the Big Pig Titanium Driver. We actually had a friend that bought one and it didn’t help him increase the distance of his drives at all. Again, rejected before we have time to make our pitch.

How To Arouse Curiosity

You arouse curiosity by hiding, obscuring, veiling, hinting but never revealing. Let’s change the first headline to read:

“Make Millions With A Joyful Product Everybody Needs – And LOVES!”

Now we’re going to want to read the letter to find out what the joyful product is. Our curiosity has been aroused.

And our second headline could be changed to:

“Hit The Ball Fifty, Even One Hundred Yards Farther – Without Changing Your Swing!”

Wow, lousy golfer that I am, I’m going to read the letter and find out how I can do this!

The importance of arousing curiosity is the main reason for the old copywriter’s adage: Never Mention the Brand in a Headline.
Just Two Quick Steps to Headline Success

If you’ll just apply these two simple steps, you’ll be able to write great headlines. They’ll get the prospect’s attention and they’ll pique his curiosity and make him want to read more.

That’s the whole point of the headline – to make them want to read more.

[Editors’ Note: Ronald A. Murphy is a Copywriter and Graphic Designer specializing in Direct Response, Internet and Multichannel Marketing. Murphy writes and designs sales letters, direct mail packages, inserts, web sales pages, direct email, newsletters for marketing, Internet articles, white papers, and other sales focused materials. He provides expertise to clients serving financial, business, technology, health, opportunity and fundraising markets. For more information on copywriting and marketing, visit his site at http://RAMurphy.com. At the site, you can subscribe to this newsletter, R A Murphy’s Copywriting and Design Tips.]

Why Do Fascinations Work?

Fascinations are like cliffhangers, something television producers have been capitalizing on for decades. In the late 1960’s, the Batman series would end an episode with Batman and Robin in mortal danger, keeping viewers on the edge of their seats until the next episode, when they would once again defeat their nemesis.

And who can forget one of the most talked about cliffhangers in television history – “Who shot JR?” – from the TV series Dallas.

More recently, programs like Heroes (“save the cheerleader, save the world”) push viewers forward from week to week, always leaving the audience with unanswered questions and the promise that all will be revealed in upcoming episodes.

Like cliffhangers, fascinations give just enough information to arouse the prospect’s curiosity and build suspense... then leave the reader hanging. If the prospect wants to find the answers, they either need to continue reading or, in many cases, actually have to purchase the product.

What are some components of a good fascination?
• It should play the curiosity card in a very big way. When a reader sees a fascination, they should say, “Wow! I really want to know more about this!” It’s the difference between saying...

One million reasons to open a Roth IRA for your grandchild
and
Make your grandchild a TAX-FREE millionaire

The first one is interesting, but is it really something you want to read about? Not necessarily. Now take a look at the second one. Wow! How is this even possible? Don’t you feel compelled to find out how this can be done?

• Fascinations are unpredictable. The prospect has no idea what the answer is, which creates suspense and tension. Just take a look at two different ways the following statement can be made...

Why you should never bring previous years’ tax returns to an IRS audit.

Ho hum. I’ve already got half of the answer and am not really sure I need to know more. But by changing just a few words, a mystique can be built that demands an answer.

What you should never bring to an IRS audit.

• Many fascinations contain paradoxes that make them irresistible. (Paradox: A statement that seems contradictory or opposed to common sense, yet is perhaps true.) Example: Deduct mortgage payments on a home you don’t even own!

• Fascinations never reveal... instead they hint, imply and allude.

• Fascinations are entertaining, often packing a one-two punch

How to Find Fascinating Tidbits in Your Product

It’s been said before, and it’ll probably be said a few thousand times more in this lifetime: You must know your product from top to bottom!
Books, premiums, health products and even some newsletters are prime candidates for marketing with the use of fascinations. But one of the keys to readily pulling out the interesting nuggets is keeping an open mind as you review the product.

Surprisingly, many of the answers to fascinations aren’t all that interesting. You need to be able to study the materials without missing the information that can be turned into juicy tidbits. If it’s a book or a newsletter, that means actually reading everything. You can’t just flip through and skim the pages, or your list of potential fascinations will be woefully short.

Here are a couple of paragraphs excerpted from Boardroom’s Healing Unlimited. Take time to read them and even develop a few fascinations for them on your own. Then, read below to see the fascinations that were used in the actual marketing piece.

Excerpt #1 from Healing Unlimited:

Reduce fat in ground meat by cooking it until it’s no longer pink, and is in small crumbles. Drain the cooked meat, stirring it well in a colander. Return it to the kettle, cover it with very hot water and stir well. Drain again in the colander. Result: Using this technique in an institutional setting, the meat’s fat content is reduced by 65%. Prepared this way, the meat tastes best in dishes with ample seasonings and sauces, such as chili or spaghetti.

See if you can think up two different fascinations for this paragraph:
Now, let’s try our hand at another one:

**Excerpt #2 from *Healing Unlimited***:

...Actually, acupuncture goes even deeper than massage because it stimulates the nervous system.

Back pain. First, we ease the discomfort by working on the circulation in the spinal area. Then we try to analyze the cause of the problem. It could be posture, weight, or a poor mattress. Or the patient may need a better diet and more exercise. The object is to keep the pain from recurring. *Success rate: 95%.*

Here are the published fascinations used in the marketing piece that applied to these two excerpts:

- **Excerpt #1**: *Simple cooking trick eliminates 65% of fat content from beef.* Nutritionist’s advice, page 85.
- **Excerpt #2**: *Banish Agonizing Back Pain Forever.* The proven drug-free, surgery-free solution (on page 339) works for 95% of all patients!

You can see how the copywriter took information that doesn’t really seem that groundbreaking. Yet he was able to turn it into a huge benefit for the reader, while at the same time piquing the prospect’s curiosity.
In the following article (courtesy of www.healthmarketingsolutions.net), the author focuses on writing for the health marketplace. But the seven bullet types identified can be used just as effectively in any industry. So make sure you don’t skip over it just because you’re not a health writer.

How to Write Health Bullets

Today the topic is writing health fascinations or “bullets.”

Fascinations are nothing more than short snippets of copy that deliberately tease a prospect with the promise of an overwhelming benefit. They stimulate curiosity and intrigue... seduce your prospect to read further... build desire little by little... and make your sales message more readable.

From a writing and design point of view, fascinations also help break up the copy and allow you to highlight dozens of benefits very quickly.

How to Write Health Bullets That Will Make it IMPOSSIBLE for Your Prospects to Ignore Your Sales Message

We have copywriting friends who are acknowledged masters of fascination writing. Over the years, they’ve taught us some of the secrets of writing good bullets, particularly for health. We can’t go into all of the details here, but we can share with you some of the key points.

First, the purpose of fascinations is to keep your prospect reading. Ultimately, of course, the purpose of all ad copy is to MAKE THE SALE – but before you can make the sale, you have to keep people intrigued and reading along. You have to sell your copy as you’re selling the product.

One of the best ways to do that is with fascinations. Fascinations also can make great headlines. One of my personal favorites is...
How Doctors Stay Well While Treating Sick People All Day

That’s basically a fascination. It contains an implicit benefit (staying well) while maintaining a high level of curiosity and intrigue (what do doctors do differently from the rest of us?).

A friend of ours has actually made fascination writing into a science, cataloging no fewer than 21 different fascination (bullet) styles or techniques. Here are just 7:

1. The “What” bullet. Health example:
   - What supplement companies don’t want you to know about their CoQ10 supplements.

2. The “Are you...?” bullet. Health example:
   - Are you or your doctor making these common mistakes with your health?

3. The classic number bullet. Health example:
   - 4 ways to trick your body into releasing its own natural painkillers.

4. The quickest or easiest bullet. Health example:
   - The easiest way to treat arthritis pain without drugs.

5. The truth bullet. Health example:
   - The truth about cholesterol-lowering statin drugs: What your doctor won’t tell you could end up destroying your liver.

6. The single bullet. Health example:
   - The single most important nutrient you need for heart health. It’s not expensive, but there are at least 7 different types and only ONE works.
7. The “better than” bullet. Health example:

- Better than steroids: New, next-generation performance products increase your body’s production of natural testosterone legally and without side effects.

Those are just a few types of bullets or fascinations. There are dozens more – and many different variations.

If you want to punch up your sales copy, we urge you to consider using more fascinations. We usually write two or three hundred just to start – and then whittle them down to the best dozen or so for each section we are writing. When we write promotions for Rodale, they’re almost entirely fascinations. We use the best ones for headlines, subheads and box copy.

How Are Fascinations Used?

Fascinations are most often presented as a string of bullets that stimulate the reader’s imagination. If the copywriter creates fascinations that are too long or cluttered, they will quickly lose their punch.

Although you will sometimes find fascinations embedded in body copy to keep the prospect reading forward, the more common uses are as follows.

**Table of contents:** Many copywriters use fascinations to create a table of contents. The juicy little tidbits, written as fascinations, are typically included on the front and back covers of magalogs and tabloids, and are used to draw the reader into the interior copy of the package. The reader MUST open the package to get any of the information promised on the cover.

**Premiums:** Free reports and other products are frequently included as premiums to entice the prospect to make a purchase. Fascinations are often used to pump up the perceived value of the premiums, while at the same time appealing to the reader’s self interest. The reader must make the purchase (and get the premium) if they want to satisfy their curiosity.
Using fascinations in a table of contents pulls the reader into the package.
Premiums appear more valuable and have greater appeal to self-interest when fascinations are used.
**Product Purchase**: Some direct marketing pieces, especially for books and health products, use fascinations throughout the marketing piece to tempt the prospect with the product. The prospect can only receive the information and/or benefits promised in the fascinations by purchasing the product. As the prospect continues reading through the sales letter, a little is given away, but there is always the promise of much, much more.
Let’s take a look at some fascinations and how they are used. I pulled some promotions from the mail that’s come into my office over the last month.

Here’s one from Health Resources:

Brooklyn Man Exclaims, “My Doctor Says I Have A NEW HEART!” How ordinary Americans are safely scrubbing their own arteries clean... reviving failed hearts... eliminating skipped heartbeats... dodging the bypass bullet... and saving their own lives. 20 true stories... Page 6.

This fascination was used to sell readers on getting inside the promotion. (It also serves as a partial table of contents.)

Here’s a fascination from Advanced Bionutritionals that offers proof:

The common household product linked to Parkinson’s disease. Stanford University study shows it makes you 70 percent more likely to develop this debilitating disease.

And the following fascination from Jerry Baker makes you want the product:

You want ointments? You’ll find oodles of ‘em – more than 80 recipes – like how to open stuffed nasal passages with olive oil or cure a painful earache with onions (see page 10).

See how easy it can be to build mystique into potentially uninteresting copy?

When NOT To Use a Fascination

Whether you are writing a fascination to keep the prospect reading, or to drive home a point, make sure it’s doing its job. The worst thing you can do is clutter up a marketing piece with unfascinating fascinations.

- If your fascination is too vague, it will not have any value. Remember the example we used from Michael Masterson: Overweight? Love Peanuts? See details inside...
  This is much too vague, doesn’t appeal to self interest, and the only curiosity it instills
is to wonder what peanuts have to do with weight. In fact, the way it is written, the peanuts could be the cause of the weight problem.

- A lengthy fascination will lose your reader. Here’s a wordy statement that is supposed to pique curiosity, but fails:

  “We Made 62 TIMES Our Money on NHC and 34 TIMES our Money on Research in Motion. Here’s How Ordinary Investors Are Walking Away Stinking Rich with the Stocks I Find.”

  Because it is much too long and drawn out, it completely loses its impact, right? How about just cutting it down to this:

  Don’t just double or triple your cash. Even ‘ordinary’ investors earn up to 62 times their investment using this secret.”

- Fascinations that reveal too much aren’t fascinating. Recall our earlier example...

  Why you should never bring previous years’ tax returns to an IRS audit

  vs.

  What you should never bring to an IRS audit.

  The impact of the second fascination is much more intriguing than the first.

  Here’s a basic rule of thumb: If your fascinations aren’t short, concise and tantalizing... then they aren’t good fascinations. So practice, practice, practice!

  One great way to get practice is to create fascinations using newspaper and magazine articles that you read. Simply select an article, then dig out the major points in the article and create a fascination for each of them. Once you’ve mastered the art, you’ll be able to rev up your copy in ways you never thought were possible!