Brian Kurtz – Direct Response Fundamentals

Mikhail: Hi everyone and welcome to Health Copywriting Profits, the online event that can take your copywriting skills and income to the next level. Today I'm talking to Brian Kurtz. Brian has been a serial direct marketer for over 25 years, and most of that time was spent growing publisher Boardroom from approximately $5 million in sales to a high of over $150 million in sales. He's also worked with some of the biggest and best copywriters in the world, including Jim Rutz, Parris Lampropoulos, David Deutsch, and of course Gene Schwartz. Welcome David. Welcome Brian, sorry.

Brian: Yeah, I can be David if you want, even if it's a better writer than me. Just to fill in, I spent 34 years at Boardroom and now for the last six years I have my own company, Titans Marketing, which is a direct marketing copywriting education business. It's been thrilling to basically, in the words of Jay Abraham who wrote the foreword to my new book, that if you did it, you have to teach it. He even says it's a moral obligation, your moral obligation to teach it. So when you sent me an email, I didn't know who you were. Not that that's a good thing or a bad thing. But I really saw that you were putting together a group of copywriters specifically for the health market, to help new copywriters and less experienced copywriters to take it to the next level, and that's my market.

Not just copywriters. Marketers and copywriters and entrepreneurs are my marketplace that I sell my groups to, and I sell books to. But it seemed to be a noble thing that you were doing and you came at it with a lot of humility, and I was pleased to participate. I'll hopefully add a different dimension than some of the other writers, because I'm not going to tell people how to be a copywriter, but I'm going to tell your listeners or viewers what it means to be a great copywriter. What are the characteristics that make a good copywriter. Also in the health market, some tips that I think are crucial to make the supplement business and vitamin business sing. I'll tell you, I think that when you were advertising this, I think you said the US dietary supplement market is expected to reach $56.7 billion US dollars by 2024.

That's really good news on the one hand. On the other hand, if you're on Shark Tank and you're pitching to the Sharks and you say, “Oh, it's going to be, it's a $56.7 billion market, and if I just get this much I'll be a millionaire.” At that point Mark Cuban says, “Oh, really? I'm out.” The reason why he's out is because it's not just taking a slice of a huge market, it's how you go after that slice. The biggest differences of the companies that make it and the companies that don't are the ones that really recognize the difference between commodity and specialty, and I hope we get into that in this interview.

Mikhail: Yeah, definitely one of the things we hope to cover. You've mentioned that you have your clients that you introduce to direct response principles, and that's what I wanted us to talk about today. So one of the things, I guess, that you mentioned in your book Overdeliver, which in my opinion is it's probably very a real crash course when it comes to the response, and one of the things if you're a business owner, you should read. But also it's important for copywriters to understand some of these principles. One of them, which I guess it's funny that we talk about it as part of a copywriting event, is the 40/40/20 rule. So maybe you can get into that and why it's a little funny for it to be part of this.

Brian: Yeah, it's interesting that it doesn't seem to fit, and the other hand, it's maybe the most important thing a copywriter needs to know. So in my book, Overdeliver, chapters four, five, and six, the book is set up where I set up with an introduction on over-delivery, what it means, that it's not a word, all of that.

Chapter two is the importance of original source, where babies come from. Not that I'm telling you that it was better in yesteryear, but I think you have to have fundamentals as your foundation. Chapter three was how paying postage made me a better marketer. That was not because direct mail was the best, but direct mail set the stage for everything that goes on today online. With direct mail, before you hit send, i.e. send data mailing, you had to be totally sure that you had your ducks in a row because you're spending $500, a thousand on postage and printing and all of that.

But then I get to chapter four, five, and six, and chapter four is all about lists and list building. Chapter five is all about offers, and chapter six is all about creative and whatever I can say about copywriting. And they're in that order for a reason. I started, I'll start with the 40/40/20 rule, which is a rule that I learned my first week in the business. Whether it's accurate or not, it's close believe me. It said that every direct response campaign, it depends on 40 percent list, 40 percent offer, and 20 percent your creative or your messaging. Now, that doesn't mean that the creative is half as important as the offer or the list. What it does say is that the creative and the copy and all that is the least important element until it's not.

What I mean by that is that if you get your list right, and your offer right, then go after world-class copywriting or copywriters to do the copy when you have your... they know the list and they know what the offer is, or at least they know what your basic offer is and they can improve on it, then you've got everything working in sync, and that's where you take your offer to the next level. So I changed the 40/40/20 rule to the 41/39/20 rule, which made the list 41 percent, the audience matters. One of the... I mean, there's a lot of indications of that throughout direct marketing history. I'll cite my first book, The Advertising Solution, where I covered six legends of direct marketing or advertising, David Ogilvy, John Caples, Gene Schwartz, Gary Halbert, Claude Hopkins and Robert Collier.

Those six guys were basically direct marketers trapped in general advertisers' bodies. So general advertising is image advertising and brand advertising, which is what the world was between 1920 and 1980 even. But these six guys understood that you needed to get response. If you look at the quotes from all six of them, they're copywriters. They're all copywriters. Yet every quote of them, you know, Gary Halbert says, it's not about a brilliant burger, it's about it's about a hungry audience. Gene Schwartz says, it's not that the copywriter creates desire. The desire is already in the marketplace, the copywriter just guides it. So they were obsessed with list before they were obsessed with copy, and they were copywriters. That was just an interesting indicator to me why the list was so important.

Another indicator is that if you have the perfect list, let's say you have an offer for a supplement offer and you have a health publisher that's going to allow you to sell your supplements to their list, and it's a perfect list. The list is, let's say the list is a book buyer list on heart disease, and your supplement is, maybe it's a fish oil with an emphasis on heart disease. Perfect, right? So you have a perfect audience, you come up with offer that's just okay, you have a one bottle, three bottle, six bottle offer or whatever, and you have creative that basically is, it's nothing much. It's like a buy this now, it'll help with your heart disease, go here to the sales page. With that combination you'll make it some money. You'll get some orders. However, that you have such a good list and that you develop the offer with a copywriter, now the creative becomes the most important thing, that then it becomes way more than 20 percent.

Then it's a hundred percent, but you have to get the other 41 on the list first, and then work on the offer, and then have the copywriter refine the offer and then write a killer copy with story, with empathy, with

everything that a great copywriter does when they write. So I think the 41/39/20 rule is something that a copywriter needs to keep in mind. Another reason that I talk about a lot, is that any copywriter who I ever work with, I have these seven characteristics of what every great copywriter, Jim Rutz, Gary Bencivenga, Parris Lampropoulos, David Deutsch, Gene Schwartz, every one... I kind of looked at what did all of these copywriters have in common? I came up with seven characteristics. One of the characteristics is just knowledge of direct marketing.

That's number five. It's probably more important than that, but I just listed it number five. So the interesting thing is that if a copywriter understands list offer and how that pertains to their copy, if a copywriter came to me, a new writer, even experienced writer, and the first thing they didn't want to see was the list history, if it's a product that has done some mailings or some email or there've been some promotions out there, video sales letters or whatever, if they told me that they didn't... like the first thing they should ask me for is the list history. What lists have worked? What lists haven't worked? What segments of the list have worked? Where did you get the lists? Then look at the, if you've been in business a while, they would probably ask you about, like if a list worked, how did it do on renewal?

How did it do in terms of the lifetime value? Those are concepts that you'd say, “Well, I'm a copywriter, I don't need to know that. I just have to... here's a product I got to write for it.” It is so much deeper than that. So much more intense than that, and the best writers all knew that. So if you don't understand whether... and again, whether it's 41/39/20, or whether it's 46/32/12, whatever. t doesn't matter. It's the concept of list of, it's a three-legged stool of direct marketing, and you got to know all about all three stools. It's just not having great copywriting ability and then just, “Oh, here's a product I'm going to zing this copy out, and it's going to be a control, and I’m going to make a lot of money.”

I think one of the things that a lot of copywriting courses, and I think you even put it in one of the items that you sent to me about, the... I think you wrote something like... You wrote ‘this online event is all about how to get started, get good and get paid as a health copywriter, even if you've never written a word of copy in your life’. That's a huge promise. With the people that you have speaking at this, not including me, you will have great copy writing skills, and with me, you'll get a little more marketing skill, but hopefully that's useful too. But it's not the best thing to tell anybody that they can become a copywriter. Copywriting is not a commodity either. It's a specialized... and you know it because you're moving up the ranks now yourself, and you know what it takes to get a control. You know what it takes to get something that wins in the marketplace.

In addition having humility and... that’s number six of seven, that all the great copywriters have. By humility, I'll add to that, that you've got to, if you're writing like in direct mail, when you were writing a package and you were trying to beat other great packages and you got a control, it was always in your best interest to beat yourself than to have someone else beat you. The best writers always did that. I mean, Gary Bencivenga, the day he got a control was the day he started trying to figure out a way to beat it, and the King is dead long, live the King. He didn't want anybody else to get that control once he got it in his hands. Now the challenge today in online marketing and email marketing and Facebook and display ads and all of that, is that you could have a control for 15 minutes, whereas in direct mail, you could have a control for six months or a year or two years.

Even if you're testing against it, getting it beaten is not the easiest thing. So that's also, I challenge every new writer to always think I got something good here, it seemed to work, how can I improve it? My mentor Marty Edelston who founded the Boardroom had stationary that said, 'good, better, best, never let it rest until the good is better and the better best'. That is kind of corny, but that's the attitude you have to have as a copywriter, and bringing it all back to your question, and this was a long-winded answer on the 40/40/20 rule, but it's all related. You have to understand that as a copywriter in a very deep way to become one of the greats. Even to become really good in an online marketplace where everybody is going to be after your control. Everybody is going to be borrowing stuff from your control if you get a winner.

The level of let's say, I was going to say ripping you off of your copy. I was going to say flattery, duplication or copying, that's the best form of flattery. Well, it's also the best form of plagiarism. If you look online, 'sneaky little trick', how many times do we have to see that in an online offer? You know, one sneaky little trick and it's for a supplement or something. There's a lot of stuff that you cannot invent but you can innovate, and you've got to understand so many aspects as a writer to really be an innovator. Otherwise you're just going to be anyhow copy, and it's not going to get you anywhere.

Mikhail: Yeah. I think some really good points there in terms of you could probably have a Gary Bencivenga, David Deutsch write your copy for you, but if it's going to less that that's just straight not a good match. It doesn't matter, it's a zero.

Brian: Yeah, zero orders. Whereas the opposite, you will make some money and make orders. So the difference is you have a list and offer that are good. Really good. Then you invest in that creative, and that takes... that's direct marketing Nirvana. It really is. It's direct marketing heaven.

Mikhail: Yeah. So you've already mentioned a couple of the characteristics of the world-class copywriters that you've worked with had the... you've taken a look at them and seen what they have in common. I guess you can just finish off that list and see what are some of the things new copywriters should be trying to model and in terms of their characteristics?

Brian: Yeah. So, I mean, there were seven there. There might be less, might be more, some of them overlap, but these are the seven. The first is hunger. You know, you go into this business, if you're going into it, wow. The supplement business is $56.7 billion, and I just want to write something and sell some fish oil. I'll make some money and get out. Well, that's one way to look at it, but I don't think that's the way to really dive in and dig in. You have to have hunger, you have to practice, you have to... You know, it goes back to Malcolm Gladwell in Outliers, who said it takes 10,000 hours to mastery. Now, a lot of people have debunked his 10,000 hour theory, but keep in mind, it's not two hours. It's not 10 hours.

It's not 100 hours. So whatever it is, you've got to put in the time and effort to really understand how to do this stuff. It's not a commodity to be a good copywriter. I mean, Gary Halbert used to say, take a book bunch of great ads, all-time great ads and copy them in your own handwriting. Not even type them, write them. They say that the thumb and index finger have a different relationship to how it goes to your brain as opposed to a keyboard. So do the heavy lifting to get to that next level, and that's just hunger. Number two is... could be number one also. It's insatiable curiosity. You've got to be curious about it. Again, if you're just like curious because it's a $56.7 billion industry, well, good luck with that.

That's not being curious and diving in and going a mile deep. You've got to go a mile deep before you go a mile wide and any of those great copywriters I mentioned could write about almost anything. But they each started with a specialty in a very narrow area and just mastered it with the hunger and the insatiable curiosity. It's interesting that when Gene Schwartz, I remember we handed him a health book once to write a package for, and as soon as I handed... I hadn't even read it yet, and as soon as I handed it to him, he goes, “Brian, what's not in the book?” That was his first question. I thought about that, I said, “What do you mean what's not in the book?”

He said, “Look, I'll read this. I'm sure I'll be able to pull out amazing fascinations out of it.” He didn't say amazing because he was much more humble than that. He would say, “I'll pull out good fascinations from it, I'll get some good copy. Maybe even a couple of good headlines and leads, but go back to your editors on some of these key topics,” and he would know the topics. It was diabetes, it was heart disease, it was blood pressure, it was memory loss, Alzheimer's. All the hot topics. He said, “Go back to your editors on those topics, let them read the articles in the book and see if they can go one step deeper, one step below that, and if they can get me more engaging, more cutting edge stuff, because that'll definitely be the stuff I'll be able to write for most intensely for.

That's curiosity before you even read the product or before you even see the list history or before you even see the history of the product. That's what I mean by insatiable curiosity. The third characteristic, I used to call it smarts, but it's bigger than that. I've changed it to feedback loops. Basically, I want to know who a copywriter is hanging out with and why do they hang out with them? Great copywriters usually have at least one other copywriter that they run copy against who are at their level. It's not like you're getting two writers for the price of one, but the best writers know that their first draft or even their third draft, isn't the final draft and they need to run it by somebody, and they work together almost as teams. I had some copywriters who are world-class that if one of them got a control, that the person that was their feedback loop wouldn't write against them for that product.

So it was interesting that they were like teaming up. So I couldn't, I had to keep track of who had the control and who I couldn't assign, but it's because that they took this feedback loops so seriously. That is so valuable. I always talk about Eric Betuel, who's one of the best writers ever. One of my Mount Rushmore copywriters of the last 30, 25 years. So he was one of the top four writers for Boardroom in my last 25 years there. Eric's wife worked with him. She was a writer and a designer and she didn't do a lot of the upfront writing, but she was his feedback loop and she made all of his copy so much better. I used to call it pillow talk. They're lying in bed and Eric would, “Hey, did you read that paragraph on page 16 of the magalogue?” kind of thing. So you got to have feedback loops.

Number four is passion, which ties into hunger and insatiable curiosity and feedback loops, but have some passion for what you're doing, you know? Gene Schwartz wrote the original promotion for Boardroom reports, and when he was... when he did the control package, the launch package, everybody said, “Gene, what a great package, you're a genius.” He said, “You know, I spent two full days with Marty Edelston, who was the guy who was passionate about this project. It was a lifelong dream for him to launch this project. I just interviewed him for two days, and basically the package wrote itself because it was Marty's idea. I just put some poetry on it. He was being a bit humble of course, but it was basically that because if you're dealing with an entrepreneur or an owner of a business, they've got this passion built in usually for what they're doing.

The copywriter's job initially is just be a great interviewer. Every copywriter, every great copywriter I've ever met, were just the best interviewers you're ever going to find. So that's number four. Number five I talked about. That's the direct marketing knowledge that you really need. And at least at a minimum, know the 40/40/20 rule or the 41/39/20 rule, know lifetime value which I talked about briefly, know that when you're going after... and this is true in the supplement business, big time. Know that when you're going out, everybody says the trick is to write copy that you can go to cold traffic and get people to buy. Well, that's a big thing. If you can get cold traffic, people who don't know you, don't know your brand, don't know your product and you can get them to buy, that's being a magician. A magician copywriter, right?

However that's not the be-all end-all. The be-all end-all is writing your initial copy with the second order in mind and the third order in mind. Because if you just write it as a one trick pony, that order will come in, you have nothing else to sell you also, if you oversold it and your next product, you have to oversell it even more because you undersold, you oversold it for the wrong reasons to call traffic. When they become you think warm traffic, they're not so warm because of the way you sell. I always say the way you sell is the way they respond. You sell with impulse copy, don't think they're going to stick around as long if you do that, as opposed to selling with meaningful copy. Copy that really tells a story. Copy that gets under their skin. Marty used to say, ‘makes the prospect vibrate’.

A lot of people say that they hate that word, but I like it. If you vibrate, you'll probably reach into your pocket for your credit card. That's what I mean by vibrate. So it's 40/40/20, lifetime value. Know what you're going to do when you go to cold traffic, how you’re going to deal with them once they become warm traffic? Then also there's the third element... God, I'm forgetting it. Holy mackerel, I just drew a blank. I'll get it back. But then, so that's the fifth, direct marketing knowledge. Then the sixth is humility, which I've talked about, which is super important. You really have to just, you just have to... you can't go into a situation thinking you got it all, or I got everything, right? I got it all lined up. It's just not the way you do it. It's you've got to go in and say, it's about what's not here, what's not in the product, what's not in the book.

It's... you know, I had a guy write to me once, he said, and this was late in my years at Boardroom, shortly before I left. He sent me an email and he said, “I'm going to be the best writer that ever walked in the door at Boardroom.” I thought about that and I said, “God, does he know who Boardroom is? Has he researched it?” I wasn't being arrogant about that. I just wanted to think about, was he being confident or arrogant? So he gave me his website, I went to his website. Clearly, I went to his website and he would never be one of the best copywriters who walked in the door at Boardroom based on his samples, that's for sure. So I wrote back to him and I said, “Wow, you'll be the best writer who ever walked in the door at Boardroom? Wow, shame on me I've never heard of you.”

I kind of played it a little coy and I didn't want him to... I don't know. I didn't want him to think that he was, I was going to put him down and basically insult him. But it really is something that you really need to, you need to keep in mind when you're going after a new client even if you have a lot of experience. You want to have confidence, you want to show off your work. That's number seven. Number seven is, what is... how you share your success is basically number seven. How you show your successes, how you... It's just common sense. So those are the seven.

Mikhail: Yeah, I think you mentioned that guy and about being the best copywriter when I was reaching out to folks for this event. They're some of the biggest names in copywriting industry who would have never heard of me. But I said let me ask, let me see if they'd be interested, and pretty much everyone was interested in being a part that I invited. I guess that comes back to one of the things you mentioned in terms of their generosity and willingness to teach and give back. I think that's probably another one of the characteristics.

Brian: Yeah. That ties into humility, how you share your work. That's in there as well, absolutely. I think it's... I don't know if anybody turned you down, but some people are just too busy and that's fine. That's not saying that they're arrogant or anything like that. But the fact that you got a good group of copywriters to say yes, is a tribute to how you asked and how they responded.

Mikhail: Yeah. So we covered those characteristics. We talked about the 41/39/20 rule. I just want to go back a little bit, back to that concept of understanding the list and there's the RFM...

Brian: You know, it's interesting, RFM was the third thing. So under direct marketing knowledge, I always say you have to know at least the 40/40/20, 41/39/20, you need to know lifetime value and you need to know RFM, right.

Mikhail: Yeah. So maybe you can just expound on that a little bit.

Brian: RFM is not a direct marketing rule of thumb necessarily. It's a behavioral rule of thumb of how humans behave in the marketplace. So it's even bigger than that. What RFM says is that, and it's probably the most, it's the single most used tool in any direct marketer's toolkit, even if they don't know what it is, believe it or not. What it is, it stands for Recency, Frequency and Monetary value. Recency says that someone who responds more recently is worth more than somebody who responds less recently. Frequency means someone who's responded more frequently is worth someone who's responded less frequently. Generally someone who spends more money with you is worth more than somebody who spent less money. The monetary value might not be as big a deal, if say you have, you're marketing a magazine that's very specialized and it only costs $20 a year, it might not be the key that they only spend $20 a year.

It's more about the niche that you're selling in. But with supplements, for example, I'd say RFM is going to rule the day and anybody who has a list should be doing RFM. So when I, at Boardroom, we had a list of postal addresses of nine million names. Every model that we did on those nine million names was done basically on RFM data. Basically what it said was I had all the purchasing data on every transaction data we called it, on every customer, every prospect, what they bought, what they expired on, what they bought twice, what they... what combination of products they bought. All of that was a record under their name, basically. So if you have a name and address, under that you have a trailer record of all these things that they did. What you would do to create a model is that you would go out... let's say of the nine million, we narrowed it down to two million, like the last two year buyers of our list.

We would go out to the buyers, do a model by just mailing 50,000 or 100,000 names. Whatever responses we got back, if we got 500 to 1,000 responses back, we would lose money on that mailing to the broad universe of two million. But we got the names back of people who really responded to our offer, and then

we looked at what their transaction data was, what the RFM data was on the ones who responded. By accumulating that we went back out to the two million looking for people that had the data that the responders had, and we were able to take the two million names and rank it in five percent increments of how they would respond if we mailed them.

So it's called the game's chart, and you were able to predict the top five percent based on what we mailed to the cross section. You would say I'm going to get a 60 percent lift on that because of now I'm getting the best names in the top five percent. That's how we did all of our mailings to our house file, to our what you would say our warm or hot list. But we did it through this regression model. A regression model means you mail something to prove who you go after. It's not a lookalike model where you take your names and just match it to a big universe. I talked about this on a podcast once, and the host put this... he went deeper with me. He wanted to know, he went down this rabbit hole that, what's a regression model versus a lookalike model, blah, and I got really into it because that's the questions he asked me.

So he posted the interview on Facebook and a responder said, “Wow, this podcast is great with Brian Kurtz. I didn't know... I thought Facebook invented lookalike models.” It got me into a whole thing about Facebook didn't invent everything. Lookalike models are great on Facebook, but if you knew more about what I knew about regression models, how you would do a Facebook lookalike model would have a much deeper meaning to you, and you would actually ask different questions of your media buyer at Facebook for instance. So I think that RFM is the linchpin to everything. If you have a list of a hundred people, you should do RFM on it. I mean, if you have a hundred people who've bought from you, I'll bet that there are 12 who bought two products from you, or 12 that are in your mastermind or whatever.

You have to develop all these segments on your list of like we'll say your VIPs, your honored guests, your guests, coach class guests, your prospects, your suspects, your avid readers but haven't bought anything. All of those are different segments. They're all based on RFM or at least online they're based on RFT. If they haven't spent with you, have they spent time with you? The T stands for time instead of monetary. So that's a really interesting angle on that because if they spend a lot of time with you and they haven't bought yet, they are a much better prospect who eventually buy. So you have to interact with them and you can interact with them through email a lot cheaper, because lo and behold, they can... they will, if you engage them with a low ticket offer, if they've spent a lot of time with you and you're going to give them more product or services that would follow from the time they spent with you, that's a great segmented way to bring someone into the buyers list from the prospect list for instance.

But every list, list for people too, right? Their names, but they are people. If you look at them as people, I always call my list that I blog to every Sunday as my online family, because I need to always be reminded that it's not just a list, and your list is also multiple lists. Someone who bought seven of your products, if you have a lot of products and the seventh one they bought last week, invite that person to dinner for God's sake. Or get them on the phone and ask them questions about what that kind of multi-buyer and give them money for it. Pay them to get on the phone with you, because what you'll learn by talking to them is going to be more valuable than anything more that you can sell them at that point, because you're going to learn how to sell other people who have only bought two products, a third or fourth product. RFM is so valuable.

Mikhail: Yeah. That that's where I guess the copywriter can take away from it. Obviously based on that data that will guide the type of copy that they will be writing.

Brian: Absolutely. In fact if... we didn't have, you know, direct mail you couldn't split it too much because it costs a lot of money to separate the zip code strings, believe it or not. So, but just, we were selling subscriptions to a newsletter bottom line, personal. The mailing to ex-buyers was set up as a completely different mailing and ex-buyers meaning they responded, they paid and they expired from the newsletter and they didn't come back. So just that alone, we would do regression models just to the ex-buyers. We had ex-buyers going back 12 years and we would do a regression model on all the ex-buyers based on other things they might've done. Maybe they bought a books sometime during that period, maybe they spent more money during that period, but they didn't renew the subscription.

We would go out to them as either a multi-buyer but an ex-buyer, and they'd be at the top of the model for getting them back into bottom line personal, but that would be a completely separate mailing with copy that would say, “We want you back,” or an extra renewal premium to get them back in. I mean, it makes so much sense, why mail all of them together? Ex-buyers were so different and we had a lot of ex-buyers because we had a lot of subscribers. You're going to have a lot of ex-buyers, you've got a lot of subscribers. Two completely separate models, two completely separate RFM models that we would go back out to, and that was just so valuable to the company. Your best customers or your ex buyers. If you have a good product and they expired because they didn't have time or they didn't have money or whatever, that's a reason to bring them back in, not to not include them.

That's your best list. So you got to go to those names way before you go out to outside lists or cold traffic. So there are a lot of ways to apply it, and the copywriters were in there with us. They would come up with a package to the house list, a package to cold list, outside list, they would be different, and then a package to the ex-buyers. Three different... now, they weren't completely different. A lot of the bulk of the package was the same, but the headlines were different, the leads were different. They were different because they were different lists. They were different online families that needed to be treated differently. That's how you apply all of that list segmentation to copy. If you're not going to do that you're leaving a lot of money on the table, you're leaving a lot of care and concern for your audience. You're leaving a lot of love and heart on the table too because you're not talking to your customers properly.

Mikhail: Yeah. So you mentioned it that at the start, we've covered some of the direct response principles. You mentioned in the supplement industry, especially how important it is to differentiate yourself from everyone else, because it is essentially a commodity that you're selling

Brian: It’s totally a Me Too business. It really is. I think the thing is to, one of the keys is if you have a hero product. If you have a fish oil, but you have an ingredient in the fish oil that you can only get in Africa in a certain area of Africa, that differentiates you. If you have a combination, I don’t know, vitamin D with vitamin B and a CoQ10 in one pill, I'm making that up. I don't know if you can even do that, but in one pill that hasn't been out there yet, that is a differentiator. So I think that, and if you're in a Me Too thing, you can still make money in the supplement business, but it's so much easier if you can have a hero product that is at least if it's not completely unique, you can make it feel unique or create specialty with it. Another way to differentiate is through editorial content, that your supplement that's like everybody else's comes with a guide, with recipes if it's kind of like a vitamin supplement that you use in drinks.

So there's a lot of ways to use editorial content to supplement the supplements and make it look like a different product. I mean, we did that with books. We took books off the shelf at Barnes & Noble, which are now coffee shops, but we took books off the shelves at Barnes & Noble and we made them into direct mail books by putting a hard cover on them and creating bonuses that were our own content with the outside content, and you had a product that didn't look like the one that was on the shelf collecting dust at Barnes & Noble, and this new product was $39 and that product on the shelf at Barnes and Noble was discounted to 17. So you can do the same thing with anything, but you have to rejigger it. You have to create an offer and it's not just one product. The other side of that with a hero product, if you can come up with a hero product, sell that, then you can sell commodity on the back end.

Once they trust you, they know, like and trust your hero product and say give them discounts on fish oil and vitamin D and vitamin B and vitamin E and magnesium, all of that, they will now for convenience, you get the hero product, plus you get all of these backend that you need, that you don't have to go to the health food store. That's how you get them on continuous service and all of that. But that's a much better route than starting with a commodity. You can do it with a commodity upfront, but I'm just giving a better way. If you are starting with hero product to commodity on the backend, once they know, like, and trust you, and that you can get them into a continuous service delivery, now you have a business. A product is not a business. A promotion is not a business. What I just described is a business in the supplement business.

Mikhail: Yeah. So Brian, just before we wrap up, as someone who has worked with copywriters, you've hired copywriters, what would be your one piece of advice for new copywriters that are looking to break into the copywriting industry, break into the health industry? What's your one piece of advice you would give them to help them out for that?

Brian: It's more than one. It's basically a holistic approach to copywriting. What I mean by that, you know, you got to have... you should go to courses or coaching groups, or maybe even a mentoring group with a particular copywriter. You need to go to conferences, meet people, find out who the players are in your field. You need to read books also. In Overdeliver, I've got my further reading section in the back. I've got I think all the best copywriting books under copywriting and direct marketing. You've got to understand direct marketing as we've talked about. And you need to not just look for a mentor. I think, you know, I always say, you don't choose your mentor, your mentors choose you. To do that, you've got to figure out a way where let's say you have a favorite copywriter that you've been following a long time, and that copywriter, like I'll use the example of Gary Halbert, who's no longer with us.

But Gary Halbert used to somewhat advertise for young copywriters to go live with him for a year, and they paid Gary for it. Like they paid Gary, I think the deal was like $25,000, $27,000. They paid Gary, and I think this was the deal. You paid Gary, you went to his house after two weeks he realized whether you're going to make it or not make it. He'd either kick you out of his house, no refund on the $25,000 or $27,000. If you made it the two weeks, you'd stay with him for a year and you become his Butler almost. You pick up his dry cleaning, you do all this stuff, but you also get assignments and homework and all of that. There are copywriters that don't do it as insanely as Gary did it, but when Gary did it, it was great because there are a lot of Gary Halbert mentees out there right now in the marketplace that are some of the best writers in the world.

So it works, but that was an extreme case of your mentors finding you, not you finding your mentors, but you had to find him and pay for it. Sometimes you got to pay to play, but sometimes, you'll find a copywriter who's doing something, you find out he needs help, you write something for him, something happens. I did that with Gene Schwartz and Dick Benson who Dick Benson was a direct mail consultant, one of the best ever. What I did with... I didn't want to become a copywriter, but I wanted all the best marketing information. So I realized that both Dick Benson and Gene Schwartz had their own health businesses. So what I did was they needed help with list selection. I was a list maven at the time. I got them list histories on Boardroom with different selects, and I just gave them all the lists that we were mailing.

Their list brokers were doing a lousy job and I just gave it to them. I wasn't expecting anything. What I got in return was becoming Dick Benson's favorite client who he called every single day. I was a second favorite client because the first... if I was a woman I'd be his favorite client. But I was the second favorite client. I was his favorite male client, let's put it that way. But Benson and I had a tremendous relationship and he was absolutely my mentor, but he chose me. Gene Schwartz, the same thing. I used to go to have lunch at Gene's apartment and learn about art and learn about all the things that Gene taught. Then I learned about stuff in breakthrough advertising and brilliance breakthrough, and... but he chose me, but I gave him a lot of stuff with no expectations. A hundred percent no expectation of return, and I got the most amazing return possible, him being my mentor.

I gave you a long answer. It's not one thing, but I'd say if you can have your mentors choose you through all of that kind of research and all of that, plus know the right courses, know the right people to talk to, know the right events to attend, that's a great way to build all of your knowledge. And don't think you're going to do it in a week or a month or a year. Get educated slowly and get rich slowly.

Mikhail: Right. Well, thanks. Thanks Brian so much for your time. If folks wanted to learn some more about you, get on your list, where can they go to do that?

Brian: Just go to BrianKurtz.net. It's a site with tons of content on it, has all my mastermind groups from low price to high price. It's got a lot of free content, all kinds of stuff, all my blogs going back five or six years. There are some repeats, but in five or six years you're going to repeat yourself once in a while. I repeated... a lot of the stuff I talked about today or in blogs, so it's all in writing there and more. If folks wanted to buy my book Overdeliver, the only reason I say that is that you get... at Overdeliverbook.com you get an amazing bonus package for buying the book if you go to that site. You go to any site to buy it, I think on that you go to, there's a button for Amazon, you buy it for $17.

You come back to the site and you download amazing, some priceless stuff. Two PDFs of classic books from two of my mentors, Dick Benson and Gordon Grossman, I've got Jay Abraham keynote speeches, 19 of them. I've got Gary Bencivenga The Bullets in a single PDF. I have a Dan Kennedy swipe file. I have another swipe file that goes back to the year 1900. Believe it or not, there was good copy written back then. So yeah, if you go to Overdeliverbook.com, great place to just download a lot of knowledge and wisdom, and you have to buy my book to do that. Whereas Briankurtz.net you don't have to spend any money, and you can just get on my list and you'll get my blog every Sunday. It's all content. I don't do affiliates, just educational material. I have a lot of fun with it and my online family does as well.

Mikhail: Yeah, we do.

Brian: Thank you.

Mikhail: I am part of it, and I really enjoy your blog posts and emails that you send out. It's always interesting stuff that you always related back to direct response, whether it's always about some story that's happening in your life, if it's baseball or some strange clock in your office or something like that.

Brian: That was a fun one, the clock without hands.

Mikhail: Yeah. All right, well, thanks again, Brian. I've really enjoyed this chat and I'm hoping our viewers would have gotten a lot of value out of this.

Brian: Well, good luck with the event and hopefully you'll be sharing a lot of knowledge from a lot of great people, and I know you are so thanks for doing this.