

# **DATE YOUR CLIENTS**

written by

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# Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| FOREWORD .....  | 1   |
| AUTHOR'S DISCLAIMER AND INVITATION.....                 | 4   |
| PART I: They Meet .....                                 | 9   |
| CHAPTER 1: MAKE 'EM SWIPE RIGHT.....                    | 11  |
| CHAPTER 2: FINDING YOUR "TYPE" .....                    | 23  |
| CHAPTER 3: THE FIRST DATE.....                          | 35  |
| CHAPTER 4: THE FIRST DATE (PART DEUX).....              | 51  |
| CHAPTER 5: WHEN MINUTE 16 MATTERS MOST.....             | 73  |
| PART II: The Chase .....                                | 97  |
| CHAPTER 6: CHIVALRY IS NOT DEAD.....                    | 99  |
| CHAPTER 7: PHEROMONE-INFUSED PERFUMES ARE EN VOGUE..... | 109 |
| CHAPTER 8: LEFT ON READ .....                           | 123 |
| CHAPTER 9: IT'S ALL ABOUT TRUST .....                   | 137 |
| CHAPTER 10: MEETING THE FAMILY .....                    | 149 |
| CHAPTER 11: MOVING IN TOGETHER .....                    | 163 |
| CHAPTER 12: FRIDAY NIGHT IS DATE NIGHT .....            | 179 |
| PART III: The Moment of Truth.....                      | 191 |
| CHAPTER 13: THE FIRST FIGHT .....                       | 193 |
| CHAPTER 14: THE WALK OF SHAME .....                     | 207 |
| CHAPTER 15: THE BREAKUP.....                            | 219 |
| CHAPTER 16: NETFLIX AND CHILL .....                     | 233 |
| CHAPTER 17: COMMITMENT ISSUES .....                     | 247 |
| CHAPTER 18: SETTLING DOWN.....                          | 259 |
| CONCLUSION:.....  | 273 |
| ARE YOU READY FOR A HAPPY ENDING? .....                 | 273 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....                                       | 275 |
| ABOUT THE AUTHOR .....                                  | 277 |

## CHAPTER 1: MAKE 'EM SWIPE RIGHT

(Tinder Reference #2)

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We'll start right here at the beginning.

There you are, sitting at home on a Friday night, building your online dating profile (praying to all things holy that nobody in your social circle ever gets "matched" with you). Forgive yourself. We've all been there.

And now the big question: Which picture on your phone makes you look absolutely *nothing* like you look in real life? You don't want it to look like a selfie (because that's the self-promotion). You don't want it to look too staged (because people will just think you're posing). Damn it!

Finally, you find just the right photo. Edit it. Edit it again. Add a filter. And ... post.

Oh, gosh. Now they want a bio. You get to choose the five words that describe you best, Boo. And, predictably, here they are: "Loyal. Fun. Honest. Family. God."

Congratulations, you just used the exact same description as 80.4% of all online dating profiles. Way to stand out from the crowd. I hope you chose that photo wisely, because a lot is hinging on it to set you apart now.

Digital dating. Your personal brand on display for the world to see – and any eligible bachelor or bachelorette will decide on whether to

engage you exclusively from that profile. That pic. Those five words. The number of hours – even minutes or seconds – it takes you to respond to a message. It's all part of that brand you're projecting to the world. And, if you're interested in hearing the worst news ever, I'll break it to you gently here.

Wait for it.

You will never know why someone didn't swipe right. Ever. Repeat: ever. Your potential soul mate kept scrolling and you will never know it. Talk about a butterfly effect. That one poorly-selected photo just cost you a dog, a minivan, and a white picket fence. And here you are, one filter away from happiness – and you don't even know it, because you're still waiting for your first mobile connection, oblivious that it slipped through your fingers.

Oblivious. Hmm, I like that word. Unaware. Unmindful. Unsuspecting. It's loaded with meaning.

And do you know what it reminds me of? Small business owners who could, potentially, have the best product or service in the world, but lack the ability to build an even remotely-appealing persona online. They settle for a website built by a nephew from his parents' basement (because it was cheaper). They settle for Vistaprint marketing materials (designed on the site's graphics tool, of course). They settle for clip art in a Photoshop world and are *oblivious* to the entire left-swiping world around them.

Pass. Pass. Pass.

Top secret newsflash, friends: Entrepreneurs typically become entrepreneurs because they are *really* good at something *very* specific. And, typically, it isn't sales. They're the chefs who start restaurants, but never learned how to get patrons through the doors. It may be the best meal ever prepared, but if never leaves the kitchen, what does it matter? If everyone is swiping left, they'll never know that you're the greatest human on the third rock from the

sun. Meanwhile, you're oblivious.

I hope you're following the parallel here. If not, I'm afraid you may be more oblivious than I once feared. We may need to talk. But, for the rest of you, let's continue.

Every day, I spend time on the phone with potential clients and/or would-be business partners and they explain to me that they have "the best product on the market." It is immediately, with 94% certainty, followed by the phrase: "... if people only knew about it, they'd ..." (You can fill in the blank.)

Yes, Barbara, that's true. And if everyone got to meet you in person and taste your world-famous brownies, you could stop spending your Friday night building an online dating profile. So, what are you going to do about it? I'll tell you. We're going to spend as many nights as necessary to polish our brand (whether personal or professional), to add the curb appeal required to get you noticed.

You're not failing at making a good product, I'm sure. Or offering a great service. You're failing at getting enough people to know about it. Your one goal in building that profile is to get noticed. It's a hook. Just as you're not expecting your dating profile to serve as a marriage proposal, your business' public presence doesn't need to close a sale. It simply needs to provide enough intrigue for a potential consumer to want to learn more.

For a business, it's a website. It's signage. It's a television commercial. It's your sales rep. Ask yourself, when is the first time that a potential customer would encounter your business? That's the moment that your consumer makes the decision to explore a potential relationship with you.

If you look cheap, you are cheap. If you look disorganized, you are disorganized. If you look really new, you are really new. Perception is reality in this game of first impressions. So, my friends, pony up on the curb appeal, because some of your stock values are

plummeting, and you're sitting around waiting for a phone to ring ... *oblivious*.

"But," you ask, "what if I just don't know what to do?"

Great question. And an even greater answer is on its way, with a little bit of audience participation required, simply to test your intuition.

**Question:** What do I do if I don't know how to market myself / my business? (Select one answer from the list below.)

- A. Talk to your nephew who is "really good at computers" and see if he can build you a website.
- B. Bury your head in the sand, because things you don't understand are really scary and should be ignored.
- C. Take to social media and post as many inspirational "live, laugh, love" posts as you can find on Pinterest, knowing that your 34 followers will all be inspired and tell their friends about you.
- D. Hire a damn professional who knows how to actually *sell* something.

If you didn't select "D" as your answer, we really have problems here. Well, you do. I'm good. But I'm here to help, so I'm making *your* problems *my* problems. *Mi casa es su casa*.

Look back to option "D," because there is *one* word in *italics*, and it is imperative that we talk about how this answer could still lead you astray. The nuance in answer "D" is that the professional you hire must know how to *sell* something. Mere "art" and the "art of selling" are two totally different disciplines. Two skill sets entirely. And, as crazy as this sounds, one seldom overlaps the other. Pretty pictures never made me open my wallet.

## SIDEBAR STORY

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I had a sidebar conversation with a guy last night while guest speaking at a conference. He was asking me, offline, if I would look at his website with him. I had done an initial consultation with him a month or so ago, in which I was fairly brutal (“truthful”) about the state of his online presence. (It was *really* bad.) No matter what I said to him on the telephone, however, he would reply and tell me that he already knew whatever I suggested and the updated version of the website was due out in two weeks including those fixes. (My first reaction was to suggest ending the call, as I *clearly* had nothing to tell him that he didn’t already know. But I’m nicer than that. Usually. Well, not often, but I must have been in a good mood.)

Last night, I was introduced to the *new and improved* site. It sucked as much as the first one.

So, here we are, standing outside of this conference center with a laptop and he’s expecting me to critique his new website on the spot like a trick pony.

“What do you think of the new site?” he asked. “Do you have any thoughts?”

Do I have thoughts? Is the pope catholic? I have thoughts.

The conversation went something like this:

ME (kindly): “Well, I can say that the new site is much ‘prettier’ than the old site. You have aesthetically made a lot of improvements.”

Him: “But, do you think it fixes the problems you pointed out the last time?”

ME (still holding on to my real opinion): “It certainly is a lot prettier.”

Him: "But, do you think it fixes the problems you pointed out the last time?"

ME: "Honestly? No. It is the exact same package with a different bow. You have focused all your attention on the art and none of your attention on the science. That's why you spent the last half hour complaining to that lady over there about how you can't get anyone to buy your product. You're spending your entire marketing budget trying to drive traffic to a broken website, rather than spending the money to fix the website in the first place. Now you don't have any money left – *and* you still have a broken website."

Color me offended, but it never ceases to amaze me that everyone thinks that they are marketing geniuses. Everyone who knows how to program a website *must* be an expert on the psychology of sales. Makes total sense, right? Similarly, I'll ask my auto mechanic to perform my upcoming heart surgery. And I'll see if my attorney has any free time to swing by and replace my hot water tank.

Back to that big "D" we were discussing above.

You need a *professional*. But not a professional at website programming. You need a professional who knows how to make *sales*.

Have you ever seen the movie *Hitch*, with Will Smith? He was a dating coach. He knew how to *sell* something – even something undesirable. He wasn't a fashion designer, nor a barber. He just knew how to put the package together. You need Hitch. Call me "Hitch."

#### PERSONAL CONFESSION

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I remember sitting at a restaurant with a friend one time when the topic of online dating came up. It's always an awkward topic, online dating, because, although it has become so mainstream, folks are still self-conscious about seeming too desperate or unable to meet a



potential mate in a “more traditional” way. Bag it. I spend more time texting my family than having dinner with them, and more time sending emails than making phone calls, so knock off your Mennonite-like oppression and *cyber up* already.

Continuing, my friend suggested a new dating app where he was “having some huge wins.” Classy, I know. So, I joined. Naturally. And, while this next passage is not an actual transcription, the paraphrase is uncanny.

SJ: “Okay, so you get to put in six pictures of yourself. But be careful which six you choose.”

ME: “What about this one? Or this one?”

SJ: “No. There’s a formula. You have six opportunities to show all sides of yourself. And she’ll draw conclusions from these six images. You need one good profile photo which makes you look your best. Serious is best. Then, pick one photo that shows you smiling big, like laughing, and put that one next so you have range of emotions there. Then, do one with you doing something silly or funny. Use two group photos, which makes you seem like you have friends – I mean, you do have friends, but let her know that. And then use a picture of you with a kid, but be sure that you put on the profile that it isn’t your kid. Girls love pics with kids.”

ME: “...”

Frankly, just writing the story makes me laugh about it all over again. He knew the profile “formula.” He knew exactly how to choose the right combination of photos to get me the optimal number of impressions and *right swipes*. I’ll spare you the qualifying questions and text he suggested for an optimal profile, but you can imagine that it was extensive and well-curated.

SJ knew exactly how to create an online brand. Perfectly – even if he wasn’t selling a great product or offering a great service.

It wasn't too long ago that I had a client come to me frustrated because they were running television commercials but were not having much success getting traffic to their website. The product was a family of health and beauty accessories. "We're just not noticing a bump in traffic to justify the advertising spend," said the director of marketing. "Maybe people just don't watch TV anymore."

Fail.

You'll notice that it was easier for the client to believe that "people don't watch TV anymore" than it was to believe that they had done a poor job of representing their brand. It was an immediate jump to a conclusion which held the marketing director blameless.

Again, fail.

We spent a lot of time together that day and I was able to help that client correct a fundamental problem with their messaging. We walked through the basics of solution-based marketing and all that jazz, and I think I got through.

The client had provided a pretty picture. They had one serious photo. One smiling ... just kidding.

But really, they had an attractive commercial which gave some really valuable information. The message had no hook though. There was no reason to learn more or explore further. It was vanilla.

When a consumer visited their website, it was equally as bland. There was no call to action. No reason to act today. No clear indication as to which of their dozens of products a person should choose. It was my contention that the customer just found their message to be ... "nice." (And in the marketing world, that's about

the same as being the girl with the “great sense of humor.”)

Sadly, the director of marketing was much more willing to blame *the television*, rather than own the problem. Crazy, right? Much like the people who complain that “there are just no good men/women left.”

Perchance, there are, but you’re just not doing the right things to attract them? [gasps]

Did I just say that?

#### RYZE-ING TO THE OCCASION

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At our agency, we deal with this all the time. All day, every day, we are approached by people with products and services which are in search of a marketing agency to help them “get to the next level” or “take things global.” (The clichés kill me. Seriously. Slow death.)

I get to spend my professional life telling people that their babies are ugly. And, what is the worst part of this job, you may or may not ask? Sometimes the worst stories of online marketing failures are OURS.

There. I admitted it. We are like the starving baker. Like the cobbler’s kids.

We do some of our worst work on the brands that we have invested in (yes, we own some of our own brands). And the reason is simple, really: We are so close to the situation that we lose all perspective. Like those clients who know *so much* about their products that they just speak in industry colloquialisms, we do the same thing when we are not careful. We just “know,” so we quit explaining. We quit selling.

Internally, one of our best practices is to always have what I call “story time.”

As an example, when a web designer and/or developer proposes a new site design, I (or someone else on our team) starts the conversation with a little bit of roleplaying.

"Before you show me the new site, tell me what I already know about you. I'm the consumer. How did I hear about you? Did I see you on TV and this is where I'm landing? Did I look for you? Did you look for me? Have I visited your site before? Have I asked for information?"

This line of questioning forces objectivity. It focuses the conversation on the intended audience, rather than the designer. Know your audience.

And, if you want to talk about the dating equivalent of this advice, go look at your online profile (or find a mirror, for heaven's sake), and ask yourself, *objectively*: "Would you date you?"

## TODAY'S LESSONS LEARNED

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- Know the difference between *being* online and *selling* online.
- It is painful to think that your online brand is *not* doing what you want it to do. *It is even more* painful to realize that your online brand is doing things you don't want it to do.
- It is imperative for you to seek objective advice from people who are not emotionally connected to you or your brand. People who love you are seldom honest. They are jaded and want to spare your feelings. And, frankly, why would they want to be the person who offends you? Hire a jackass who speaks truth.
- All companies (and individuals) need to stop and take an objective look at their online presence. If you're not proud, rebuild.

## NOW, ASK YOURSELF

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- Self, what is the personal brand that you want to portray – I mean *really portray* – to the world?
- Self, does the brand you portray - online or otherwise - represent who you *want* to be? Socially? Personally? Professionally?
- Self, when faced with rejection, do you tend to blame others, or do you take the time to reflect on how you could have contributed?
- Self, do you have people in your life who will help take off the blinders and be honest with you? Who are they?
- Self, did you just read these questions out loud and place a very dramatic pause after the word "self" in each question? I may be judging you (and laughing a little).