

# SCOTT HAINES COPYWRITING INTERVIEW

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Below is the Scott Haines interview.

Scott is easily one of the world's *top* direct response copywriters. He's written for everyone from **infomercial gurus** and **New York Times Bestselling Authors**... to \$100+ million per year direct marketing companies... to even business giants like **Jay Abraham** and **Donald Trump**. Scott could not answer everyone's questions due to time constraints.

But he did get a good chunk of them.

And I would *highly* suggest printing this entire blog post out and reading it multiple times. There's so much "gold" inside, it'd be impossible to dig it all out on just one reading. Ready?

OK then, here it is...

**QUESTION:** What do you do daily/weekly/monthly to keep your copywriting edge as sharp as possible?

**SCOTT HAINES:** As a busy freelancer, I write a lot of copy. Also, I coach copywriters (I've been a featured coach in every one of John Carlton's Simple Writing System Workshops... plus... I have a handful of private coaching clients.). And I still read a lot of good copy. Beyond that, I reread the classic marketing/advertising books periodically. These five more often than the others...

1. **Scientific Advertising** by Claude Hopkins
2. **My Life in Advertising** by Claude Hopkins (NOTE: You can get both of Hopkins' books in one combined edition.)
3. **Tested Advertising Methods** by John Caples (4th Edition or earlier, if you can find one.)
4. **How To Make Your Advertising Make Money** by John Caples
5. **The Robert Collier Letter Book** by Robert Collier

I used to copy out sales letters by hand... and also... lots of headlines. Not so much anymore. I talk more about doing those things in my Shortcut Copywriting Secrets(tm) Mini-Course. I'll reveal how you can get a free copy a little later.

**QUESTION:** What was it like working directly with Gary Halbert, and what were the top 3 “gems” you learned from him?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Working with Gary was the very best thing that ever happened to me. As far as what it was like... there's just not enough space here to do it justice. I could easily write a whole book on our strange and crazy adventures together. And someday I might.

I will, however, give you three gems I learned from him...

1. One time, on his houseboat in Bayside Marina in Downtown Miami, he asked me this question...

***“Do you know the #1 reason why most people buy something from an advertisement?”***

I thought about it and replied, “Sure, self-interest.” Then he told me something I'll never forget, he said...

***“That's not it... the #1 reason most people buy something is because of curiosity.”***

He then went on to say, ***“Sure, self-interest is very important, but curiosity trumps it.”***

I can't give you a whole lesson here on how to put curiosity to use in your copy but, I can tell you, at the very least, curiosity needs to be a strong element in your headlines and bullets.

2. ***“Nothing is impossible for a man who refuses to listen to reason.”*** This was one of Gary's favorite sayings. And it's how he lived. He didn't let anything stand in his way. I saw him get things done that bordered on the impossible... and... it's because he didn't listen to most people's “reasoning” or pay attention to their idea of “common sense”.

He lived a “No Limits” lifestyle. In fact, he had a dive watch that had “No Limits” on the face of it to constantly remind himself of how to think.

**3. “More answers will be found through movement than will ever be found through meditation.”** Another Halbertism I strive to live by. Here’s a quick “Gary story” that explains this aphorism fully:

Many years ago we were in Key West—at our good buddy Rocko’s house—looking for places to stay. And we were searching thorough the classifieds in the Key West Citizen newspaper. Anyway, after I looked for awhile, I started discussing options with Rocko. You know, why this or that may or may not be a good idea... and so on. Well, after about five minutes of this uncertainty, Gary grabbed the paper from me, and literally said...

***“I do know this, movement beats meditation any day.”***

Then, he picked up the phone, went down through the classifieds, and in two, maybe three minutes tops was talking to someone about coming by to see a place “right now”. And in less than 10 minutes, he and Rocko were out the door. And in about an hour, he was back with the keys to his new place.

Me? When they returned, I was still looking at the classifieds with no place to stay (except on Rocko’s couch).

I’ve never forgotten that lesson. It was one of the most dramatic demonstrations I’ve ever witnessed of someone getting something done immediately.

Sure, finding a place to rent may seem like a trivial or small thing... but... Gary could just as deftly and quickly knock out monstrous obstacles and problems, as well.

**QUESTION:** What is the best way to gain trust with a customer when all you have is their mailing address and they have never heard of you or what you do before?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Mail them what Halbert called an A-pile letter. An A-pile letter is a simple, white, #10 envelope with a typed or handwritten address—in blue ink, if handwritten—and a corner card that

only reveals your return address with a “live” first-class postage stamp. Do that, and if you are selling something, do a complete sales job.

Better: Offer them something free... no strings attached. Or a free trial. In the long run, that’s usually the most profitable—although not the least hassle-free—way to do business. It’s how Boardroom, Rodale and many other large direct marketing companies operate.

If you’d like to see an example of how I’ve used this technique, click on the link below. It’s an ad I wrote (actually a tear sheet ad that was mailed) that gave away a free book. It was extremely successful to cold lists (people that had no idea who my client was). (Of course, we had a high-priced—\$3,995—back-end product we sold to people who requested the free book. And by the way, we sold—by mail—well over a million dollars worth of the book before we tested offering it free. And “free” was more profitable overall... by a pretty large margin.)

**[www.shortcutcopywritingsecrets.com/tearsheetad.pdf](http://www.shortcutcopywritingsecrets.com/tearsheetad.pdf)**

**QUESTION:** What are the ‘key takeaways’ you learned while mentoring with Gary?

**SCOTT HAINES:** There are too many to list... however... I gave you three very good ones earlier.

**QUESTION:** What have you done over the years to increase your production SPEED? Do you start with the order form as some people recommend? Do you write all the way through and then go back to edit? Do you write in blocks then piece the letter together?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Write! It’s that simple. The more you write, the better/faster you will get.

Some things that help: Timed writing periods with breaks. By now, most copywriters have heard the late, great Gene Schwartz’ advice about writing for 33 minutes and 33 seconds... and then... taking a 5 or 10 minute break before starting again. It works. It keeps you fresh.

The thing is, I strive (and you should also) to do as much work as possible, while staying as fresh as possible... which... by the way, is something I learned from a Russian workout book. Timed periods with breaks help with that.

If you want a neat (and totally free) desktop clock/timer to help you with this, you can download one here...

**[www.respectsoft.com/vistaclock.php](http://www.respectsoft.com/vistaclock.php)**

Having a daily writing goal helps, too. Such as, 2 pages a day... or one or two thousand words. Writing first thing in the morning helps. Also, consistency. If you write every day at the same time, your subconscious gets used to the routine and tends to help you out a bit more.

I don't start with the order form. I know direct marketing legend Ted Nicholas is a big proponent of that technique—and I don't really disagree with his reasons for starting there—it just doesn't work that well for me. I usually start with the headline.

Sometimes, if I'm having a little trouble getting started, I'll write the bullets first... which is something I learned from my long-time friend and colleague, John Carlton.

I often do write a piece from stem to stern. But I also write in pieces. It varies depending on complexity, my energy level, workload, et cetera.

**QUESTION:** What is the method you use from start to finish for doing the information gathering from clients (audio, phone, internet research etc.)?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Here's the short answer (because the complete answer takes up a whole section in my copywriting course): I mostly have them send me everything (product, promos, results, any and all data). Then, I block out a day, or two, or three and go through it all.

After that (and also during the process), I develop a list of questions and then get on the phone with them. Sometimes, however, I just hop on the phone with them blind. Sometimes, I have multiple phone calls. I may or may not hop on the Internet for research... it just depends on how complete my start package is.

**QUESTION:** What are some of your most secret tricks to writing the best bullets?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Another subject that takes up a whole chapter in my copywriting course... so... I just don't have the space to answer that question here.

**QUESTION:** What are the things that you do differently (if any) with your copy when selling a \$19 book vs. a \$10,000 course? Or do you follow the same principles no matter what?

**SCOTT HAINES:** I see you've read my bio. Anyway, I do a complete selling job regardless of price. Of course, it's less of a chore to get someone to part with \$20 bucks versus \$20,000. That is, the higher the price, the more you need of everything — words, proof, risk-reversal, and so on.

Having said that, though, I believe I have had good success selling the higher-end stuff because of my confidence or my mindset. I just don't hesitate when offering something expensive. I write with full conviction and fully expect them to buy. A lot of people have mental hurdles when it comes to asking for a considerable amount of money... and... it shows in their writing. I don't. And that, again, I believe makes the difference.

**QUESTION:** I'd like to ask Scott about getting clients when you don't have a huge track record. I've written some high performing website copy, and five sales letters that turned around the businesses response by more than 300%. But I don't have a "binder" full of successes yet. How do I get to the big bucks?

**SCOTT HAINES:** You don't get to the big bucks until you earn it. It sounds like you are on your way. Keep it up. Add to your successes until you DO have a big binder full.

If you want some advice on leapfrogging your way up the ladder, read Robert Ringer's book, *Winning Through Intimidation*. (The updated version has been retitled: *To Be or Not to Be Intimidated? That is the Question*. A much lamer title, by the way.)

Just be careful of what you ask for. It's a lot of responsibility to take someone's business and ten to fifteen thousand (or more) of their dollars into your hands. If you do so before you're ready, you're going to be in for a very bumpy ride.

**QUESTION:** Have you been able to make a compiled list payout? If so what?

**SCOTT HAINES:** No, I've never tried. Halbert did it a couple of times. The first time with his Coat-of-Arms promotion. And he did it with at least one diet promotion (maybe more than one, I can't remember) by choosing people in the DMV database (or various DMV databases) based on their height/weight on their Driver Licenses. I'm not 100% sure, but I don't think you can access that information anymore.

**QUESTION:** If you were self-studying copywriting, today, what type of daily curriculum would you set up for yourself?

**SCOTT HAINES:** I have a report that details exactly what I'd do titled:

**The Haines Method(tm)  
For Quick Copywriting Mastery!**

I'll tell you how you can get a copy in just a minute.

**QUESTION:** If you still were a relatively new (but accomplished) copywriter with a good track record of performing for a single client thus far (i.e. made them almost \$500K in the last six months), how would you position and effectively market yourself to land newer and higher paying clients in 2010?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Keep working at it. Use that success story. Build upon each success you have. That brings something up... I'm in my 15th year as a freelancer, and there are guys out there in their first few years trying to charge as much (and in many cases, much more) than I do. It's ridiculous. They don't have the chops or the track record. And, like I said earlier, be careful, getting a lot of money for something you're not prepared for is a recipe for disaster.

**QUESTION:** As Scott got started what were his steps to A class? I'm new, I graduated from John Carlton's SWS and I realize that is a first step, but what's next in the whole picture?

**SCOTT HAINES:** John's Simple Writing System is superb. As I mentioned before, I've been a featured coach every time he's held it. But, if you're truly new, you need to fill in the gaps in your education. You need to read the classic texts on marketing and advertising and get grounded in the basics.

Here's a quick story to illustrate what I mean: 10 years ago, I had a meeting with Jay Abraham in his office. During the meeting, Jay asked me how many times I'd read **Scientific Advertising** by Claude Hopkins. Proud of myself, I said, "Seven times." And he immediately shot back with, "*That's not enough. I've read it over 50 times.*"

Jay probably has the best marketing mind of anyone alive. And, before he ever did any of his seminal thinking on the subject, he immersed himself in the greats who came before him.

You should do the same.

**QUESTION:** Here's my problem. I need to clear \$150,000, after taxes by December 31, 2010 (next year). This allows me to get debt-free.

What I've chosen to do is sale nutritional supplements (Virility, Bladder Control, Prostate, etc.)

My first promotion will offer the product at a pre-sale/pre-formulation discounted price.

Here's my question to Scott.

How and what would you do to generate that kind of money?... i.e. Copy strategies, marketing strategies, etc...to get it going.

**SCOTT HAINES:** I'm not trying to be rude, but if you're starting from dead scratch with little to no money and little to no experience in this market, you're delusional. It's a very good market, but it's also highly-competitive with pretty sophisticated customers.

If you think you're going to swoop in and clean up against some of the best companies and promotions going today, be prepared for a brutal reality check.

Selling nutritional supplements is a business... meaning... you better be prepared to absorb some setbacks while you're learning the ropes. There's a lot you can't know going in... and... you're going to pay for that lack of knowledge in time and money lost.

Read Michael Masterson's, **Seven Years to Seven Figures**. It'll go a long way toward clearing up your thinking.

**QUESTION:** There seems to be a growing divergence of opinion on what makes top-selling copy in the “new economy.” There are those in the old school who espouse the long sales letter – problem, pain, solution, offer model. On the other hand, there is a growing band saying that people are sick of being sold to and want a more harmonious, longer-term rapport with marketers. I see successful and unsuccessful versions of both sides. What do you think?

**SCOTT HAINES:** You’ve got this all wrong. You are talking about a tactic versus a strategy. The long sales letter is a tactic that works... and probably will for the foreseeable future. The other deal is a strategy. And it has ALWAYS been more profitable to do longer-term, educational-based, rapport-building marketing to prospects and customers.

I mentioned Jay Abraham before. He’s a master at this type of overall strategy. But that doesn’t mean he doesn’t use the “tactic” of doing a complete sales job via the long-form sales letter when he’s offering something.

**QUESTION:** Schwartz (and other greats) talks about not drawing attention to the copy – in essence, making the copy transparent. What do you do to avoid drawing attention to your copy? What’s your test?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Flow and smoothness. A simple, direct style. Very few (if any) ten-dollar words. And always, ALWAYS, read your copy out loud to find the rough spots.

**QUESTION:** In selling Information/Advice products: What’s your approach? Some suggest mixing “teaching” with “selling” in a promotion. What do you suggest avoiding and what sort of balance do you want to get between information/’golden nuggets’ and ‘selling’?

**SCOTT HAINES:** I generally don’t include much “teaching” in my promotions. Not that it doesn’t work, I just tend to lean more toward a curiosity-building/takeaway approach. So I can’t give you any ratio or specifics. You’ll have to test it for yourself.

(NOTE: If I were writing a magalog or bookalog, I’d include more giveaway info... because... that’s the whole purpose of those formats... to make your advertisement look/read more like valuable content.)

[www.AtlantaMarketingCenter.com](http://www.AtlantaMarketingCenter.com) | [www.Profit-Triggers.com](http://www.Profit-Triggers.com)

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**QUESTION:** What do you do if a promotion fails? Where do you begin to rewrite? Do you begin with the appeal? The theme or Idea? The Lead? Or do you kill the entire thing and begin from scratch?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Fortunately, this doesn't happen very often... but... it does happen. If it never happens, you're just not doing enough. But if something does fail, the first step is always analysis to determine the possible problem. And, depending on the answer (or answers), I might change offer, pricing, headline, theme... or... scrap the whole thing and try something completely different. I wish I could give you a better answer... but each case is unique with all kinds of different variables.

**QUESTION:** How can an experienced writer, but inexperienced copywriter break in and start building clips for a portfolio? You must have a portfolio before anyone will take you serious and pay you accordingly. Do you make up "dummy" copy ads?

**SCOTT HAINES:** You can do that... but a better solution is to offer to do some spec work. Spec meaning they only pay you if it works. Or, last resort, you can offer to do totally free work on the contingency that, if it's successful, you can include it in your portfolio... along with the results and possibly a testimonial from the client. And it wouldn't hurt to try to work in a subsequent paid assignment into the agreement.

John Carlton calls this the "Shameless Whore" phase... and... whether you like it or not, and even though you're an experienced writer, you've got to spend some time there. Everyone does.

**QUESTION:** How much time do you spend researching in relation to the total project?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Research can grow beyond 60% to as little as 5% or less. Example: When I first started writing financial promos (more than a decade ago), my research was as much as 75%-80% of the total project. These days, it's less than 10% and sometimes 0%.

**QUESTION:** I know that most great copywriters read a lot of great writing. Who is your favorite fiction author, and why?

**SCOTT HAINES:** Easy. John D. MacDonald. He penned the Travis McGee series of novels. Halbert got me hooked on him and that series. Quick story (that I've told elsewhere, but it's relevant, so I'm going to repeat it here):

Shortly after I first started working with Halbert (back in 1998), we took a trip from Miami down to the Florida Keys. Marathon to be exact. And while in Marathon, we stopped at a bookstore. I picked up a health book to help me with a current project and Gary picked up a few paperbacks. After we got back in the car, Gary handed me one of the paperbacks and said...

***“You’ll always remember where you were when Gary Halbert bought you your first Travis McGee novel.”***

And, quite obviously, I still do. In fact, on a somewhat recent vacation to the Keys, I passed by that bookstore and the memory of him giving me that book was as vivid as the day he did it.

Anyway, at that time, Gary didn’t say, “Read this, it’ll make you a better copywriter.” No, he just told me that once I start reading Travis McGee, I’ll become addicted. And I did. Not a rabid addiction, but I slowly worked my way through the entire series (21 books in all) over roughly 10 years.

And now that I’m finished with all the books in the Travis McGee series, I consider that gift one of the most important things I ever received from Gary. Why? It’s simple...

**Reading Those Books Made Me  
A Better Storyteller!**

And good storytelling (“in print” or “in person”) is paramount to persuasion and selling.

Also, one of the earlier questions was about making writing transparent. If you want an example of transparent writing, read a McGee novel. You’ll almost never notice his style or the words... you’ll just be engrossed in the story.

**QUESTION:** How do you get in the right frame of mind to write copy? How do you get your “game face” on?

**SCOTT HAINES:** In my Shortcut Copywriting Secrets(tm) Mini-Course, I have a whole section devoted to this subject titled...

**“How To Write Killer Moneymaking Copy Even On Those Days When Your Mind Is Completely Frozen!”**