

Dear Mr Hayes-McCoy, We Have Thirty-Two Million, One Hundred Thousand US Dollars (US. \$32.1M)... Your commission will be 25% of the total sum.

Could you please notify me of your acceptance urgently!

Tell me? Am I the only one who is lucky enough to have a personal friend in Nigeria called J.A. Kanu?

I've never actually had the good fortune to meet J.A. ... but he keeps writing to me, like an old friend. What's more he keeps on wanting to make me rich beyond my wildest dreams - 25% of 32 Million US Dollars. WOW!

It appears that he and a bunch of crafty fellow civil servants - including a certain Dr Awele Ahmed from Lagos - are highly placed executives in the Federal Government of Nigerian Contract Review Committee for the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation.

And for some reason which I can never quite get an angle on they want to transfer this exact amount of money quickly and QUIETLY into a - and I quote - 'a reliable bank account overseas'.

Quite naturally, I, like the Dalai Lama, am the chosen one, so in return for allowing my friend Kanu to use my bank account, I'm told that... 'Your commission will be 25% of the total sum, 5% for expenses' and the balance of 70% is for J.A. and his colleagues. (Let's face it, it's not a bad split! - wonder who get their expenses covered?)

To earn this untold wealth, all I have to do is fax my bank account number to a certain 'very confidential' fax number in Lagos, at once!

Lately J.A.'s letters have been getting kind of frantic, and one arrived on my desk this morning which had a decided note of hysteria in it. 'What's happening' - he says - 'we must move this money into your account quickly, otherwise it will be too late!' Gwaaaaaad!

Mind you, deep down I suspect that J.A. has picked the wrong person. He simply has no conception of what he's up against when it comes to trying to attract my attention. Because in the very same batch of mail I received (the dreaded curse of having a double barrel name!) a letter addressed to '**Dear Hazel McCoy!!!**

Not only this, but it told me that the KEYE Productivity Centre were holding a special one day seminar in the Gresham hotel for receptionists(?) who are... 'expected to recognise and handle security problems'!

By now, as I turn to my third letter, I am in a rather suspicious frame of mind ... and my third letter confirms everything that I ever stayed awake worrying about - it was a letter from my Bank - one of the big two in Ireland!

It was one of those two-liner jobs which never cease to give me a warm 'customer care' glow.

'Dear Mr McCoy' it said - well I suppose I was spared the Hazel bit - but wait for it!

'I should be obliged if you would contact me at your convenience as there is a matter I would like to discuss with you' ... yours sincerely.

That was it! Not a single word more!

Needless to say, J.A. would have been proud of me had he seen the instant lynx like look that appeared in my eyes and witnessed the speed with which I grabbed the telephone to respond.

But all was well!

It appears that these clappy happy little two line letters are just the banks helpful way of contacting you to say ... 'you've overpaid your repayments on your loan and your account is now so much in the black that we feel we should tell you. (Note, how I did it all on my own! - without even the help of J.A.)

Of course, there's a lesson to be learned from all this ... and YES! You are absolutely right! It's the direct marketing copywriter's platinum rule of writing good copy... which is:

'Always put yourself in the reader's place'.

Try it next time you finish your masterpiece of a direct mail letter, sit back and ask yourself:

- Would I like to receive a letter like this?
- 'Is it open and friendly in tone?'
- 'Is the offer BELIEVABLE?'

Because if you can say 'YES" to these three questions, chances are that what you are holding in your hands is a great piece of direct marketing copy.

Poor old J.A. got the first two okay, but he fell down badly on the last one.

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Tiny Flowers on Wexford sand dunes
From: The Underfoot Series
Photograph: Robert Hayes-McCoy

