

“Truth & Order Amidst The Chaos”

# The Marketing Rebel

# RANT

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From: **John Carlton**  
Reno, Nevada  
Sunday afternoon

Dear Friend and Subscriber,

Are you having fun today?

If not, here's something I'd like you to try: Put this newsletter down, and go do something fun for five minutes. I don't care what it is. Pull a joke book off the shelf, call a buddy who always lifts your spirits, go play with the dog. At the very least, sit back, close your eyes, and remember a funny scene from a movie. (Say, the campfire scene in “Blazing Saddles”, or John Belushi doing his sorority voyeur thing in “Animal House”.)

Better yet... run that memory clip in your head of when you were young, full of piss and vinegar, and doing something absolutely stupid and hilarious and having the time of your life. Remember that? When life was fun?

Go do it. I mean it. Five minutes. You got nothing to lose. I'll still be here.

You back? You in a better mood? Good.

**Here's my first lesson for you:** If you had trouble coming up with a five-minute fun activity, or had to stretch to find that happy memory... then your life is on the fritz. One the very first things you gotta get straight in your head is: Why are you in business? Why do you want to make a ton of money?

The great marketer Joe Sugarman has a little formula for judging any project he gets involved in. He calls it “ELF”. That stands for Easy, Fun,

and Lucrative. What good is a fortune if you have to sacrifice your life to attain it?

It's often a shock when you understand a simple truth about American capitalism: Making big bucks not only does not require that you give up having fun... but... the real winners are guys who work a fraction of the time their peers do. And still rake it in. And have plenty of time for a life.

Great marketing means working smart, not working hard. Savvy marketers love shortcuts that work, love to delegate, love peeling away the horseshit that surrounds most projects (like endless meetings and focus groups and reports *ad nauseam*)... and they love life. Very few of the millionaires I know are having fun. It's a cruel joke that money will not bring you happiness.

You first have to know what will make you happy. That takes some research. You do that research by actually living. Once you discover what makes you happy -- and most folks never do -- then you go for it like a bulldog after a cat. If creating massive wealth helps you get to that happiness, then you know why you're in business.

So... the next time you pick up one of my newsletters... I want you to have a happy memory to indulge in for five minutes before you start reading. Cherish that memory. And get your ass in gear creating more of them.

Okay. Now let's get going on creating the cash-flow part of your dreams...

## Salesmanship 101

Your number one weapon in advertising will always be superior salesmanship. I was not a born salesman. I had to learn the hard way, making embarrassing mistakes, blowing deals right and left... and going to outrageous extremes to find world-class salesmen who would teach me their tricks.

I'll be sharing those tricks in each issue. Here, however, is an honest biggie: A proven "multiplier" of sales to use in your ads is...

### **Personality!**

A good sales job will bring you orders. Add some real personality to your sales message... and sales will go through the roof.

I recently wrote a short cover letter for a client who was mailing an ad to his inactive list. I insisted that the client personalize each letter with the prospect's name. Here is how the letter starts out to, say, Bob Jones:

Dear Bob,

Just now, I was sitting at my desk going through some stuff, and had a sudden thought. So I called out to my long-suffering secretary...

**"Hey Barb! What the heck happened to Bob Jones?"**

As far as we know, Bob, you're still alive and kicking. But we haven't heard from you...

Now, let's dwell on this opening for a second. Most advertisers -- if they had the sense to mail a cover letter at all -- would have adopted a holier-than-thou tone that read like the warning label on a bottle of medicine:

Dear Mr. Smith,

It has come to our attention that your account has become inactive blah blah blah...

Yeah, I wonder why.

Now go back to what I did. Created a scene, complete with some drama and script and -- most important -- excellent use of the guy's name. It's lighthearted, yet still brutally-effective salesmanship. It also doesn't go on and on. Just a

brief, personalized little dash of slang-driven personality. The kind of copy people love to read.

This client took the leash off me years ago, and I have created a personality in his letters that keeps readership at astonishingly high levels. He's a funny guy anyway, but he's not a writer, and has never attempted to translate his own personality to the printed page. So he pays me a fortune to do it for him.

When people on his list get a letter from him, the response is not "Oh, yuck, another sales pitch", but...

**"Hey! Let's see what outrageous story he's got to tell me today."**

Personality works. It will multiply your sales.

**Here's the problem, however:** Many people I try to coach insist they have no personality. It's mostly a symptom of low self-esteem (the most common ailment in society) -- of course you have a personality. Everyone does, even if you're boring as dirt.

And here's the kicker: When you're writing copy, you can be whoever you choose to be. You're in control of the words. It's your game.

Now, I do not recommend you try to write over your head. The most common blunder new writers commit when they discover the power of personality is to get too aggressive. They end up offending the reader, instead of engaging her. It took me years to figure this phenomenon out.

Here's the answer: You need a "**Starter Personality**" at first. The more you write, the more comfortable you'll get with using personality. You'll begin to see that people really can like a guy like you, even if your hobby is collecting bottle caps and you haven't changed your wardrobe or hairstyle since the late '70s.

Think about the advertising you see around you, year after year, that features some nutcase or big doughy-faced guy. The best example was the late Dave Thomas of Wendy's hamburger joints. The ad agency constantly tried to edge him out of the campaigns, and each time they did the ads tanked. Sales spiked when Dave was put back in. Homely guy, monotone delivery, but very much like your favorite uncle. People identified with

him, trusted him, and happily ate hamburgers he endorsed.

You don't have to be Sean Connery. You can be Elmer Fudd. But you gotta know how to use what you have.

To create your own "Starter Personality", simply pay attention to the things that make you human. Are you a plain-talkin' guy from humble beginnings who made it rich? Has your lack of good looks forced you to find other ways to win at life? Have you made every mistake there is to be made, and accidentally stumbled on success?

Use that. Get a laugh out of your failures, and shyly admit your success. Share your reader's skepticism at all things in advertising. Never brag. Never argue.

And for God's sake... never bore your reader.

My accountant is a funny, caring man who knows a lot about accounting. Yet he sends out a dry, pre-packaged newsletter to his clients that puts people to sleep. It's like he's apologizing for bothering you with stuff about your money.

Yet, every time I talk to him, he regales me with stories that have a definite financial point. He once worked for an IRS "goon squad". He has clients who forget to tell him about massive write-offs that would slash their taxes. He's on top of the constantly-changing tax laws, and how to use the loop-holes.

A real letter from him (or even a cassette tape) on a hot subject each month would get **devoured** by his clients. Who would then pass it on to friends and colleagues. Who would then line up to hire this savvy, interesting, tax-slashing accountant. But no. He hides his personality behind stilted brochure-type newsletters full of cutesy graphics and tame mumbling.

It is sheer lunacy to write bland copy in order to avoid offending some imagined part of your audience. It is **brilliant** marketing to risk pissing off a few people to get your message across to those who want what you sell. Stop worrying about pleasing people who are not in your target audience. And start obsessing about pleasing the people you're asking to send you money.

One of the best pieces of advice I ever received was from an old grizzled salesman who'd seen it all. "Just sell the damn thing," he'd say. "Stop trying to be fancy."

That advice works in copy. Do not apologize that you're selling something. Do not try to appear to be a big honking company if you're a small start-up. Don't try to blow smoke at all.

Pretend you're writing to a colleague -- pick someone you're acquainted with, and write her a letter. Don't be overly familiar, don't be off-color, don't mumble, don't use any "corporate speak". Just tell her why you're writing, what you have, and make your pitch. One human being to another. Let your personality shine through.

That's how great salesmen do it.

**Next month:** A very shrewd shortcut method to master the art of quickly bonding with your customer in order to persuade her to do your bidding.

## Lessons From The Vice Squad

It's no secret among top marketers that some of the smartest salesmen are con-artists. I do NOT suggest you get involved in any sort of unethical project... and, in fact, I hope you rot in hell if you do.

However... you cannot afford to ignore the outrageously-accurate knowledge of human behavior that is the stock and trade of the con-man. (And I include politicians as well as multi-level marketers in this category.) The same charm tactics used by the cad to steal hearts can also be used by the nice guy to win his soul-mate. And the compelling sales pitch used to sell worthless junk will work just as well selling your honest-to-God hot stuff products.

I fully expect that, when people start trashing me -- and I will get criticized, because everyone who sticks their head above the fray to tell the truth eventually gets shot at -- they will harp on this "Lessons From The Vice Squad" section in my newsletter.

Well, screw 'em. I don't care where good marketing ideas come from. The reason con-artists are so good is that they typically only get

one shot at making the “sale”. They gotta split right after money exchanges hands. So they are superb students of human nature and behavior. As you should be, selling your legitimate business. You’re dreaming if you think you’re gonna get more than one shot at making the sale.

Bad marketers ignore human behavior. Good marketers study demographics and psychology. Great marketers learn from everything... including the “dark side” of salesmanship.

**First “vice squad” lesson:** No con will work on an honest man. You need greed in the mix. In those 3-card Monte or shell games (which shell is the pea under?), the hustler always allows the mark to win at first. Then the bet doubles. The mark, thinking this is the easiest money he’s ever made, agrees.

And suddenly that pea does magic acts. By the time the mark realizes he’s being taken, he’s lost a bundle.

For the rest of us, it’s a reminder of the importance of appealing to the inherent greed in all humans. Many marketers put their customers on a pedestal, and refuse to get into the “gutter” with their competition offering blatant bargains.

Big mistake. I love to do “firesale” ads, where some slight damage or mislabeling or tiny flaw has forced us to offer everything at dirt-cheap bargain prices. There are businesses all over the country who earn so much in their liquidation “going out of business” sales that they not only stay in business... but they routinely try to go back out of business so they can have that liquidation sale again.

A furniture dealer I know sold so many couches with slight rain damage, that he punched a hole in the warehouse roof to keep the leaks coming.

People like to get something for nothing, or at least get a better deal than everyone else got. It gives them a story to tell their friends. Makes them feel good about their prowess at finding bargains. And -- most importantly -- **gives them “permission” to spend money on something they might otherwise put off buying (or not buy at all).**

Take this lesson to heart. There’s a reason why “greed” is listed as a basic human motivation, right up there with better health, fixing problems, and finding love.

A connected rule to this is: Once hooked, the mark will refuse to let go. In fact, the more irrational and absurd the deal, the more tightly the hooked mark will insist it’s the greatest thing in the universe.

This is not unusual or isolated human behavior. Happens every day. In cults praying to UFOs, in pyramid marketing schemes where the simplest math shows it cannot work, in superstitions (those astrology and psychic hotline ads aren’t on all night just to take up air space), and in investments (does Enron or the dot-com boom ring a bell?).

At nearly every marketing seminar I’ve done, there is at least one guy in the audience stricken with multi-level marketing sickness. No amount of rational argument or clear-cut math or even the warnings of others who escaped the same fix will make this guy waver from his commitment to the con.

Worse, in order to keep his own mind from exploding, he must evangelize to everyone else around him, trying to convince them it’s the best thing since sliced bread. Just look into their eyes. Lost.

No one is completely immune. How many chain letters have you received in your life? How many have you sent on to friends, just to “be on the safe side” that none of the bad stuff promised will happen to you? I’ll bet you did it at least once.

There’s something inherent in our wiring that makes us desperately cling to beliefs that take root in our head. There is often no rational explanation whatsoever. Do you prefer Coke to Pepsi? Why? It’s sugar water. How many times do you have to vote for one political party... and get fooled again... before you change your affiliation? For most folks, it’s time after time.

And a famous religious leader once said, “Give me a child until he’s seven, and he’ll be a believer for life.” Why? It’s in our wiring, dude.

What does this mean for the smart marketer? It goes back to the “two reasons why anyone buys anything” rule: Your customer needs a ton of rational reasons why this is a great deal, so he can give his wife, his buddies, and himself a good and plausible story supporting his buying decision.

And you need to appeal to your customer’s “**belief wiring**” deep inside -- by hitting all those silly hot buttons he would never admit to having any sway over him. “Hey, I bought this Porsche because it’s a great investment and a work of art... not because young women suddenly look at me differently.”

Yeah, right.

**Next month:** Astonishing sales secrets I learned playing rock and roll in sleazy biker bars.

## How-To Department

### **The Pro Copywriter’s Bag Of Tricks**

This segues nicely into what I just wrote above.

I seldom skimp on bullets, because you can never guess which little nugget or suggestion will “flip” your prospect into becoming a customer.

Bullets (for the rookies in the crowd) are those little blurbs in an ad that deliver bite-sized pieces of benefits -- allowing you to hit every conceivable “hot button” your reader possesses. Like this:

- So simple to use, a child can master it in minutes!
- New design eliminates the aches and pains of repetitive motion! (And lets you heal from past damage, too.)
- The secret of lulling your opponent into a false sense of safety... and then crushing him with a move so fast, he’ll swear it was invisible!
- How to start a steady stream of cash-flow that comes in every hour of every day, without any maintenance whatsoever! (So effective, it should be illegal.)

They’re called bullets because of the little dot that usually starts them out, which looks like a bullet hole. Typesetter slang from long ago.

Bullets offer you a shorthand way to get a lot of good sales points across quick. You aren’t burdened with the grammar rules of complete paragraphs. You make a point, then move on to the next one without any hemming and hawing.

This allows you to take every possible aspect of your product -- the way it’s made, the secrets it reveals, the bells and whistles of the design -- and attach clear, convincing benefits that give the reader a reason to buy. Bullets “make the connection” between the physical aspects of your product... and the (mostly emotional) benefits of what it **does for the customer**.

Bad writers force the reader to make that connection. They assume the reader will say to himself “Oh, I get it -- 368 cubic inches means it’s a big engine, and that must mean it has more power so I’ll go faster.”

Doesn’t happen. Reading is a passive behavior -- if you don’t tell him, the benefit won’t occur to him. Never assume your reader will “make the connection”, no matter how obvious.

Make a master list of benefits your product offers before you sit down to write. Then work every one of them into your copy. What you think is an inconsequential point may be the very detail that flips your prospect.

**Here’s another trick:** Most marketers I know wring their hands a lot over pricing. They’re afraid of asking too much, and scaring people away... and they’re equally terrified of asking too little, and leaving money on the table.

I know from experience that great salesmanship has no regard for price. If your product is expensive, you work your sales pitch around that fact. If you’re giving it away, you better be doing it because you have a killer back-end.

If you’re asking the big bucks, justify the expense in your copy. “You’ll double your investment back the first time you use it.” “It’s less than the price of one fast-food lunch every month. Pennies a day.” “Does \$120 sound like a lot? That’s just \$12 a month, less than \$3 a week. And look at what you get.”

Don't make your reader justify the cost for himself. Do it for him, as soon as you mention price. If you think he's gonna gasp with "sticker shock", then set him up before you lower the boom: "Before I tell you how much this is, let me ask you a question. Would you spend one dollar a week to add 25 blistering miles an hour to your tennis serve?"

People are sensitive to price. But in a crazy way. They'll shop clear across town to save 7 cents a can on tuna, and then drop \$22,000 for a new car that loses half its value the second it's driven off the lot.

Why do people do this? Salesmen know. It's in our wiring. Finding a store with cheaper tuna is a small victory, showing a little mastery over your environment. Buying a new car is more like joining a special club, or adopting a new identity.

**But it's all dependent on the marketing.**

"Our tuna is just as good... except we charge less for it." "Are you a hip young urbanite with a zest for life? They're all driving the new Hairmobile."

Use this lesson in your marketing. People will pay what it costs to get what they want. And it's not the deal you get... it's the deal you think you get. All we need is a damn good reason, and we'll buy your stuff.

**Next month:** How to stop the "invisible robbery" that's bleeding your business of cash.

## Operation Moneysuck

Operation Moneysuck is a big part of my course "**Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets of a Marketing Rebel**" because it's the heart of a successful business.

The basic definition is this: If you're the guy who knows how to bring in the money, then that's what you do. You don't try to fix the computer, you don't argue with vendors, you don't change the oil in your own car. You pay other people to do that stuff. And you put your nose where it belongs -- bringing in the moolah.

There are many collateral side rules to Operation Moneysuck, too. All dealing with that basic idea.

**Here's the one I see most violated:** The deal ain't over 'til the check has cleared the bank.

Not when you get the check. Not when you deposit it. When it clears. When that great Computer God moves the data around so the cash that was in his account... is now in yours.

Seems obvious, right? Screws businesses up every day. I've seen clients wet themselves over a phone call where money was promised. I never do. Long ago, I adopted a working attitude of a "**pessimistic optimist**" -- I expect things to go wrong (and plan for it), and am pleasantly surprised when the deal goes down smoothly. Nothing is a "lock". Your phone system fries just as the big ad hits. Your best friend embezzles all the funds. The print shop goes belly up before releasing your order. The check bounces.

Just stay cool, calm and alert while the deal works its way from idea to profit. Relax and pop the champagne when the cash is yours for keeps.

## Ship of Fools Department

If you're reading this newsletter, you're probably in -- or aspire to be in -- that part of the business world where all the action takes place. Either owning a business, or marketing one.

One of the invisible secrets of being successful is to have your act together. Your personal act.

**Consider this tidbit from the trenches:**

Almost every entrepreneur millionaire I know has lost it all at some point. Gone from mansions to rags.

And nearly every copywriter I know has flamed out. Just had a brain melt-down, and left the biz for anywhere from a few months to decades. (I ran off to write novels and play in rock bands for a couple of years.)

The practical result of all this angst is, a lot of professionals become "self help" junkies.

You've probably seen a few at the bookstore, wandering among the racks and racks of self-help books, looking pale and worn out.

**I'm here to give a warning:** You can overdo it. Self-help can quickly become self-limitation... if you forget the magic ingredient: Action. At

some point, you must take what you've learned out on the street, so to speak. You gotta dive in the pool, even if it's cold.

I only recommend two books on this subject. I'll tell you about them in the next newsletter. Of all the material I've read -- and I've chewed my way through a library -- the "answers" to getting your act together turn out to be amazingly simple.

That's not something most self-help junkies want to hear. But it's true.

It's all about motivation... clarity... and action. I'll be sharing what I've learned in these newsletter rants. Won't take long to spell out the basic secrets.

But it did take me half a friggin' lifetime to figure 'em out.

**Here's the first revelation I ever had about action:** When I was a young and dumb freelancer, I had some goals in mind, and I was pumped up about reaching them. But between that first step toward a goal... and that triumphant feeling of attaining it... lies a whole bunch of little steps that involve nasty things like getting up in the morning. And doing all sorts of activities that you'd rather not do right now, thank you very much.

I stumbled upon a psychological trick. I don't remember where I found this nugget... but it's potent.

Listen: Every time you catch yourself saying "I can't", immediately translate that to "I won't", and see if it still makes sense.

It's that simple. And will suddenly expose you for the lying, lazy-ass weasel you really are.

Try it. "I can't write a good ad." "I won't write a good ad." "I can't get a girlfriend." "I won't get a girlfriend."

Now, I'm not saying that, once you have these little revelations, you must change your behavior. What you're doing is getting honest with yourself. And you know what? It's okay not to want to do something. Just get clear on the reasons why -- it's not that you can't do it... it's that you won't do it.

And when that "won't" sticks in your craw and makes you feel uncomfortable, you'll finally

realize that you have the power to change your entire attitude about everything.

It's not just a cool trick. It actually works. What silly animals we are, that such simple things can change your life.

What silly, lucky animals.

**Next month:** Why "dirty" motivations can be the most potent driving force behind your success. And how to harness this "unmentionable" power.

## Coaches Corner

### **Bidniz Secrets No One Bothered To Tell You About**

I've been stockpiling tips and advice from mentors and colleagues (and yes, even enemies) for my entire career.

These secrets fall into two basic categories:

- (1) Business, or the art of making the sale...
- (2) And bidniz -- the art of making the business work.

Most of what I teach falls under the "business" category. But to really understand how success happens, you need to master the "bidniz" part, too.

**Here's an "appetizer", a taste of what I'm talking about:** Never plead for a man's time. Take it. He will let you know if you can have it, or if you need to do something else first.

People in authority (most of them, anyway) hate to be approached in a groveling manner. "I'm so sorry to disturb you, Mr. Smith, I'm your biggest fan, and if you'd be kind enough to grant me just a minute of your precious time..."

Horseshit. It takes five minutes to ask for one minute that way.

Do what good salesmen do. Credentialize yourself, and say what's on your mind. "Mr. Smith, your partner asked me to speak with you right away. My name is Bob Jones. I'm the freelancer working on your ads."

Skip the embarrassing sucking up. If you get the "don't you know who I am" look, counter it. "I've known about your work for years, and I respect it. Here's what I need to know..."

There's a huge warning that goes with this tactic. **Very important:** Do NOT assume you

are one of the “insiders” until you are one. You’ll know when you are. If you have to ask, you aren’t one yet.

Gary Halbert and I, when onstage during seminars, love to trash-talk, taunt each other, and play dunce to straight man routines. It’s fun, and keeps us loose.

But we do not appreciate some schmuck walking up during a break thinking he can share in the fun because he knows how to insult people, too. If you’re not on the inside, don’t get pushy.

Look. I can call my close friend an ugly jerk because I’ve earned his respect and trust. He’ll take the insult as an endearment. You call him an ugly jerk, and we’ll both knock your teeth out -- from a stranger, these are fighting words.

So get straight on this, because every day in business you’re going to need bizniz tools just like these to survive and prosper.

**Next month:** Exploding the “expert myth”, and what to do with the 3 Stages Of Pure Friggin’ Idiotness that infect most businesses.

## Shame and Success Department

Probably the best teaching comes from real-world examples. My friend and subscriber Daryl T. found a one-armed golfer, and asked what he thought were some pretty tame questions. I bit his head off. He has graciously allowed me to print the exchange here -- it’s a mini-education in smart marketing tactics:

**Daryl T.:** Hi John. Quick questions on that golf product I told you about. (1) Report, video, or should it be something else? And (2) Estimate of production costs? We’re low on funds right now.

**John:** Okay, Daryl, I promised myself when I did this guru thing I wouldn’t try to bullshit anyone. What you’ve just asked me -- and I say this with total affection and respect for you -- are dumb questions. Not dumb as in “stupid”, because there ARE no stupid questions. You’re moving, taking action, and thinking, and I applaud you for that.

No. They are dumb as in “stop and think for a minute here”. You ask what kind of product. That tells me (a) you aren’t familiar with the market, and (b) you’re not familiar with what people buy to get instruction.

These are really easy to figure out on your own, and if you’re not already taking these steps, then you’re not thinking like a marketer yet. First, go buy all the golf magazines you can. Go to the library and see if they

stockpile back issues. Check out the SRDS (Standard Rate And Data) for existing golf lists, and see what people are buying. Watch the Golf Channel and see what products are being touted. Have your search engine look for golf sites. Get in tune with what people are already buying in this market.

Start thinking like a golfer.

Special reports, in this market, are for lead generation only, nothing more. You won’t make much with them -- the mags and most manufacturers give them out free like candy. A book might work, but don’t bet your life on it. (Go to Amazon.com and see how many titles on golf there are.) An instructional course would work much better. My clients use video almost exclusively.

You say you’re short on funds. That’s certainly no crime. But you aren’t gonna be taking out any huge ads in the mags, are you. You must map out a plan for what you can do, with what you have. First, nearly all the research I mentioned is free, at the library. You need cable for the Golf Channel. You’re gonna write your own campaign. I imagine you’re gonna work a percentage deal with the talent. All this means no cash outlay. (And you’re gonna have fun.)

But high-production value video is out. It ain’t cheap. When my current clients first started out, however, I encouraged them to do something called “guerilla video”, which is based on the concept that hot information is more important than how it’s presented. If Marilyn Monroe in her prime gave you her phone number, you wouldn’t care if it was written in crayon on a wet bar napkin. On the other hand, a pesky insurance salesman could give you a solid gold card, and it wouldn’t influence you in the least.

Guerilla video means your product looks like those videos on the TV shows “Cops”, or “America’s Funniest Home Videos”. You grab a camera from Circuit City and film your talent. You don’t try to hide that it’s low quality. In fact, in your ad, you trumpet that detail. You’re just regular guys, trying to share some incredible information with other rabid golfers. There’s a part of the market that loves slapped-together stuff like this -- you feel you’re getting in on some really secret stuff that the corporate masters missed, or want to keep secret.

Here’s a “broke but daring” tip: Set up a website that is simply your blatant sales pitch. You can do it yourself for very little cash. Then write small, but very intriguing ads with a killer headline and directions to your website. Think of classified ads. Heck, if the golf mags have a classified section, use it. Refer people to your website, and you can have the benefit of a long-copy ad. Problem: You are only gonna hit people with access to the Web. Five years from now, that’ll be everyone. Right now, you’re carving up your audience. But then, you’re sacrificing in order to use the limited funds you have.

Good luck. Sorry about the “dumb” comments.

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### **Subscription info, comments and questions:**

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