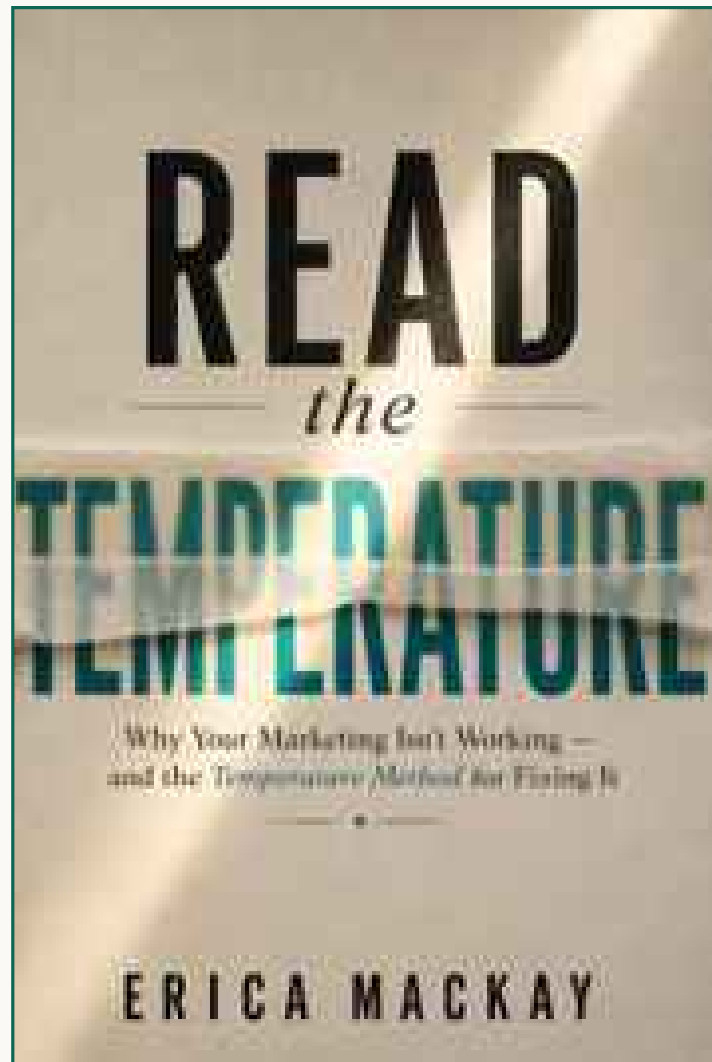




FREE SAMPLE — THE INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The Case Is Never What It Seems

WELKOM. SOUTH AFRICA. 1981.

I was seven years old the first time I was told I couldn't do something that made no sense to me.

I wanted to go to the library.

Not a grand library. Not a famous one. Just the local public library in Welkom, the town where I grew up, in apartheid South Africa. I wanted to go inside, walk between the shelves, and borrow a book. The most ordinary thing a curious child could want.

I was not allowed. Not because of anything I had done. Not because the library was closed, or full, or reserved for members only. I was not allowed because of the colour of my skin.

I stood outside that library and I did not cry. I did not just quietly walk away and accept the rule. I did something that would become, I realise now, the defining habit of my entire personal and professional life.

I asked why.

Not out loud. I was seven, and I had been raised by parents who understood that some battles required strategy before confrontation. But inside, in the part of me that was already forming into whoever I was going to become, I turned the question over and over. Why? What logic was there in a rule that kept a child from books? What evidence was there that this was right, or just, or even useful to anyone?

There was none. The rule was arbitrary. And the moment I understood that a rule could be arbitrary — that the people enforcing it had no evidence to support it, only the habit of power — something was unlocked in me that has never closed again.

I still got books from that library. My classmates and teachers who were allowed in could get them and bring them to me. And I made sure I devoured every book. The rule said I couldn't go into the library, so I found another way.

Whenever someone tells me I can't do something, the first thing I do is look for the evidence to support that statement. And the second thing I do is prove them wrong.

This book is about marketing. But it begins here, outside a library in South Africa, because the skill at the heart of everything I am going to teach you is not a marketing skill. It is a life skill. It is the ability to look at the evidence in front of you — clearly, without assumption, without accepting

received wisdom — and to follow it wherever it leads.

That skill saved lives when I worked as a bodyguard. It transformed the fortunes of every client I have worked with as a marketing strategist. And it is the single most powerful thing you can bring to the question of why your marketing isn't working.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Let me introduce you to Ann first.

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ENGLAND. A FEW YEARS AGO.

Ann was doing everything right.

She had written her poetry books with care and published them with pride. She had followed all the popular marketing advice and done her research — the kind of diligent, methodical research that most small business owners never bother with. She knew her audience: women, largely retired, in their sixties and seventies, with time to read and a love of language. She had even created her avatar, called her Sally, and put her picture up on the wall above her desk. She had found out where Sally spent her time online. She had shown up there, consistently, with her work, talking specifically to Sally.

Ann did everything she was told to do. The problem was that nothing was selling.

When Ann came to me, she was frustrated in the way that only someone who has done everything they were supposed to do can be frustrated. She hadn't cut corners. She hadn't guessed. She had followed the advice. Create the avatar. Target your audience. Find out where they are. Show up where they are consistently. She had done all of it — and still, her poetry books sat in boxes.

"I don't understand," she told me. "I know exactly who my reader is. I know exactly where she is. So why isn't she buying?"

It is a question I have heard, in some form, from almost every consultant, coach, and professional service provider I have ever worked with. The names change. The products and services change. The platforms and campaigns change. But the question is always the same.

Why isn't my marketing working?

Ann's audience was on Facebook. That part was true. Retired women in their sixties and seventies had, over the previous decade, migrated to Facebook in enormous numbers — to keep in touch with grandchildren, to share photographs, to reconnect with old friends, to play those irresistible little quizzes that tell you which Jane Austen character you are or which decade your soul truly belongs to.

They were there. Ann had found them. And she was talking to them about poetry.

What Ann had not accounted for — what nobody had told her to account for — was the mood her audience was in when they were scrolling through Facebook on a Tuesday afternoon. They were not in a buying mood. They were not in a contemplative, literary, let-me-discover-something-beautiful mood. They were in a grandchildren mood. A catching-up mood. A mild-amusement mood.

They were the right people. They were simply not in the right state.

When we unpacked Ann's situation together, we looked not just at who her audience was, but at what they were feeling, what they were seeking, and when they were most open to what she had to offer. And we found something unexpected.

On Wednesday afternoons, in a church in London, an orchestra held an open rehearsal. Members of the public — many of them retired, many of them women, many of them exactly Ann's reader — came to sit in the pews and listen to the music being made. They came not to scroll or to be distracted, but to be moved. To be present. To experience something that touched them.

Music and poetry, it turns out, live in the same room of the human heart.

Ann approached the organisers with a proposal. She would provide tea and coffee for every attendee — at her own expense — in exchange for the right to sell her poetry books in the foyer. The organisers agreed immediately. They saved money. The audience got refreshments. And Ann got something she had been missing entirely: the right person, in the right place, in the right frame of mind.

She made more sales on her first Wednesday afternoon than she had made in an entire month on Facebook.

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I tell you Ann's story because it is not really a story about poetry, or about Facebook, or even about a church in London.

It is a story about evidence. About the difference between the evidence you expect to find and the evidence that is actually there. About what happens when you stop guessing and start reading the clues your market is already leaving you.

Ann knew who her reader was. She did not know what state her reader was in. She had the demographics right and the temperature entirely wrong.

That word — temperature — is going to become very important. But before I explain it, I need to tell you the rest of my story. Because the method I used to solve Ann's problem did not come from a marketing textbook. It came from nine years of keeping people alive.

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SOUTH AFRICA. LATE 1990S.

I was working nights as a security guard to pay for my university studies during the day when I overheard something that changed my life.

A group of male colleagues were talking about close protection work. Bodyguarding. The kind of work that paid well, demanded everything, and — as they were very clear to point out when they noticed me listening — was not for women.

It was like a red flag to a bull and I have never been able to resist a red flag.

I enrolled in the training programme immediately. It was six months of the most demanding preparation I have ever experienced — bomb detection, armed and unarmed combat, high-speed tactical driving, surveillance, counter-surveillance. Thirty applicants started. Four passed.

I was one of the four.

For the next nine years, I worked as a close protection officer — a high-level bodyguard — for corporate and high-net-worth clients across South Africa and beyond. I was often deployed undercover, posing as an executive's personal assistant or secretary, present but invisible, protection without the appearance of it.

It was, in many ways, the best training in reading evidence that I could have received.

Here is what most people don't understand about close protection work: the physical skills are almost irrelevant. If a situation has deteriorated to the point where you need to fight your way out, something has already gone badly wrong. The entire purpose of the preparation — the weeks of work before a single event — is to make the event itself uneventful.

To protect a client at a three-hour dinner, I would spend an entire week investigating four things:

The client. Their habits, their vulnerabilities, their likely reactions under stress. The things they would do instinctively that could put them in danger. The things I needed to know in order to anticipate their movements before they made them.

The threat. Who might want to harm them. What methods they were likely to use. What their historical behaviour told me about how they operated. Whether the threat was immediate, growing, or theoretical.

The venue. Every entrance and exit. Every member of staff and how they had been hired. The sightlines from every table. The routes between the kitchen and the dining room. The location of every telephone and every door that locked from the inside.

The route. Every road between the hotel and the restaurant. Every potential ambush point. Every detour and the detour's detour.

By the time I walked into that dinner, I had read the evidence of that environment so thoroughly that almost nothing could surprise me. I had already imagined every scenario. I had already made every decision. The evening itself was simply the execution of preparation that had happened long before.

The secret to a perfectly safe three-hour dinner is a week of forensic preparation. The secret to marketing that works is exactly the same.

When I walked away from close protection work and eventually founded The Marketing Detective Agency, I brought every one of those four disciplines with me. Because I had come to understand something that most marketing advice completely ignores:

Marketing is not a creative problem. It is not a tactical problem. It is not a budget problem. It is an evidence problem.

If you don't know your client with the forensic precision of a close protection officer — their behaviour, their vulnerabilities, their likely reactions, the exact moment they are most open to what you offer — you are guessing. And in marketing, as in close protection, the cost of guessing is always higher than the cost of preparation.

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THE FIELD.

Imagine a field of giraffes.

You are standing in the middle of that field, holding a perfectly cooked steak — seasoned exactly right, the kind of meal that any self-respecting carnivore would cross a car park for. You are waving it around. You are calling out. You are dropping the price, adding bonuses, running promotions, trying every version of the message you can think of.

The giraffes look at you with their large, mild eyes. Nobody buys.

This is the situation of almost every small business owner, consultant, and coach I have ever worked with. They have something genuinely valuable. They are showing up consistently. They are doing the work. And nobody is responding — not because the product is wrong, but because they are standing in the wrong field.

The giraffes are not your customers. They never were. Somewhere else — in a different field, at a different temperature, in a different state of mind — your lions are waiting. And when you find your lions and wave your steak in front of them, you will not need to discount, or push, or shout. They

will run towards you.

The entire purpose of this book is to help you stop feeding steaks to giraffes and find your field of lions.

But finding the right field is only the first step. Because even in a field of lions — even when you have found exactly the right audience — there is a crucial variable that determines whether they buy today, next month, or never.

That variable is temperature.

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This book is structured in four parts, which mirror the detective's process.

Part One: Open the Case File. Before we can solve the problem, we need to correctly identify it. Most marketing advice diagnoses the wrong crime. It assumes the problem is tactical — the wrong platform, the wrong message, the wrong frequency — when it is almost always strategic. Part One establishes why demographic targeting is an incomplete answer, why so many consultants end up marketing to the right person in the wrong moment, and how to begin reading the evidence your market is already leaving you.

Part Two: Read the Temperature. This is the heart of the book and the framework I have spent years developing and refining with clients. The Marketing by Temperature framework introduces four distinct pain states — Blaze, Smoulder, Ember, and Spark — each of which requires a completely different marketing approach. A client in acute, urgent pain buys differently from a client in chronic, tolerated pain. A client who does not yet know they have a problem needs to be reached in a completely different way from a client who can see the problem coming on the horizon. Part Two gives you the framework for identifying which temperature your ideal client is running at — and exactly what to do about it.

Part Three: Build the Case. With the temperature identified, we move to the practical work of defining your client with genuine specificity, understanding the full depth of the transformation you actually deliver, and building an offer that has a clear shape, a clear price, and a clear reason for the right client to say yes. This is where the detective's preparation translates into a business that attracts the right people consistently.

Part Four: Close the Case. The methodology comes together in a single, specific, buyable offer sentence — the thing you say when someone asks what you do, and they lean forward instead of nodding politely and changing the subject. Part Four teaches you how to write it, test it, and refine it until it works.

Each part builds on the last. And each part begins with a moment from my own story — because I want you to understand not just the framework but where it came from. The detective methodology I am going to teach you was not invented in a consulting room. It was forged in apartheid South Africa, sharpened in nine years of close protection work, and tested across twenty-five years of marketing practice in industries from insurance to logistics to sustainability.

It works. Not because I say so, but because the evidence shows it.

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One last thing before we begin.

My father was a computer programmer who believed, above everything else, in education. When I was six years old, he walked into a school that had never admitted a non-white pupil and refused to leave until the headmaster agreed to enrol me. Half the parents pulled their children out in protest when I arrived. My father told me to bring home straight A's — not for him, but so that nobody could use me to call the integration a failure.

I understood, even at six, that I was not just a child going to school. I was evidence. Evidence that the system's assumptions were wrong. Evidence that the rule had no foundation. Evidence that what people said was impossible was, in fact, entirely possible if you were willing to do the work.

I have been collecting that kind of evidence ever since.

The marketing isn't working. The books sit in boxes. The enquiries don't come. The clients who do arrive are not quite the right ones, and the ones you most want to work with seem to find someone else.

You are not the problem. The evidence is.

Let's read it together.

Erica Mackay
Oxford, 2026
The Marketing Detective Agency