

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

PEOPLECARDS CELEBRATE THE UNFAMOUS

What the heck is a PeopleCard? In short, it's a trading card with nobody on it. At least, nobody famous. PeopleCards make a point of featuring typical folks. No ball players, movie stars, cartoon characters, or boy bands here.

Strange as they sound, the cards are actually quite fascinating. More than one person we showed them to attempted to write them off with a quick "that's strange" type of comment, before settling down to read through the entire set. It would be hard to find a better testament to the entertaining diversity of humanity. And "diversity" is certainly a word that comes to mind while looking over People Card people.



LAURA: She pees with the bathroom door open

After seeing these cards, we had a few questions for Brant Herman, president of PeopleCards.

SPOOK: In a nutshell, why cards of regular people?

BRANT HERMAN: The idea came when we heard about a celebrity getting in a fender bender on the evening news. That kind of set me off a little bit. It was too mundane a detail to be broadcast on prime-time news. There are more important things in the world than Steve Martin getting in a fender bender. We felt that something had to be done to make people feel that you don't have to be like these people — to look like them, and buy what they buy — to be important.

You see celebrities on TV all the time selling things. Michael Jordan's there selling food that he would never eat; there's a lot of that kind of contradiction out there. Thirty-five percent of girls in fifth grade are on diets because of the ideal that's being pushed at them. But we didn't want to preach about celebrity issues. We knew you catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

At first we thought we could do a magazine about regular people and bring out interesting details about Joe the plumber and Mary the homemaker. But I'd been a trading card collector for a long time, and I knew that people thought of them as valuable. So we started tossing around the idea of mocking that medium. Why not put a baseball fan on a card instead of a baseball player? We thought people would go, "I know I shouldn't care about Joe Steelworker from Indiana, but he's on this card, so I do."

Think about the funniest thing that ever happened to you. It was probably something that happened when you were with friends or sitting around the dinner table. A funny movie is good, but it's never as funny as something happens when you're with your friends or family. We wanted to bring out in a unique way how important these regular people are. We wanted to switch from the limousine world to the Chrysler world. People are more than just regular people — we say around here, "regular is



DAVID: He's a parking cashier



not a personality, it's state of digestion." **SPOOK:** If someone has written a letter to the editor of their paper, had a walk on part on TV, or been on the news because of a felony

conviction, would that disqualify them to be on a people card?

HERMAN: Extras are allowed in unless they have a talking role. It's kind of arbitrary. We have a city council member who wants to be on a card. Us that too much? Not to the world. If you're on the news, that's okay — but not if you're on three nights in a row.

SPOOK: Looking at the cards, one person's motto was "F' it", someone listed his favorite place as "on top of my fiancée," and Roy Peters' picture is just plain scary. What age group are these aimed at?

HERMAN: Cards are generally a kids thing, but we say that these are pg-13. Content may not be appropriate for people without a sense of humor. We target people ages fifteen to forty-five who aren't going to collect trading cards because nothing has appealed to them before this.

There's that kind of evolution. We had to get to the point where people are trading Pamela Lee's porn video and obsessing about minute details of celebrity life before these could really be on the market. Pamela Lee gets hepatitis c and it's on the news, but thousands of other people get it and nobody makes a big deal out of it.

SPOOK: How did you find the people for series #1?

HERMAN: We started by printing applications and going to San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and walking around

cool and weird neighborhoods and handing them out. People had no idea what we were doing, so we went to the Internet and got people to sign up with a “sign up and you’ll get a free set” promotion. Some people say these look like white trash cards, but when you compare regular people to the media images you expect on trading cards, the whole world looks like white trash. Then again, since our first thing was from “free stuff” Websites, perhaps people who like free stuff were over-selected

SPOOK: How many applications did you have to choose from?

HERMAN: A couple thousand, with about 10,000 for series 2

SPOOK: How did you make your final selections?

HERMAN: We looked for something on every card that would make us laugh. A unique world view, residence in an interesting place. We got an entry from a sixty-year-old clown named Love; how could we



MELISSA: Her favorite animals are little monkeys

say no? Some pictures just jump out at you.

It’s not the kind of product that just catches your imagination when you first see them. You keep picking them up and finding something new about them. People start making up stories about their lives, speculating about them.

SPOOK: How did you think of letting people send e-mail to the people on the cards through your Web site?

HERMAN: We always wanted to make this a community. PeopleCards’ founders came from the dot-com boom and that brought knowledge that there was a new way to communicate. If you match a product up with an online component you add an added value. There’s no way that when you buy baseball cards that Mike Piazza is going to write back to you. The e-mails we’ve received range from invitations to “your motto is my motto but I never could phrase it as well” or “dude! I know you! I used to work for you.” We’ve had



GLENDA: She likes to stay up all night

people at trade shows say I know that girl! It turns out that two women in the first set dated the same guy

SPOOK: Are you still taking submissions for series #2?

HERMAN: No, but every submission will be held until they make it on a card. It may take some time, since there are a lot of people on the planet.

SPOOK: Have you had any submissions you wish you could use but can’t?

HERMAN: We had a British porn star lying in bed with some coworkers. We’ve had a few other risqué photos; handcuffs and the like. We get some pretty interesting ones. We got a guy from the Ukraine with his AK-47 and some camouflage on. People think they have to show how zany they are, but they don’t really have to. We get a lot of cross dressers, amateurs and professionals. We had one person who we asked their gender and he answered “fauxmale”

SPOOK: Ever have anyone famous try and sneak in?

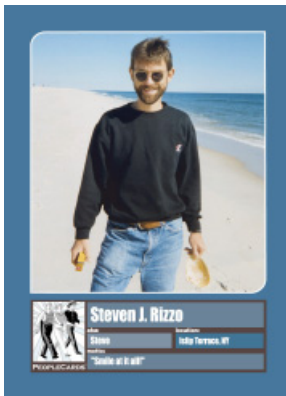
HERMAN: No, not really. We have had a few radio hosts, thinking that they’re famous.

SPOOK: Why don’t you allow submissions from children?

HERMAN: We did in first edition, but decided not to in later ones. It’s a wild world and the product isn’t harmed if we protect kids. We might do “flashback” cards, with before and after pictures. Some people send us high school pictures, so we want to do some of those.

SPOOK: You have a card for a married couple. Do you have any of unmarried couples?

HERMAN: Sure, we might do that. We’re really flexible about letting people send in what they want to. Our next set will have more groups, including groups of friends, or sports leagues, or anything. Another thing will be small bands, on a small label perhaps. Not on MTV or on many radio stations. A retiree square dance polka band



STEVEN: His favorite place is Fire Island

would be just as good as a small band from Texas

SPOOK: Your Website offers t-shirts. Are there coffee mugs, mouse pads, and action figures in the future?

HERMAN: We've got some ideas of how to present people to the public through the public and celebrating regular people as entertainment content. We've got a lot of different things we want to do.

SPOOK: Do you worry that by promoting these people, putting them on cards and shirts and such, that you'll put yourself in philosophical hot water by making celebrities out of them?

HERMAN: Once they're in, they're in. If Stanley Power Tools makes Bob Bukin a poster guy, we're all for that.

SPOOK: Have you considered doing custom sets for family reunions, class reunions, and such?

HERMAN: We do some custom work. We try to focus it on companies as an HR tool. Instead of releasing a catalog, they make



PAM: Her favorite food is fried chicken with biscuits and gravy

trading cards. We try to stay away from one-ups, like Billy's bar mitzvah.

SPOOK: What is the future for People Cards?

HERMAN: We want to broaden what we offer people, so PeopleCards comes to represent not just a product line but a philosophy. There should be more ways to experience this content.

SPOOK: To finish up, I'd like to ask you a few quick questions. Do you have a personal favorite card?

HERMAN: Theresa Ugenti. Her look is very serious, and they seem a very well-matched couple. They both have glasses, look kind of dorky but appealing. There are a lot of things about them that just appeals to me.

SPOOK: Is there one favorite — say a movie or author — that shows up a lot

HERMAN: Stephen king is huge — HUGE. The color blue. Nose picking and passing gas — people do it and people tell you about it, too. There wasn't anything so far as food that was a consistent winner, but then you get some extraordinary ones, like



BARBI: The possession she holds dearest is her breasts

someone had a fillet mignon method that was her favorite, or someone had ice cream with potato chips.

SPOOK: Do you get a lot of people complaining that Dr Pepper is misspelled on the back of Roy Peters' card.

HERMAN: Oh, is it?

SPOOK: Why do you advertise your Web site as .net not .com?

HERMAN: Originally we could only get .net, not .com. Also, to get theoretical on it, it's more of a network, a group of people sharing, instead of just a company saying here's what we are, take it. You don't just buy the product from us, you buy it, send us e-mail, things like that.

SPOOK: Seriously, how much would someone have to pay you to become a people card?

HERMAN: We did just get a pure-silver \$1,000,000 bill from a stunt-car driver in Reno Nevada. But we're a small company and could use the money. Let's say \$50,000.

SPOOK: Do your cards come with gum?

HERMAN: No gum. We're working on the gum, and our Web site has a promotion where we'll send you gum if you place an order. ~