

E-Mail Exchange: Genuine Real People Casting and Mark S. King

Date: Fri, December 26, 2025

To: Outreach@genuinerp.com

From: Mark S. King

Subject: Your search for people living with HIV

What is the nature of "the project" for which you are searching for people living with HIV? In order for people living with HIV to make an educated decision about whether to participate, further details should be provided in your initial outreach.

When dealing with people living with HIV, who have a long history of harm and exploitation -- most particularly due to the policies of the pharma industry and the monumental costs of life-sustaining medication -- it would be best for you to practice "genuine compassion and thoughtful preparation," as your website promises. Tell us the nature of the project first ("We are searching for people living with HIV for a pharmaceutical ad/anti-stigma campaign/public health message").

Instead, your social media ad mentions only how much money participants might earn. What a cynical and troubling approach to gain our involvement. While you will get responses, certainly, from people living with HIV who could desperately use the cash, the blind nature of your outreach does nothing to mitigate our actual needs. It only exploits them.

I look forward to your response with details about your project.

Mark

Mark S. King

MyFabulousDisease.com

2025 Inductee, LGBTQ Journalist Hall of Fame

Mark's collection of essays spanning four decades:

My Fabulous Disease: Chronicles of a Gay Survivor

Date: Tuesday, Dec 30, 2025

To: Mark S. King

From: Franchesca Agramonte, Genuine Real People

Hi Mark!

Happy holidays~

I appreciate you taking the time to express your concern. The goal of the project is to humanize people living with HIV and challenge persistent misconceptions. Participants are not asked to endorse a specific medication or share anything they are not fully comfortable sharing. The inclusion of payment information is for transparency, but I understand how it could be read that way. If you take a look at our website, you will get an idea of the space we hold for people to share their lived experiences in all types of campaigns. I invite you to review our work here: <https://genuinepeople.com/>

If this project is not of interest to you, we completely understand. I do want to assure you that exploitation is not our intention, nor our practice.

Wishing you a happy and healthy new year.

Franchesca Agramonte
GENUINE Team

Date: Dec 30, 2025
From: Mark S. King
TO: Francesca, Genuine Real People

Francesca,

Thanks for your reply, but I'm afraid it doesn't answer my question. What is this project for? A public health campaign? An ad (whether lifestyle or as part of a drug outreach) for a pharmaceutical client? I'm not asking you to identify your client. I am asking what the project is, not the (rather vague) goal of the project you mentioned. And this is why there is inherent distrust between people living with HIV and those who would use us as window dressing.

I reviewed your website before I emailed you, and your founder's article about using real people in pharma ads caught my eye. That's another reason why I am asking.

This project is of interest to me, but not as a participant, but as a 40-year advocate for people living with HIV and the ways we are used, misused, and devalued. I am not accusing you of this, but your inability to be specific does give me pause. I would like nothing more than to amplify your project, knowing of its actual purpose, rather than write about yet another attempt to use people living with HIV as placards for industry.

Mark

Date: Jan 7, 2026
To: Francesca, Genuine Real People

From: Mark S. King

Franchesca,

So, any further information you can provide? I see you are still advertising on social media, but without information on who the project is for.

Mark

Date: January 7, 2026

To: Mark S. King

From: Francesca, Genuine Real People

Hi Mark!

This job is for an HIV lifestyle shoot. At this stage in the casting, the client is not being shared. Anyone moving forward with the project will be aware of the brand name. If you are interested in being considered, feel free to submit asap!

Thanks!

Franchesca Agramonte

GENUINE Team

Date: January 7, 2026

To: Francesca, Genuine Real People

From: Mark S. King

Franchesca,

Let me give this one more try, and then I'll stop asking and write about what I know.

I'm not asking who your client is. I am asking the nature of your campaign/client. Is this a governmental public health campaign, for instance, or a privately funded anti-social stigma campaign, or is it a pharma client, whether branded or not? Now who, but what. This is a question you can answer without revealing your client, although it's curious to me that this would be a problem at all.

I previously outlined my reasons for asking this question. Please answer it, and thank you.

Mark

p.s. you might want to share this with the team as a way to understand how your outreach is being received:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/16nuN1KHYM/>

Date: January 8, 2026

To: Jill, Genuine Real People Founder

From: Mark S. King

Jill,

My name is Mark S. King, and for the 40 years I have been living with HIV I have written and spoken out extensively about life with HIV and the many challenges we face. Social stigma is a constant.

I'm forwarding you, below, my email exchange with Franchesca regarding your outreach about casting people living with HIV. I'm hoping you will respond with more details and a willingness to understand why your outreach is problematic, if not outright tone deaf.

This might actually be an opportunity for Genuine to learn from a misstep and work productively with networks of people living with HIV in the future. That's my hope, anyway.

Your outreach, first and foremost, does not identify the nature of the project, whether it is a public health campaign, a pharma drug ad, or a non-branded pharma lifestyle ad. It only mentions how much money people living with HIV might get. As I said to Franchesca, I find this approach to be cynical, reducing the risks we take by disclosing our HIV status to a monetary figure, without providing important context to the nature of the project. We have a complicated history with Big Pharma, exploitation is common, and the amount you offer is SAG scale at best and doesn't factor in, apparently, the daily risks that disclosure brings.

I have been unable to convince Franchesca to provide anything more than the campaign is an "HIV lifestyle shoot." Huh? For the betterment of public health, to fight HIV stigma, or to sell, branded or not, HIV medications? While I question why you cannot tell me the client, the general industry would be the least you can provide.

Yes, you will get interest from people living with HIV who are either strapped for cash or live a life free of the risks of disclosure. That doesn't mean the outreach isn't viewed as exploitation and done for bargain basement payment.

Instead, I suggest you work with the many networks of people living with HIV and learn more about the disclosure risks we take on a daily basis and why your casting process is problematic. By working with these networks, you would gain the kind of sensitivity and empathy your

website trumpets, and perhaps learn the meaning of allyship in the HIV arena. These networks include the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus, the Positive Women's Network, The SERO Project, The Reunion Project, and others. I would caution you against approaching any of them with your wallets open but rather, with your hearts and minds open to why your outreach thus far [has been met with suspicion and mistrust on social media.](#)

I will write about this experience for my award-winning site and for POZ Magazine in the next few days. I hope it has a happy ending. Feel free to reach out via email or I would be glad to schedule a zoom call.

Mark

Date: January 8, 2026

To: Mark S. King

From: Jennifer Kitchin, Genuine Real People Executive Producer

Hi Mark,

Thanks so much for your email.

GENUINE has been casting real people of all types for over 30 years. Most often we are looking for real people to participate in marketing initiatives. These initiatives may be branded or unbranded content, broadcast TV commercials or long form digital pieces. At the heart of our work is featuring real people and their real stories.

We are a trusted source in the industry and ensure privacy and security for all of the real people who are interested in our projects. Our outreach is directed at broad populations, rather than specific individuals, and allows people to "opt in" to communication by submitting via a secure online platform. GENUINE's privacy policy is readily available as is our contact information. For healthcare projects, we follow HIPAA guidelines and we ask that people agree to share their health information via a HIPAA acceptance clause on the online submission form before any health related questions are addressed.

As I mentioned, we specialize in finding people to share their real stories for various initiatives and, therefore, are often speaking with people about sensitive issues whether they be health related or emotionally driven.

We believe our work speaks for itself and the real people and stories featured on our website live up to our name and demonstrate the legitimacy of our company. We invite all potential candidates to browse our website, review our work/case studies and reach out with questions or concerns.

We definitely understand your concerns as it relates to the population of people living with HIV. We are transparent that this project involves real people sharing their real stories and only those comfortable with this visibility should participate.

We regret that you find the mention of payment to be troubling. GENUINE will not work on projects where participants are unpaid as we believe the selected candidates' time and participation deserve compensation. If people are uncomfortable with the rate offered, then they should not submit for the project.

You are correct that our initial online outreach is not specific as to the nature of the project. Social posts draw a lot of scrutiny, as is modeled here, and we want to be mindful of details that may trigger heated online conversations and, therefore, keep our forward facing outreach broad. We prefer to answer questions and address concerns on an individual basis. To that end, we thank you for reaching out to Franchesca with your concerns. We are currently in discussions with our client for approval on more detailed language to explain the nature of the project and will share that with you, once it is received.

We do hope that GENUINE's visibility, experience, work and availability quell any fears about the legitimacy of our company. We are proud to offer people the opportunity to share their story and their voice.

Best,

Jennifer Kitchin

Executive Producer

Date: January 9, 2026

To: Jennifer Kitchin, Genuine Real People

From: Mark S. King

Hello Jennifer,

I appreciate your response very much.

The Genuine business model, history, and legitimacy has never been a concern. I know people you have cast and they were treated respectfully. My objection is in regards to the recent social media outreach for people living with HIV, for reasons I have outlined. To that end, it is promising to hear that your client might be willing to revisit the language in your outreach to provide more context as to the nature of the project (for example, as now is fairly obvious, "...to participate in a pharmaceutical lifestyle campaign..."). Please let me know when and if that happens, or if it will not happen.

Likewise, the fact you pay participants is not my concern. Your outreach being largely devoted to the payment amount, though, without providing the nature of the enterprise, does strike people living with HIV as off-putting, as evidenced by [the social media reaction](#).

Unlike most other disease categories, HIV/AIDS is fraught with [political](#), [social](#), [criminal](#), and [economic](#) landmines for those of us living with HIV. Behind every smiling face in a lifestyle campaign, there are those who face [rejection](#) and violence due to intense social stigma, economic hardship from the cost of life-saving medications, and the ever-present [greed and legal machinations of the pharmaceutical industry](#). As I said earlier, you will very likely find people who have no such concerns. They are the lucky ones.

If by revealing your client to be a pharmaceutical, your outreach draws "scrutiny and heated discussion," as it already has, then so be it. That's the wagon to which you have hitched yourselves.

I look forward to an update on the language used in your outreach, and thank you for giving this thoughtful consideration.

Mark

Date: January 9, 2026
To: Mark S. King
From: Jennifer Kitchin, Genuine Real People

Dear Mark,

Thanks again for sharing your valuable feedback on GENUINE's social media recruiting post. Both our team and our client are grateful for the opportunity to hear directly from the HIV community. Based on your input, we will revise our posts to state that the project is part of a pharmaceutical health and wellness program. This should be completed by Monday. We appreciate your advocacy and the time you took to guide us.

Best,

Jennifer Kitchin

Date: January 9, 2026
To: Jennifer Kitchin, Genuine Real People
From: Mark S. King

This is the happy ending I was looking for and I am very grateful.

I'll wait for the revised language and then make it public.

Thanks again.

Mark

Date: January 12, 2026
To: Mark S. King
From: Jennifer Kitchin, Genuine Real People

Hello Mark,

We just wanted to let you know that our outreach materials have been updated across all channels. Here is a link to the revised Facebook posting:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DLAgpBZwW/>

Date: January 12, 2026
To: Jennifer Kitcin, Genuine Real People
From: Mark S. King

Excellent. Thank you for the added context and transparency.

Mark