

The Freelance Writer's Success Formula

Carmen Rane Hudson

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What to Pitch

+

Where to Pitch it

+

Who to Pitch it to

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Introduction

Does the thought of marketing your freelance writing business inspire anxiety attacks? Do you dream of grabbing certain gigs, only to pass them by because you're not sure what to say, or who to reach out to? Do you spend more time looking for template letters so you know what "real writers" send to potential clients than you do actually contacting clients?

If so, this book is for you.

By the time you're done reading this book you're going to know exactly what to do. The process of getting a gig will be boiled down to a simple, easy formula that anyone can follow. And you'll never, ever need to be afraid of looking foolish when you reach out to editors or potential clients, ever again.

But watch out! If you follow this formula correctly, you may just get more work than you know what to do with in the future...even if you don't have any experience right now.

(Okay, okay, so that's a great problem to have.) Follow the formula, stop spinning your wheels, and *start* making money.

I've been a freelance writer since 2009; I've written my share of pitch letters and made my share of cold calls. I'll be sharing some of these with you later on. You'll also hear from other seriously successful freelancers on how to make each element of the formula work, and work perfectly.

Who This Book is For

This book is designed primarily for beginners, people who are either just getting started in their freelance writing career or who are not getting the gigs they want. The idea is to give you a quick, easy way to find some great gigs and to do so on a regular basis. The goal is also to ensure that you don't feel any fear or hesitation when you get ready to contact potential clients, even if they don't have an existing freelancer's job post floating around out there somewhere.

The Formula

The formula is actually very simple.

Mindset + What + Where & Who + Volume = Success!

If you have the right ***mindset*** you will be able to relax and connect with potential clients in a way that speaks to them. You'll also know how to study your potential clients so you can figure out where the opportunity is.

Next, you have to know ***what*** to do in order to make your approach. You're about to learn several easy methods that you can use: traditional query letters, letters of introduction, cold calls, response letters, and social media outreach. To keep things easy, we're just going to call these methods your "pitches." You'll also learn what you should do in order to make your pitches as effective as possible.

You have to think about ***where*** your writing work is going to come from. Fortunately, as a freelancer you have a myriad of

options to choose from including businesses, agencies, and publications. We'll discuss all of those options. Eventually, you'll be able to focus your efforts on the options that work best for you, your interests, and your writing style.

Of course, if you don't reach the right person you will dramatically reduce your chances of getting the gig, so it's important to know **who** you're going to reach out to. You want to be able to "pick your person" with confidence. That person's title and role will change depending upon the type of gig you are trying to accomplish. Usually you will be speaking to an editor, marketing director, content director, creative director or business owner.

Finally, you need to connect with enough potential clients to generate enough gigs. That's where **volume** comes in. You will not land every gig. That's normal. Depending upon the types of gigs you are pursuing you may forge relationships with one out of every ten potential clients that you contact, or one out of every twenty-five, or even one out of every fifty.

While you don't want to spam potential clients with meaningless, untargeted marketing efforts just to create a lot of volume you *do* need to contact *enough* clients to keep your

editorial calendar full. One gig and one client won't cut it. Volume is different for everyone. However, this book includes a plan that you can use to get started.

Tip: Before you begin, make sure you have at least the basics of a writer's website in place. Most potential clients will not take you seriously without one! It doesn't even have to have clips or samples on it. Use it as an opportunity to showcase your copywriting skills.

Mindset

To get your head on straight you need to accept several key ideas.

1. There are no "secret handshakes."
2. It's perfectly okay to be yourself.
3. Whether or not you are "good enough" to do this should be the furthest thing from your mind.
4. You are not inconveniencing or bothering anyone.

Let's tackle them one at a time.

There are no secret handshakes.

Have you ever paused in the act of sending a query letter or letter of introduction because you're just not sure what *real* writers say? Did you frantically search about for some sort of template that might tell you, only to learn that such a template doesn't really exist?

If you're like many writers, you decided not to apply for the gig at that point. Perhaps you decided you didn't want to look stupid. Maybe you found yourself saying, *my idea/credentials aren't really that good yet. I'll come back to this when they are*. This kind of thinking keeps writers locked into a pattern of only contacting gigs that they find on job boards or bid sites. These sites represent the mere tip of the iceberg when it comes to locating all of the great clients who are out there.

Chances are you still haven't applied to that gig, or any other gig of similar quality. You're still trying to figure out what a "proper writer letter" looks like.

Here's the secret...**there's no such thing.**

You can actually say anything you want in a pitch. Anything.

There are certainly effective ways and ineffective ways to craft a pitch, but there are no *rules*. Sometimes a short five-line email can be as effective as a beautifully polished five-paragraph letter. Sometimes, it takes a phone call instead.

No matter which method of communication you choose, your job is pretty simple:

- Pique the contact person's interest.
- Tell them why you're the right person for the job.
- Keep it all about them and their needs.

If you do those three things you could write a poem in iambic pentameter and the sky is not going to fall. (You're probably better off avoiding iambic pentameter, but you *could* do it.)

If your contact person isn't interested, he or she will hang up or hit delete, then forget about the whole thing. Meanwhile, unless you were particularly strange, rude, desperate or creepy you will be welcome to try again.

Tip: Avoiding strange, rude, desperate or creepy pitches is easy. Don't offer to do any personal favors. Don't send anything pink or perfumed. Do not send food or flowers or any other gifts. Don't insult the company, publication, or contact person in any way. Don't make any threats. Don't tell your contact person that what they're about to read will be life-changing, make them a millionaire, or will be better than sex. Don't apologize profusely for your lack of experience. Don't tell them your life story...especially if your life story involves having multiple illnesses, brushes with the law, or money troubles. If you find any of that stuff creeping into your pitch because you are nervous, simply and ruthlessly cut it out and get back to the good stuff. Simple, right?

It's perfectly okay to be yourself.

In fact, it's pretty much preferable, unless you are rude, desperate, strange, or creepy (see above).

Speak and write the way you'd speak or write for the company or publication. Chances are you're drawn to certain publications or companies because you actually share an interest in what they're doing, or you have a similar writing

style. Why would you want to mask that very real asset by trying to be someone you're not?

Don't focus on being formal, or on formatting the letter just so. Instead, spend that energy making sure you're addressing your e-mail to the right person and that their name is spelled right. Spend the time making sure you understand the company or the publication so you can do a better job of hooking them from the very start.

Tip: Imagine the contact person as a friend, or as a relatively nice person you're being introduced to at a party. Do not imagine them as your high school principal, your fussy great-grandfather, any character played by Ben Stein ever, or someone who wants you to speak as though you're straight out of an 18th century comedy of manners.

Whether or not you are “good enough” to do this should be the furthest thing from your mind.

Dirty little secret: crappy writers get gigs all the time. Sometimes, they even get really good gigs.

Often, the writers who get gigs are *not* the most talented writers in the world. They are, quite simply, the writers who had the courage to pursue gigs and clients that made sense for them. No more, no less.

This is ***not*** to say that you should strive to be a crappy writer. You should ***of course*** do everything in your power to do great work. You should try to improve however you can, even later in your career, when you're making a solid income and getting more gigs than you can handle. Always be learning.

You should also, of course, use proper grammar, and try not to spell like a drunken fifth grader. You should read plenty, and get to know the rhythm of the language. But when you know for a fact that you're doing all you can do to be the best writer you can be, it's time to stop worrying about it.

This is not to say that anyone can do the work you're trying to do. Everyone cannot write, and the work you're going to be doing is extremely valuable as a result of this. But you wouldn't be attempting to build a career as a freelance writer if you didn't think you had at least a little bit of skill.

It's *also* true that evaluating any given piece of writing is a highly subjective exercise. Even at the pinnacle of your career there will be some people who think everything you put out is solid gold. Others will be all too eager to let you know they despise everything you do.

So you should spend exactly zero time wondering about whether or not you're good enough to get the gig. Instead, spend 100% of your time trying to figure out the **most effective way** to get the gigs you're currently targeting. If you get the gig and get paid for it, you were probably good enough for it. You obtain even more validation if they hire you again. In the meantime, you don't have any time to waste. Move on to finding the next client.

If you don't get the gig, figure out how you can improve. Then keep trying, either with that client or another. If you really *are* crappy, the practice you get while writing pitch letters will make you better over time. Sooner or later, you'll at least become competent. Saying that you're a competent writer—rather than a brilliant writer—isn't much of an ego-builder and it doesn't play well at family reunions, but it hardly matters. What matters is: you can build a career on being

competent. You cannot build a career wondering whether or not you're "good."

As it is, you're probably better than you think you are. Writers tend to be their own worst critics.

You should also be aware that few clients care much about your credentials. They never care about whether or not you have a top-notch education. They'll be indifferent if you don't have an MFA or similar degree, and they'll be indifferent if you do have one.

Believe it or not, often, they *barely* even care about past jobs or successful clips of past publications. They care about your understanding of their business or publication, and your ability to write...no more and no less. If you can demonstrate that you know how to write you will often land the gig.

You can demonstrate that in just a few short paragraphs when you're sending out a written pitch letter. Sometimes you'll demonstrate it with clips of previous work. Even if you don't have any clips, your writer's website will create an opportunity for you to show what you can do. Don't have clips? You can

simple decide to write up a few blog posts, web pages, and ads that will never be published. Use them as writing samples whenever you're asked for a portfolio.

You might as well put yourself out there...there's nothing stopping you!

Tip: You will never figure out if you're a talented writer, because doubts will always plague you. However, it's pretty easy to figure out whether or not you are a *paid* writer. Worry about honing your skills and filling your bank account. Lots of talented writers starve. If you fail to get your head right about this, you will constantly talk yourself out of reaching out to people who might hand you amazing gigs.

You are not inconveniencing or bothering *anyone* by reaching out to ask about a gig.

Freelance writer Jean Henshaw

(<http://jeanhenshawonline.com/>) gets 100% of her gigs from one of the scariest methods out there: cold calling. You might

expect to hear that she gets a lot of rejection, or deals with lots of people who grow angry at the interruption.

But you'd be wrong!

“Whenever I get someone on the phone,” Henshaw says, “they always say: *I can't believe you're calling, it's so weird, this is so great, how assertive of you, how brave of you, nobody does this anymore.*”

Cold calling is not like telemarketing. Businesses call businesses to do business. Companies want and need to hear from you. This is not the same as interrupting someone during dinner to offer them some sort of scam vacation package.

Writer Allen Taylor (<http://tayloredcontent.com/>) agrees. He does most of his work for businesses. He uses pitch letters, but the response is the same: “I can't think of a time when someone has said, 'No, *don't bother me!*' There are times when I don't get a response, but nobody's ever told me not to contact them again, or expressed any negative feelings about being contacted.”

Every business and publication in the world needs some form of written content in order to survive, especially in the Internet era in which “content is King.”

Most people in the world either don't have time to write, don't enjoy writing, or do not have what it takes to write effectively. Thus, many of the individuals you will be contacting *desperately need someone right now*. When you contact them and tell them exactly why you are the right person for the job you are actually doing them a service. You're making their life a lot easier. They don't have to go looking, and they don't have to sort through a whole bunch of options.

Getting your head right about this will be a direct help to you when you try to pitch. People will sense your tentativeness and lack of confidence if you are coming to them with the idea that you are bothering them in some way. Instead, you want to come across as confident and in control...easy to do when you know that most people will actually welcome your pitch!

Tip: If you get the “**Where & Who**” part of the equation correct, your contact person may even be happy to hear from you!

What to Do

It's time to craft some hard-hitting, effective pitches that will help you get the gig!

Types of Pitches

Generally, your pitches will take one of four forms:

- Query Letters
- Letters of Introduction
- Cold Calls
- Response Letters

Occasionally, you might also write something “on spec,” that is, you’re going to write the entire piece without any expectation that you’re going to get paid, and you’re going to submit that piece. Generally, this is only done with personal essays, memoirs, fiction, poetry, and travel pieces. You’re going to pitch virtually everything else.

A query letter is a letter about a specific project idea. Usually you'll be sending them to editors at magazines. You'll have a specific story that you want to tell. You will be hoping the editor will give you the go-ahead to write the project. If the editor accepts your query, he or she will usually hand you an assignment. You'll get a deadline, and a promised payment amount.

A letter of introduction introduces you and your qualifications to an organization you want to write for. You will typically use this format with businesses. You may also use them with trade publications or organizational publications that don't really accept query letters.

A cold call is just what it sounds like. You're going to pick up the phone and call someone who can give you a gig.

A response letter will be used whenever you are responding to a specific job post, RFP, or classified ad. In this case, you know a need exists...now all you have to do is convince the contact person that you're the perfect person to fill that need.

Tip: Some people have a lot of luck combining these approaches. Freelance writer Vanessa Rombaut (<http://vanessarombaut.pressfolios.com/>) says, “I tend to write a bit of a hybrid letter...a letter of introduction with three very short ideas for topics they might be interested in publishing.” The approach here is to get your contact person interested in what you can do on an ongoing basis, rather than getting too hyperfocused on a specific idea or topic.

Elements of an Effective Pitch Letter

Remember, when you're pitching you can say just about anything you want, just about any way you want. However, any effective pitch is going to contain three important elements.

The **opening** gets your reader's attention. If you're pitching a specific story to a specific publication you might even use the very same opening that you'll be using in the article you are hoping to write. You can also use relevant statistics or even quotes that you've gathered from sources in order to add the bit of zing and interest that will help hook an editor (and

show, in the process, that you have what it takes to hook a reader).

If you're trying to get the attention of a marketing or communications director at a major corporation your opening might be as simple as saying, "I'm a freelance writer." Taylor recommends this approach, saying, "Being indirect, and hinting that you want them to hire you, might just send the wrong signal. It says that you're not confident, especially if you're contacting them via e-mail."

The **body** of your pitch tells your point of contact two things:

- You understand their business, organization, or publication. This will demand some research on your part, unless you are already a reader of the publication, a member of the organization, or a loyal customer. If so, you can say so. Just make sure you make reference to a recent article, social media post, or event so that the reader knows you're not just making this connection up.
- What you believe you can accomplish for them.

Whether this is writing an article or simply saying, "I

can write any type of marketing materials you might need,” it’s important to clarify what you want to do for them.

Demonstrating that you “get it” is incredibly important whether you’re pitching a business or a publication.

In fact, Taylor says that some demonstration of this understanding is probably the one thing that most business owners do not get out of most freelancers. “They want to work with someone who understands their customer and their business model. And you can’t assume you know. Convey to them that you understand their *business*, not just their *industry*. Two companies can have two vastly different business models within the same niche. If you approach these companies with the same generic pitch you’re going to miss both of them.”

When you’re pitching a publication it’s also important to keep in mind that most publications do have guidelines. You can usually find them on the publication’s website under “writer’s guidelines,” “submission guidelines,” or even a page called “write for us.”

“Find their guidelines and make sure you follow them to a tee,” Rombaut cautions. “If you can’t get through that, they’re not even going to answer you.”

This is not to say that you can never reuse any part of a pitch letter. Sometimes your “about me” section will be more or less boilerplate, unless you’ve built a huge resume that allows you to pick and choose which clips or elements of experience you’ll be focusing on.

However, the opening of your letter and the body of your letter offer you a way to shine, and these should be tailored to a tee. These are the areas where you’ll add all of the customization, using your writing skills to help your reader understand that you really “get” their publication or organization.

The **close** talks about you and your qualifications, and suggests a next step.

You don’t have to spend a mountain of time on talking about your qualifications. You’re not writing a resume so much as you’re offering some brief selling points, which tell your

contact person why you'd be a great fit for their needs. Your qualifications could include:

- Industry experience, in any capacity (not just writing).
- A list of places where you have been published.
- Something you do which might make their lives easier, such as being willing or able to take on tight deadlines.

Do not add any irrelevant information in the close. You could talk yourself right out of a gig! Irrelevant information includes:

- How long you've been writing, even if you only started this morning.
- Your marital, familial, or employment status.
- The state of your health.
- Whether or not you think your pitch is good, great, terrible, or needs work. Let it stand on its own merits.
- Any other detail about your personal life.

Remember, irrelevant information tends to make you look rude, creepy, or desperate (see above).

Tip: You do not have to have a great deal of experience or a mountain of clips to make a case for why you might be the best fit for an assignment. In fact, some letters don't even address the author at all, choosing instead to focus on the research that the writer has done on a particular topic. For example, Rombaut got herself a gig writing about RVs. "I didn't know anything about them, but I did my research. Showing you can write is the most important thing!"

The "next step" might vary. You could:

- Ask for the assignment.
- Ask them to take a look at your website or portfolio.
- Ask them to keep you in mind for future assignments.
- Ask for permission to send some clips.

In copywriting, the "next step" is known as a ***call to action***. Make sure you tell your contact exactly what you'd like them to do next. Reading is a passive activity. You need your contact to get into "active" mode so he or she can hire you!

Tip: You can mix these elements up. If your background in an industry is a selling point for a publication, then feel free to put it right at the front of your letter.

Sample Pitch Letters

The following letters are not templates! They are simply examples of how all of these elements might look when they've been brought together.

Sample Pitch Letter A – Query Letter to a Magazine

The following letter won me a full-length feature article with *Cat Fancy* magazine. You'll notice I didn't have any credentials to speak of at the time, but it didn't matter. Focusing on the publication, the readers, and the article idea were enough.

Dear Ms. Logan:

Every holiday season, cat owners struggle to keep their feline friends from tangling with an enticing newcomer: the family Christmas tree. In response, pet owners have come up with solutions that range from the practical to the whacky.

I am proposing a 500 to 800-word piece for your Christmas 2013 issue which would cover 5 or 6 of these solutions, from

stringing decorated garlands all over the house for a tree-like effect that is well out of kitty's reach to hanging trees upside down. I would interview other cat owners to gather additional examples.

I have been a professional ghostwriter since 2009. Please let me know if you would like to move forward with this article.

Sample Pitch Letter B – Letter of Introduction to a Digital Marketing Agency

In this case, I cold called the agency first to get the name and contact information of the person I needed to send an email to. You'll notice I also stressed the industry experience that I'd developed with digital marketing agencies over the years, as well as with publications that catered to this industry. This little letter resulted in over \$15,000 worth of work over the course of one year!

Hi Mr. York:

I'm a freelance content writer who specializes in working with SEO and local SEO firms like yours. I spoke to Mark today and he said you were always looking for great content writers.

I feel I'm uniquely suited to create the content that will really help your clients. I've been published by The Search Engine

Journal and Business 2 Community. I've been hired by other top notch SEO companies, like Whitespark and Phil Rozek's Local Visibility System. I've worked with Linda Buget to develop content for her Catalyst Local Search forum.

Let me know if and how I can help. I look forward to serving both you and your clients.

P.S.: I do specialize in rush jobs, as well. Give me a call if someone's dropped the ball recently...I'll help you "wow" your clients by getting the copy delivered right on time.

Sample Pitch Letter C – Response Letter to an Online Publication

In this letter, I was able to land the gig by focusing heavily on my existing industry experience. The website in question was looking for people to write reviews for various security products and services. You might notice that while parts of the letter were basically boilerplate, the bulk of the letter was individually tailored to the prospective client. This one got me a \$300 blog post assignment.

Dear Jen:

I saw your ad and, after visiting your website, I thought I should reach out to you right away. I'm a rare sort of

writer...someone who spent 2 years selling security products to homeowners and business owners.

I know the industry. I know how to tell the difference between a good security product and a mediocre one. I've blogged for other security companies. I actually have a real love for the industry...it keeps people safe, and few other industries can say that.

Now, on to my writing credentials.

I've been published by The Search Engine Journal and Business 2 Community. I've been hired by top notch SEO companies, like Whitespark and Phil Rozek's Local Visibility System. I've worked with Linda Buget to develop content for her Catalyst Local Search forum. I've even written a feature for Cat Fancy Magazine (December 2014), and while that doesn't say much about my ability to write web copy, I do hope it still speaks to the overall quality of my work.

In short, I've demonstrated to companies and publications that I'm reliable, trustworthy, and that I deliver the goods.

Please get in touch with me if you think I'd be a great fit for your needs. I'd love to start writing for you soon!

Cold Calling

Cold calling? Picking up the phone and talking to perfect strangers to try to get gigs? It may sound terrifying, but for Henshaw it's the best and only way to get business.

"I don't blog. I don't tweet. I don't do Facebook. In terms of the amount of time it takes to get a client the ROI of cold calling is phenomenal. In ten calls I can land two clients. Why? Because I already have a good idea that the people I'm calling need a writer before I pick up the phone. More importantly, *they* know they need a writer. So it's not selling. It's just presenting my services."

If you've already adopted the mindset that you are not inconveniencing or bothering anyone (see above), then cold calling is easy. Figure out who you're going to speak to or ask for, know what you're going to say, and dial.

Henshaw says she rarely gets the person on the phone, but that voicemail is equally productive. She uses it to tell people

that she'll be sending them some information, either via an e-mail address that she's dug up for that individual, or even via their website's "Contact Us" form. Often, they email her back with gigs. Thus, she combines cold calling with warm pitch letters to get results.

When she does get a live person on the line, she simply sits back, relaxes, and answers their questions. Sometimes, after describing her experience and her rates, she's managed to get hired on the spot.

If the more casual approach does not work for you or if you feel uncomfortable asking for a gig on the spot, you can simply ask for permission to send an e-mail with more information. Gathering e-mails over the phone and gathering permission to send them is not nearly as intimidating as selling, and you'll have a much higher success rate. After all, it takes very little commitment to give someone permission to send an e-mail.

Cold calling can turn your cold pitch into a warm lead that will get you that gig. You can always write a little script for yourself before you begin (you'll find a sample script below).

Every cold call should give the following information:

- Your name.
- A way to get in touch with you.
- What you do (you're a freelance writer).
- What sets you apart.
- A close.

Since the first three are fairly self-explanatory, let's tackle the fourth one. You need to be able to tell people what makes you special in just a sentence or two. Henshaw draws on her former career, saying simply, "I'm a former journalist, so I understand deadlines."

"I go right to the benefit," she says. "It tells them: this is business for me. I'm trying to feed my family. A lot of writers simply disappear—I hear that many companies have to go through seven writers just to get one good one. I want to let them know, right away, that I'm not going anywhere."

You may not be a former journalist like Henshaw, but there is still something that makes you unique as a freelance writer. It could be:

- Your industry experience.
- Your quick wit and penchant for humor (if appropriate to the company).
- Your ability to work faster than most.
- The length of time you've been in business.
- Places you've been published.
- Specialties (medical writing, financial writing, etc).
- Anything else you can think of which will pique the interest of the person on the other end of the line.

Obviously, you should not promise anything that you will not or cannot deliver. If you do, you won't keep the client for long!

Tip: When it comes to cold calling, keep in mind that *how* you speak can be as important as what you say. If you speak in a meek, soft, apologetic voice you will convey that you are not confident in what you have to offer. If you speak too slowly you might bore the listener into hanging up on you (or run out of time on the voicemail). Speak as though you were a radio DJ, news anchor, or an actor delivering lines. You want to be warm, genuine, confident, and fast.

How about the close?

When cold calling, your primary goal is to move the process forward. If you've gotten a live person on the phone and the conversation has gone particularly well you might ask, "Is there anything I could help you with right now?"

If you're not comfortable with that or have gotten voicemail, it is, again, perfectly valid to ask for permission to send some clips or to ask for an e-mail address where you can send more information.

Sometimes you'll get gigs right away. Sometimes you'll hear back from one of these individuals months after making the call. Sometimes they'll tell a friend of a friend about the call, and you'll get a gig that way.

Either way, you will get a lot done in exchange for devoting just an hour or two of your time to cold calling each week. And if you've lost a major client, have huge gaps in your editorial calendar or simply don't have any work at all, cold calling is one of the fastest ways to start putting money in your pocket.

Finally, do not get discouraged. “If they’re not convinced, don’t worry about it,” Henshaw says. “Bless them, hang up the phone, and move on to the next call.” Cold calling is very much a numbers game. If you’ve identified a client type which works well for you, it doesn’t even require you to do a lot of extensive research on the companies you’ll be calling before you get started. Often, it’s enough to get the name of someone who might hire you, and a phone number. Gather your list before you begin, set yourself a quota for the day, and dial until you hit the quota. It’s that simple.

Sample Cold Calling Script

This simple script is short and to the point. Keep in mind that you should not feel bound to the script. If the person on the other end of the line starts asking you about your rates and availability, just answer the questions like a human being. They might be desperate for help right now, and you don’t want to talk yourself out of the sale if they’re ready to offer you a gig on a platter just because you were bold enough to give them a call!

"Hi, my name is _____. I'm a freelance writer who specializes in _____. Do you happen to hire freelancers?"

If they say yes...

"Great! I don't want to take up too much of your time. I'd just like to get your e-mail address so I can send you some information about my services, if that's okay."

If they say no...

"No problem...can you please transfer me to that person's voicemail?"

Tip: If you don't specialize in anything you can substitute any selling point you want. The script could read, "I'm a freelance writer who has been in business for fifteen years," or, as Henshaw says on her calls, "I'm a former journalist, so I understand deadlines." Again, make sure your selling point is true and accurate...don't say you're a former journalist if you're not one!

Networking

Networking is a little like cold calling in that it is an excellent way to get “warm leads” for your freelance writing services.

It's also easier than you think it is.

It can be as simple as going to a Chamber of Commerce lecture and introducing yourself as a freelance writer when everyone goes around the room. More often than not, someone will pull you aside to talk to you after the event, asking about the kinds of work that you do and what your rates might be.

Networking is not limited to events, however. As Rombaut says, “Get some business cards made up. Tell absolutely everyone that you're a writer.”

It's okay to be nervous.

“Everyone is as nervous as you are,” Rombaut says. “Smile. Have a good time. Relax. Don’t be a salesperson. Let what you do come up naturally in conversation. People are naturally interested in writers and what you do, so just have fun. Even if you don’t make any business connections, you’ll certainly make friends.”

As with cold calling, you can naturally answer someone’s questions if they have them. You can also get their business card and ask if you can send an e-mail with more information. However, networking is valuable even if you never get the chance to do this. Word gets around. Befriending people—genuinely befriending them—at events means that you’ll be the first person they think of when one of their own connections is in need of a writer. Soon, people might start calling you, letting you know that they heard about you from a friend of a friend. If you meet some interesting new friends, try to stay in touch with them. You can do this online, or you can periodically meet for coffee and lunch.

Networking offline also gives you the opportunity to get new story ideas. This is invaluable if you want to focus on writing for business magazines, or for trades. You’re simply never

going to find out what's going on if you're not willing to get out of your office to learn what's on people's minds.

Tip: If networking doesn't seem to be working for you, change up your venue. If you want to specialize in writing for a particular industry, try out some trade shows. Find networking events where decision makers will be present. Try your local Rotary Club, or find some associations. Even your high school reunion might prove to be promising.

Social Pitching

Response letters are some of the easiest letters to write, if only because they're less nerve-wracking. It's easier to get into the mindset that you aren't bothering anyone when you know the person at the other end of your overture has already identified a need.

While you *can* find good gigs on traditional job boards, Craigslist, and bid sites, they aren't always the best gigs. They also come with a lot of heavy competition. Often, you'll find yourself in a race to offer the lowest possible rates as you struggle to compete with hundreds of other writers all writing the same sorts of letters. Of course, watching highly curated gig listings like the ones sent out by Freedom With Writing will give you an opportunity to find gigs from some outstanding sources as well.

But let's assume you already know all about job listings and job boards, since most freelancers start there to begin with. Instead, let's take a look at how you can use social media to

score jobs that fewer people are seeing. Social media sites offer a way to get wind of gigs that everyone else isn't always looking at. It also offers you access to decision makers.

Fiona Tapp (<http://www.fionatapp.com/>) is primarily a parenting writer. She's also extremely adept at using Facebook and Twitter, both to locate gigs, and to score them.

She describes this as a four-step process: identifying the gig, figuring out who to talk to, researching the company or publication's social media accounts, and then writing a response letter to score the gig.

"I'm on quite a few Facebook groups. Some are local to my city, and some are more general. I'm also on a couple of Mummy boards. People will often post jobs on these boards. On Twitter, I've been following threads for the freelance writing gigs. I just regularly go to #freelancegigs or #writingjobs. I don't have to look on job boards anymore. Often these are better gigs; sometimes companies will look for writers on social media before they go out into the big world. These are usually corporate jobs, and often you can turn them into lasting, repeat clients."

Tapp does mention this is a numbers game. “It’s a lot of trolling and pitching, but your response percentage will be better than with cold pitching. I get almost all of my work this way.”

Tapp lets her social research give her the insight she needs to personalize her response letters. “Before I apply for any job I like their page, follow them on Twitter, and do a little digging. I read a few posts—not from that day or even that week. I dig a little deeper. It’s a little like being a detective. Often, I find they’ve made some sort of great post that I can talk about in my letter. I always say something complimentary about things they’ve posted or things we have in common. I find this helps me create a relationship with them right off the bat. Before I go into what I can do for them I’m always careful to create that connection.”

One of the best parts about using social media is that it can put you directly in touch with decision makers. The people who quickly fire off a 140-character request for a writer might well be the very people you need to speak to, rather than a gatekeeper. This makes it easier for you to get hired faster.

Sometimes you don't even have to go to e-mail. On Facebook, you have the space to fire off a response letter via a direct message. Even on Twitter, you can respond with a quick direct message to let them know you've sent over an e-mail in regards to their job post, so they can be looking for it. Using these multiple points of connection can help you strengthen your position at the top of the contact person's mind.

LinkedIn offers another fantastic place to find gigs, even though most of the jobs LinkedIn lists are for in-house staff writing positions. "I do like how you can see how many people have applied for those," notes Tapp.

Tip: Tapp offers these final words of wisdom: "Make sure your profile is really stellar. You want it to present your professional best." That means you want a professional photograph. You also want to make it clear that you're a freelance writer. Link your profiles to your freelance writer's website. Make it easy for potential clients to see who you are and what you do at a glance. If you make them guess, they might just move on.

Choosing a Method

The method you choose to make your pitch will depend on the type of organization you are attempting to contact. A consumer magazine will always want a query letter. They will not respond to anything else.

A trade magazine or organizational publication will either want a letter of introduction, or a mix between a letter of introduction and a query letter.

Businesses and agencies respond well to cold calls and letters of introduction. Sometimes you can “query” them by noting what might be missing from their marketing mix, but generally you'll want to let them offer you assignments based upon their own assessment of their needs.

Obviously, if you're responding to a social media post or a job opening that you've spotted somewhere online then you're going to use a response letter.

Where to Do It and Who to Talk To

There are an endless array of potential clients to write for. Your contact person will differ depending on the type of organization that you choose, which is why the “where and who” parts of the formula are lumped together.

Don't get overwhelmed! You might be thinking, “Where do I even start?” Choosing where you will begin looking for gigs does not have to be hard at all. Think about:

- All of your past work experience. You can draw upon job titles and industry experience to create a connection. (Even if you got fired.)
- Your hobbies and other interests. If you love crafts then you'll probably be great at writing about crafts, too.
- Organizations in your local area.
- Organizations that you're tied to through your family, friends, or business network.

Eventually you'll figure out where you're going to make most of your money. When you do, you might even consider sticking to that niche exclusively. "Build up your reputation. Once you pick a niche, really go for it," advises Rombaut. "Because that's where you're going to get the most money: being an expert in the field."

When you're getting started, however, you should try to contact as many different types of organizations as possible. Why? Because their response times will differ wildly. Small businesses and digital agencies will move very quickly, whereas magazines may take months or even years to get back to you. You need a good mix of gigs to keep your cash flow steady.

Businesses and Other Organizations

Step out onto any busy street in your neighborhood and you'll see dozens of businesses, hospitals, non-profits and other organizations. Most of those people need some form of writing

work done at some point or another. Now, all you have to do is figure out who to contact, and how to approach them.

“All businesses have different needs and different budgets,” notes Taylor. “There are different ways to approach small businesses versus mid-size companies or mega-corporations. They have different needs and different budgets.”

Small businesses want to see that you understand their audience. “They tend to have defined, narrow niches. That might be geographic or otherwise, but the niche is very specific. You want to zero in on that. Highlight the benefits to their audience.”

When approaching a small business, you will typically be speaking directly to the **owner**. This can be advantageous, because the owner has the power to make a decision. It can also be frustrating. Many small entrepreneurs may need some education about how you can help their business succeed. They may even be attempting to do all of their writing work themselves, with limited results. You need to be able to show them what you can bring to the table and how it will help them increase their leads and sales.

Many small business projects will be “one off” projects. You might, for example, write a few pages of web copy, and then be done. Small business owners are also good bets for recurring blog post work as well as social media management work.

If the business has more than fifty employees, you'll typically be reaching out to a **Marketing Director**. There may even be different marketing directors in an organization if it is a very large company with multiple products, departments, and channels. Once you get your “in” with a large business you can typically count on a lot of good, solid recurring work as long as you make them happy. They'll also have plenty of materials for you to look at, such as marketing personas which will help you understand their typical customers. Work may run the gamut: you could be asked to produce anything from web copy to blog posts, white papers, case studies, sales letters, and more.

Many companies even produce their own magazines. If you are hoping to write for one of those you'll need to contact that magazine's editor instead of the Marketing Director.

Obviously, if you're responding to a company's job ad on social media or elsewhere then you'll reply to the contact

person mentioned on the ad, or to the person who posted the request in the first place.

Agencies and PR Firms

Your experience will differ with these firms depending upon whether you're dealing with traditional advertising firms or digital marketing/SEO firms. The lines are getting increasingly blurred between the two types of businesses.

In traditional ad agencies and PR firms you'll typically reach out to the **Creative Director**. Often, they want to know you've had some kind of "agency experience," though not always. (Don't worry, as soon as you work for even a single agency you will have the agency experience they're looking for). Traditional ad agencies won't talk about your portfolio, either. They'll talk, instead, about your "book." The two terms are interchangeable.

If you want more success with traditional firms you'll want to target smaller agencies first. They are less likely to have in-house writers, or their in-house writing staff will often be too small to handle the volume of work that they need.

SEO and digital marketing firms are much easier to break into, and they respond very, very well to cold calling. They're also a lot more laid back. You can ask for the Creative Director. You can also ask for the **Content Director** or **Director of Marketing** in larger firms. In smaller firms, you can ask for "the person who handles the marketing." Sometimes, you'll even get the owner himself on the phone...many SEO and digital marketing firms have just one to three employees who are often far more focused on selling their services and tinkering with the technical side of the profession than on handling the content.

SEO and digital marketing firms are *extremely hungry* for content. Once these firms tried to get around the need by paying extremely low rates for extremely terrible keyword-focused content, but times have changed. The Panda update has required all of these firms to re-evaluate the types of content that they buy.

Jean Henshaw works for these types of firms exclusively. "As a former journalist, it's interesting to see that what's old is new again. Right now, digital marketing firms are extremely hungry for really good long-form content. And they want

writers who really know their stuff. You know they have a need before you even pick up the phone to contact them.”

SEO firms are often some of the fastest firms to give out assignments. They're also some of the fastest ones to pay. Just watch their reputations...there are still some very shady players out there who you don't want to find yourself working for.

Consumer Magazines

There are literally thousands of consumer magazines out there, though many of them operate on a state and local level rather than on a national level. You can find magazines on just about any topic you can think of.

Magazines tend to pay incredibly well. Many also move at a snail's pace. The key to scoring this kind of work is to make sure the query is incredibly tailored to the magazine's readership (see “**Doing Your Homework**” below).

You will always be contacting an **editor**, but you'll usually have to do a little digging to find the right one. Often, it will

either be a **Managing Editor** or a **Departmental Editor**, if you are focusing on a specific section of the magazine. Note that if the magazine offers an online version there may be different editors for the online content.

You will never cold call a magazine, nor would you send a letter of introduction.

You'll want to focus on the smaller, more local magazines first. The biggest magazines want to see a good backlog of clips, and breaking in is hard for beginners. Smaller magazines also publish more frequently, which means they need more content. This creates far more opportunities for you to show them what you can do.

Trade/Organizational Magazines

If you have some sort of industry connection these can be some of the easiest magazines to break into. Often, the right contact person (an **Editor**, again) is right on the trade publication's website.

These publications are highly specialized. For example, Rombaut writes for *The International Travel and Health Insurance Journal*! You can almost always find a trade magazine for just about any field you've ever worked in or gained experience in.

Studying the publication and adding a few story ideas to your letter of introduction can be helpful. Sometimes you can cold call trade publications to see if they need any help. As with consumer magazines the amount of time it takes a trade publication to respond may be a bit longer than you'd get from other types of clients.

Doing Your Homework

One of the most challenging parts of contacting any publication or organization is figuring out how to research them enough to customize your pitch without spending all of your time doing research. After all, if you do *too* much research you'll only end up spinning your wheels. You'll never achieve the kind of volume that you need to achieve in order to fill up your editorial calendar.

You'll also frustrate yourself. Researching a potential client for four hours is a non-starter when those individuals may not even respond.

You need some quick, easy methods for figuring out what that company or publication needs, and enough about how they work to impress them with your ability to understand how they work.

First, let's talk about researching businesses and other organizations.

Allen Taylor starts with the company's website. "I try to figure out who their web copy is addressing. For example, I do a fair amount of writing in the financial technology niche. Every company is different, but if I do real estate crowdfunding I know the audience is investors, and so that's the persona. Every investor might have a different approach and philosophy, but an investor could be male, female, middle-aged, young, a millennial, or a baby boomer. I'm not necessarily narrowing my approach that way, but I am looking at the difference between someone who is interested in

investing long-term versus more of a speculative investor. Once I figure it out I can write a very good pitch.”

Taylor also looks at the types of content the company is putting out, as well as the frequency of their content.

“Sometimes I have to put in a call to the marketing director to see if I can gather the information by phone and get a feel for their needs.”

He even advocates reading forums about the company and doing some Google searches about recent news stories, just to see if you can gain a little bit more of an understanding of who they are and what they are doing.

When researching agencies and PR firms it's not a bad idea to visit their client page, to see if there is some unifying theme in the client base that they serve. If you've got a lot of experience either in that industry or in writing for that industry you might get an “in” you wouldn't otherwise have. Saying, “I notice you work with a lot of health care providers and I've been writing for several local area hospitals and doctor's offices for over three years,” is certainly a stronger opening to

a letter of introduction than, “I’m a freelancer, I’m available, and I’m hoping you’ll hire me!”

SEO and digital marketing firms often are far less specialized (though not always) than their traditional counterparts.

Many times these firms just want to know that you can write for a wide variety of industries, and what your process might be for producing good content no matter the subject matter. When you work with a digital marketing firm you could be writing about woodshop bits on Monday, root canals on Tuesday, gutter guards on Wednesday and RFID chips on Thursday. Being curious about all manner of things and, moreover, being able to quickly grasp their client’s needs and business models are more important to them than your ability to understand their specific agency. SEO firms are very friendly for those writers who want to play a high-volume numbers game in their search for gigs.

Rombaut has a method that she uses both for trade magazines and for consumer magazines.

“I read at least three back issues and try to find a subject they haven't really covered. I also look at the writing style. Is it formal, or is it loose and conversational? I look at the focus of the publication. For example, there's a magazine where I live here in Belgium that covers train lines. They focus almost exclusively on Paris, even though the magazine is published by a European train company. I wouldn't pitch them a story about a different city. I'd try to make it fit in with Paris. I'm also looking to see if they've done repeats of the topics I'm thinking of, and to see if I know anything about that subject. I then kind of brainstorm everything I know about the subject to see if I can put some sort of interesting angle on it.”

You can get through three back issues of most magazines within about an hour, and you can usually find them by visiting your local library, or by writing the publication and asking for the back issues. Sometimes there is a small charge to purchase back issues, which is why it can be cost-effective to focus on the things you know first.

Volume: How Much is Enough?

Now that you know what to do and where to do it you simply need to ensure you're reaching out to enough people to fill up your editorial calendar and bring in the work. But how much is enough?

In truth, everyone's answer will be different. Much will depend on:

- The types of places you are looking for work.
- How effective you are at pitching.
- How much work you get from any one client.
- Your personal speed and effectiveness at getting the work.
- The number of repeat clients that you get.

When you're just getting started you can use the following plan to help you fill up your calendar quickly:

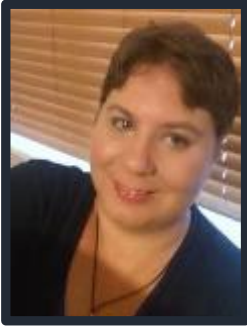
- Try to make twenty-five cold calls a day. That means you'll make 125 a week, or 500 in a month. Even if you're pretty bad at cold calling you will almost certainly land anywhere from five to twenty-five clients by doing this. It's certainly a lot more effective than waiting around for work to come to you!
- Try to send out at least fifteen cold letters a week. These could be query letters or letters of introduction. That means you'll get sixty letters out in your first month. The odds of landing a client or two are pretty good.
- Spend an hour or two looking at existing job openings and sending response letters. You don't want to spend all of your time here, but it's not a bad place to start. If you like the idea of using social media as your primary marketing method then you could spend an hour each day joining groups, responding on those groups, and following up on job leads.

As your editorial calendar fills up you may reduce these efforts because you'll be spending your time on output. Just make sure you don't abandon them altogether. You never know when clients will leave you, slow down their orders or run out of work for you to do. You don't want to find yourself in a panic or a financial bind when this happens.

The good news is you always have the option to send out more pitches. The more you send, the more clients you'll get...it's that simple. If you're having a slow day, week, or month there's no need to stare forlornly at your inbox, hoping some work will magically appear. You can always stay productive by getting out there and finding more work!

Your efforts will be rewarded if you're making the effort to pitch effectively. You can't just send out hundreds of generic pitches or make tons of fruitless calls and expect results, but focusing your efforts and targeting the companies, organizations, and publications that will be a good fit for you is a great way to improve your success rate. Sooner or later you'll land some fantastic assignments. Nail them, and you'll be well on your way toward a robust and lucrative freelance writing career.

About the Author



Carmen Rane Hudson has been a freelance writer since 2009. She lives in Shreveport, LA where she enjoys a host of geeky things. You can learn more about her at www.crhwrites.com.

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