

Freedom With Writing

**The
Case Study
Guide to
Freelance
Writing**

*Make a living as
a writer!*

Edited By Jacob Jans

The Case Study Guide
to
Freelance Writing

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Questions, comments, complaints, or praise? Email
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Dear Writer,

The world is full of successful freelance writers. Every successful writer found their success both by learning from other writers *and* by honing in on their own unique qualities.

There is something about you that is very special.

This book gives you a few keys to unlocking the full potential of your unique abilities as a writer.

Remember: The amount of effort you put into applying the lessons in this book to your own life will determine the level of success you achieve.

I encourage you to spend quality time with each of these case studies. Write down detailed answers to each question at the end of each case study. Figure out how you can apply the lessons to your own life.

Don't worry about results yet. Spend time reflecting on your own situation. Start to imagine the case study you will be able to write for your own career. Begin to fill in the details.

With each new case study, try to figure out the one little detail that could change your life. Sometimes the answer will be obvious. Sometimes it will take hours of reflection before you wake up in the middle of the night with an "aha" moment.

I have compiled this book as a small guide to unlocking your own potential as a writer.

May this book serve you well.

And may it challenge you in unexpected ways.

Sincerely,

Jacob Jans

PS: Some writers want extra guidance in learning the many strategies needed to build a successful freelance writing career. This book raises some very important questions for writers. What niche will you choose? How will you find clients? What makes you unique as a writer?

For those writers who want a structured learning environment, I recommend [enrolling in The No B.S. Course on Freelance Writing](#). The course is self-directed, which means you can learn at your own pace. You also get expert instruction and answers to all of your questions, when you need it. (And on your own terms.) [Learn more here.](#)

Case Study

The Dream Client Found on Craigslist

Caroline Baily is a formerly reluctant writer who spent fifteen years in aerospace before confessing "I have words. They leak." She is now freelancing while enjoying the freedom to tend to her children, her cats, and her rose garden without waking up at 3am to get to work. She invites you to visit her at www.engineertoenglish.com.

-
- No portfolio, because of restrictions from previous clients
 - Offered more than "just writing," cementing a long-term relationship with her client
 - Found a new gig with a steady paycheck
-

“

I was new to freelance writing, but had been wanting to make a go of it for a while and knew that my corporate contract was winding up soon. In anticipation of this I joined a few sites that comb through ads for relevant work and consolidate the results. One job board in particular tended to have enough good leads that it was worth the paltry fee for a few months of access to their results. They included the original job posting when they had a result, making it easy to inquire and apply.

I noticed that a lot of the juicier leads were coming from, of all places, Craigslist. I promptly searched for “writer wanted”, “copywriter wanted”, and similar terms on my local Craigslist board. There wasn’t much locally, and I started to get discouraged until I had a brainstorm. Why not search the listings in areas I would like to visit or move to?

As luck would have it, a city I already planned a trip to had a post seeking a “Writer for web pages”. I emailed:

Dear Madam/Sir:

I would like to discuss the web page writer position you're advertising on Craigslist. From your description it sounds like you are specifically looking for someone who can produce writing that is both technical and accessible, which is a particular specialty of mine.

I've included a link to my LinkedIn profile in my signature; a lot of my current day job is nearly exactly what you describe, and I'd love to expand a bit and am not bound by any noncompete agreements that would inhibit my ability to produce endless amounts of material for a client.

A primary caveat is that I would need to work remotely, as my physical location is not in Dayton; however, I am near enough that face to face meetings would not be impossible with enough notice.

I look forward to discussing this position with you soon, and producing material for you shortly thereafter.

Warm regards,

*Caroline Bailey
*redacted email**

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/carolinecbailey/>

Of note: I have a program that lets me track when someone opens an email I've sent. It showed that the email was opened shortly after I sent it, then again the next morning, multiple times.

That afternoon I got a reply:

Hello Caroline,

Thank you for your reply to our Craigslist ad. You do have an interesting background, and I would like to speak with you.

Would you be available one day this week, evenings are ok too, for a short talk?

*My skype is *redacted*.*

Thank you,

Client Name

Well, of course I would. I didn't have a portfolio, due to most of my prior writing being bound by nondisclosure agreements, so my LinkedIn profile was my main hope of hooking the potential client into giving me a chance. We caught up on Skype and he did a screenshare to walk me through what he wanted to do with his website; I'd guessed correctly in my initial email, and it was exactly what I'd been doing with the added perk of being in a field that I want and need to learn, SEO, marketing, and website design.

We agreed on a test piece at a rate lower than I should have asked, \$40 for a "how to", but for a sample to see how we worked together it wasn't unreasonable. There was a bit of difficulty in getting login credentials to the site to be able to do the test piece. The client actually inquired if he'd "lost" me, then came back with:

I was impressed by you and saved a "spot" for you in hopes we could reach an agreement on working together. I have more than 50 documents that need developed of varying complexity and could use you now.

So, to save time, let's cut to the chase... no need to spend time on a "pitch". I just need an estimate of time and fee to create a BP. I estimate 2-3 hours max per BP. Verbal or email is fine.

Assuming we agree, we work on one BP together with an upfront retainer to see how it goes. I am sure there will be a learning curve. We can adjust fees and expectations from there.

Do you remember the formatting for the BP? Or, would you like to see it again?

Your thoughts?

This was before seeing anything but my LinkedIn profile and speaking to me voice-only over Skype! The rapport I developed over the call was a probable factor in this; the client has an Engineering background, and my previous career is heavy on that. I also mentioned that I would be in his area at the end of the month, and we agreed to set up a meeting.

I quoted a rate that was, again, too low -- \$20/hr. I have since decided that I will use that as my "sample" rate, with a cap of 2-5 hours before I go to my actual rate. (Said rate will vary depending on the services required, but will be considerably higher. We writers should not underestimate our value or our worth.) This should enable me to determine whether the client and I are a fit without wasting much time, money, or effort on either side.

And then he sent a retainer for five hours' worth of work. By this point my trip to his area was imminent, and he told me to wait to start writing until after the trip... and offered to give me a lift from the airport to my destination with a stop for a business lunch along the way. I accepted. Over lunch I found out that he has plans for two more sites after this one and was seeking not just a writer, but almost a collaborator or consultant. As I'm also a consultant, this seemed agreeable to me pending the results of writing.

Upon seeing the short piece I completed when I returned, he said that he had only one thing to say: "WOW!" He was so impressed by my work that he immediately refused all other applicants and stated that he would only work with me on this project -- and the others coming up, if I'm willing. We worked out a schedule for when the site will be populated with enough content to go live, discussed a few expansions that he will implement, and once live he is offering royalties (a percentage of membership fees) as well as periodic bonuses on top of my base rate and has every intention of continuing to work with me as long as I please.

Taking note of sources and fishing through Craigslist in cities that appealed to me certainly turned out well; my first real client is a dream client who pays invoices promptly and is as much a mentor as a client. The pay will suffice for now, and I am learning critical skills for my new freelance writing and consulting business while being able to work from home on my own schedule.

Analysis

This case study shows that being a little creative with your job searching can pay real dividends. It also shows the importance of communicating your specialization with the client. If you don't have a portfolio, there are other ways you can hook the client, such as a great LinkedIn profile. Additionally, offering services beyond just writing can make your offer much more appealing, and open up many more opportunities.

Your Turn

- What services can you offer, in addition to writing?
- How can you impress potential clients outside of your portfolio?
- How many specializations do you have, beyond the obvious?

Case Study

The One Email That Lead to Many Gigs

Courtney Elder is a freelance writer based just outside of Portland, OR. She writes for a variety of companies and enjoys creating content for her disc golf and healthcare clients the most. Her full portfolio can be viewed at [Author-Eyes](#), a creative content studio she runs with her husband. When she's not writing, Courtney loves spending time with her husband, two sons, and three cats.



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- She chose a niche and focused her marketing efforts
 - Stayed persistent, sending out many failed pitches before landing the right client
 - Sought a “business partnership” and not just a writing client
-

“

Context is always important, so here's the quick backstory about my writing journey and why landing this particular client was so impactful for me. Despite being in love with writing during my youth, my adult life took me down the path of working in healthcare. It was with my husband's encouragement that I got back into writing, and in April of 2016 I landed my first gig on Upwork.

I worked very part time, basically during evenings and weekends, and soon began to build a portfolio. Eventually, I was making good enough money that I decided to quit my job and freelance full time. January 1st of this year was my first day as a self-employed individual.

Alongside the clients I had already created relationships with, I wanted to reach out to new prospects to continuously build my brand. My husband and I started a content creation company, [Author-Eyes](#), and while we are available for all clients, our primary niche is the disc golf industry. We are both avid players and it is very much a part of our family's life.

One of the more prominent brands is a company based in Emporia, Kansas named Dynamic Discs. Not only do they manufacture disc golf products but they sponsor many top players and have an incredible social media presence. It was on my radar to reach out to most of the major companies in the sport, and DD just happened to be first on my list.

I checked out their website before sending an email to their Media Director Bobby Brown. To my surprise, they did not have a blog. I decided to take a leap of faith, and just 12 days into my official freelance career, I sent this email:

Hi Bobby,

My name is Courtney and I am pretty obsessed with disc golf. My husband and I love to take our kids out to play, and we pretty much talk about it non-stop!

We recently started our own business - a creative studio that offers writing services to the disc golf community (our website is still under construction!). I'm an experienced writer and have been working for a variety of clients for many years. Not only am I working with Chris Finn to expand content on the Dude site, but I'm also in discussion with Nate Heinold regarding written coverage at LedgeStone.

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I noticed the DD website doesn't have a blog section. I just recently finished an interview with Tina Stanaitis and thought my article would be a great starting point for a DD blog. It can feature player profiles, news, disc reviews, tips for your game, etc.

I'd love to hear your thoughts about beginning a partnership together.

Thanks so much for your time!
Courtney Elder
Owner, Author-Eyes

To my complete surprise, he emailed me back the same day asking what I had in mind! Bobby mentioned that they were upgrading their website and that when it was completed, he wanted a blog element. I pitched my already completed article to him as a starting point and he loved it. His time frame was about six weeks out, so we agreed to stay in touch.

About a month later, I received an email from the Events Coordinator at Dynamic Discs, Doug Bjerkaas. He asked if we could have a phone conversation about some other opportunities. I'll probably always save the voicemail that he left for me because it was a huge confirmation that I was on the right path:

"Hey Courtney, it's Doug Bjerkaas with Dynamic Discs calling. I know I mentioned that I wanted to talk with you earlier and I've just been so busy. But I do want to talk to you about a couple of articles we'd like to commission you to write."

All of a sudden my pitch for blogs began to turn into a big opportunity! Doug and I spoke and he asked me to write two feature articles that would be placed in a magazine that's distributed to over 900 players at their largest annual tournament. I could tell I was gaining traction with DD, so I made sure to keep in touch with Bobby during and after my work with Doug.

Wanting to further the presence of our company, my husband and I went on a "mini-tour" and visited several large disc golf events in March. I was able to meet Bobby in person and put a face with the name, and we reaffirmed our plans to collaborate on the blog. Shortly thereafter, I began my work for Bobby and now provide Dynamic Discs with a weekly blog post.

Two days before writing this I received an email from Bobby regarding that large annual event; their website for the tournament, [Glass Blown Open](#), needed content on a last minute basis. Bobby was unsure if I could even provide remote content, yet I assured him it would be no problem. I've been commissioned to write one article each day for the event, which spans about one week.

It's amazing when I think about what came from one little email. That's not to say I've had this level of success with every client; I have sent countless pitches that never garnered a response, or have had people engage in a response and then stop further dialogue after my secondary email.

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Being a freelance writer is hard work; I'm still building my business and find that I work a lot more than I did in my 9-5 job. Yet the success stories like this one are proof that sometimes putting your name out there is all it takes!

Analysis

I like this case study, because Courtney shows how one pitch can lead to many opportunities. She didn't just randomly send out pitches, however. She chose a niche, developed a long term strategy, thought of her career as a business, and was diligent about communicating and following through with her clients and potential clients.

I also like that she clearly states that she sent out many pitches that failed; such is the nature of freelance writing. Most successful freelance writers are pitching all the time; you get used to rejection, or worse, not even hearing back about your pitch. Eventually one is too busy to notice, but it does take time. Sending out pitches is part of the job; as is not hearing back from most people you send a pitch to.

Your Turn

- What is your niche?
- What do you like about the pitch in this case study?
- How can you establish long-term relationships with your clients?

Case Study

A Brand New Writer Beats a Crowded

Jessica Denne is a 27-year-old student at University of Maryland University College, studying for her Bachelors of Science degree in Psychology. Jessica grew up in the military lifestyle as a “Navy Brat” and later went on to serve active-duty in the U.S. Navy, herself. She has travelled extensively, and has spent her life with extremely diverse individuals from all walks of life, and varying cultures from around the globe. As such, Jessica has developed a deep awareness, concern, and fondness for all humans; as well as an appreciation for their likeness and also for their differences. She an avid lover of words and likes to use hers to inspire open, honest communication and connection in [and to] the world around her.



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- Jessica entered a pitching contest in a niche where she had no professional experience
 - She crafted a very good pitch
 - She won the competition, despite competing against many writers with more qualifications.
-



I am a 27-year-old student at University of Maryland, University College- studying for my Bachelors of Science in Psychology degree. I have learned a lot about how to research through my educational endeavors, and this research paved the way for my personal and professional writing aspirations. Prior to successfully submitting a winning pitch to the 'Be a Freelance Blogger' website, I had never published any of my work(s); I had only ever managed to conduct ample research on how to blog, or how to become a freelance writer, hardly any of my time was spent writing; furthermore, I certainly wasn't writing anything for publication. I did, however, start a personal blog that [truth be told] I have not spent nearly enough time contributing to, either. I have been told by friends, family, and professors for many years that my writing is a talent I should pursue, but my inner critic has always caused me to be doubtful, and to shy away from trying to write professionally.

During all the research I had conducted in my journey for knowledge on how to be successful in today's online world of writing, I found the 'Be a Freelance Blogger' website. Their website offered an option to sign up for their email list, with the promise to deliver helpful tips and tricks to help get ahead in the field of freelance blogging. It was through this website that the opportunity arose. Sophia Lizard (the founder of 'Be a Freelance Blogger') sent out an email to her subscribers with the headline, "Can we pay you \$100 for a blog post?", wherein she explains that BAFB hosts a 'Pitchfest' every 3 months [March, June, September, and December]. The email encouraged writers of any stature to enter a pitch for the contest, even if the entrant had never been published before.

Initially, I blew the email off telling myself, "I'm not experienced enough. Someone who is far better and more mature in their writing endeavors will surely beat me out; there's no point in trying". About an hour later, I had convinced myself that it wouldn't hurt to try. If nothing else, it would be good practice. The criteria were to follow the theme: "Plan B: What to do when things go wrong". It was also required that the pitch be relevant to their niche; being beneficial to, and aimed toward, freelance bloggers.

Prior to drafting my pitch, I reviewed the BAFB guest posting guidelines to be sure I followed their rules and requirements exactly as they have them specified. Then, I went back and re-read the instructions for the current Pitchfest, to be sure I understood the theme, and the founder/ editor's criteria.

Once I was sure I understood everything, I sat down and pondered ideas to pitch. In the end, I stuck with what I know: being a newbie, how discouraging it can be, and how to persist despite the difficulties most immediately faced by writers entering the field of freelance blogging. I have

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a good deal of helpful information from all the research I have conducted on the topic, on my own time, coupled as well with my own personal experiences. I used all this information to create the pitch titled, "5 Backup Plans Required for Success in the Field of Freelance Bloggers: A Guide for the Newbies". (My pitch was originally posted [here](#)). **My entire pitch has also been included at the end of this document, for your reference and ease of access.*

All my interactions throughout the Pitchfest process took place with both Sophie Lizard (Founder, BAFB), and Lauren Tharp (Managing Editor). I submitted my entry to the contest on March 29th, 2017 @ 9:25pm... the deadline for submissions was March 31st, 2017, by the end of the day. The date came along for a winner to be announced and Lauren Tharp [Managing Editor, BAFB] addressed all the entrants, informing us that the date for announcing winners would be pushed back a few more days, as there were so many entries. I replied to her saying, "Lauren, I appreciate your update reply. This is an exciting opportunity that I am genuinely grateful to be a part of! Happy writing, all!"

On April 10th, Lauren Tharp responded to my pitch, "Not gonna lie, Jessica: This is probably the best pitch I've seen thus far. Very well done. I love that you tell the reader what Plan A is... and then what they can do as a Plan B if Plan A fails. That's PERFECT. Exactly what we're looking for.

There may be some hidden gems further down in the entries, but you're going to be hard to beat. Haha." I gleefully responded with, "Lauren, thank you so much for your positive feedback! I am absolutely stunned by your kind words and am feeling more confident in my writings, as of now. I sincerely appreciate your outstanding words! [:"

On April 11th, Sophie Lizard announced the winners- starting, "1st prize- Jessica Denne, 5 Backup Plans Required for Success... (see Jessica's winning pitch: <http://beafreelanceblogger.com/plan-b/#comment-203365>). My written reaction was, "OH MY GOODNESS! ;;jaw drops;; I did it!!! Thank you for this opportunity, and congratulations to the other winners. For anyone who wasn't chosen- don't give up! Keep writing, keep growing, and keep trying! You can do this!"

As a result, the drafted article- the expansion of my winning pitch- must be [at least] 1,000 words, and is due on April 30th, 2017. As the 1st prize winner, I will receive payment of \$100 on publication. My article will be published on the [popular] Be A Freelance Blogger website. I will gain exposure, on top of the experience and confidence I have already gained from this opportunity. It is clear that my situation has changed: I am more confident in my writing; I will now be a published writer, having gotten paid for my craft. [HOW COOL!?] ; I have been more brave and bold in the writing opportunities that I seek out; and I am more committed to/ focused on my personal blogging, as well as various ways in which I can expand on my professional writings.

My full 'Be a Freelance Blogger' Pitchfest Entry:

Headline: 5 Backup Plans Required for Success in the Field of Freelance Bloggers: A Guide for the Newbies.

Opening: The lifestyle available to established freelance bloggers is to be coveted by aspiring writers. These big [yet still attainable] dreams are not easy to fulfill. The market for freelance bloggers is growing rapidly, and clients are very particular about what they do and do not want.

The first, most difficult lesson aspiring freelancers learn? Most clients do not want you.

Point 1: Finding a reputable first client, and the level of difficulty entailed. Address the importance of researching clients before applying to work for them. Plan B when falling for a scam and getting "played" by a false client: use the circumstances of the situation as another avenue to research, while researching clients prior to applying.

Point 2: Criticism is usually quite harsh. For new writers, this can be discouraging. When receiving harsh criticism/ feedback, instead of shutting down and declaring that your work sucks too bad to ever be chosen- incorporate a Plan B wherein you use these criticisms and bits of feedback constructively, to build on the quality of your writing.

Point 3: Keep at it. Finding a reputable client to work for and generating the income aspiring freelance bloggers anticipate won't happen overnight; coupled with harsh criticisms to come, the pursuit of clients and gigs will be very discouraging at times. In the meantime, utilize a Plan B that involves various free tools, forums, and pieces of advice that will help you to expand on your current skills as a writer until you can secure a gig that is promising for the future.

Point 4: Do not put all of your eggs in one basket-- do not only submit one application to one client and think that's how simple it is to get into the field of freelance blogging; because it isn't. As a Plan B, you should submit samples and applications to many clients, to increase your chances of being selected for a job. Even if you aren't selected, some clients will provide feedback on why you were not selected, and as I said before, this criticism can be used to expand on your skills as a writer so one day, you will be selected.

Point 5: Be patient. Freelance blogging to make a substantial living is not something that will be mastered quickly, even for the most naturally avid writers. Be aware that success in this field is not guaranteed, it is achieved through hard work, dedication, and relentless persistence. For the interim, your plan B should be: don't quit your day job. ;)

[Required]: I feel that this is a great post for the freelance blogger website because it is relevant and practical information and advice for newcomers to the field of freelance blogging. This article could inspire the next greatest freelancer to not give up-- and that is a great feat! I am sure that I am the best person to write this article because I have spent a great deal of time researching freelance blogging opportunities and outcomes. I

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have tried, and I have failed, but I know that persistence and growth are key- so I would like to use this article to inspire others to just keep writing.

Analysis

This case study shows that you don't need to have experience or credentials to have a successful pitch that leads to publication. You simply need a good pitch. That alone is usually all it takes. The other main point is that research is good, but eventually you just need to put yourself out there. As Jessica says it doesn't hurt to try.

Your Turn

- What magazines, clients, blogs, etc, could you pitch to?
- Have you accumulated knowledge in any particular field, even if you're not an expert?
- How can you adapt your pitch to the decision maker, even if they don't explicitly list their requirements?

Case Study

How Everytown, USA Became My Freelance Writing Goldmine

Theresa St John is a freelance travel writer based in Saratoga Springs, New York. She has been published in over 200 publications. She writes about travel, history, food, and local tourist attractions.

- Dreamed of becoming a freelance travel writer, but was completely broke and had no experience
 - Realized her starting point was surprisingly *close to home*
 - Now stays in luxury resorts, vacation rentals, enjoys seven-course dinners, and more. All as part of her freelance travel writing career
-

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I decided that I wanted to be a journalist/travel writer in 2013. Of course, like many others starting out, I had big dreams and bright, shining stars in my eyes. I thought I'd be traveling to exotic countries, hosted at five-star hotels, spoiled rotten, all on someone else's dime.

And, those things certainly did come, but it took a little while to get there. I needed to concentrate on establishing myself first.

I'd just come out of a nasty divorce, with fistfuls of bills I couldn't pay. They were killing me. Thanks to my gambling now ex-husband, we'd lost every single thing and I was struggling to get back on my feet.

I realized that my freelance writing career would need to begin closer to home, right in my own back yard, so to speak. I embraced that reality immediately and my mantra soon became 'Everytown USA is a destination for someone, especially **my** town.'

And it was true. I'd hit a goldmine.

Today, less than four years later, I **am** hosted in other towns, cities, states and countries. I **do** stay at luxury resorts, in vacation rentals, enjoying private tours, museums of interest and seven-course dinners.

I'm published over 200 times; in several on-line, in-print and in-flight magazine arenas. I write about travel, history, food, and local attractions in any area I'm invited to visit. I get to interview the most interesting people, and submit those articles to various publications as well.

I still love local and find new things to write about here all the time.

Make sure you're familiar with your area. If you're not, it's time to get started!

I'd always gone to museums in my area. I loved taking a few hours out of my day to learn about the past, present and future of my hometown.

There are so many attractions here, I couldn't count them if I tried, (some discovered for the first time on Google) and they cost little to nothing to visit.

Now that I knew I wanted to write about the place where I had roots, I jumped in with a notebook, pen and my camera. I was enthusiastic, revisiting places I enjoyed and even attractions I had no initial interest in.

Look for local publications

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Once I had a few visits under my belt, and good notes that I could use to weave a story, it was time to look for someone who might want to buy my article.

There are a lot of opinions on writing. You've probably read them all. Should you ever write for free? Should you write your story before you pitch, or visa versa ? What about those pitches - should you query one publication at a time - or send out an email blitz and see who bites?

My first two articles were written for free, just so I could claim a few by-lines tucked under my belt. I understood that it was important to start building a reputation as a writer. Soon though, I began looking for outlets that paid their writers.

I decided to begin my queries with a single, local publication, rather than an email blitz. I searched for local publications on Google and found 'Discover Saratoga.' It was on-line, and a member of the Chamber of Commerce. I searched for, then targeted my pitch, to the woman in charge.

This is what my query letter looked like:

Dear Miss -----:

Good Morning:

My name is Theresa St John. I'm a freelance travel writer and photographer based right here in Saratoga.

I've always loved this area of Upstate New York and am hoping you are open to working with freelancers, as I'd like to submit some content to your website.

I'm very interested in visiting our local attractions and museums. I am thrilled that we have so many in Saratoga to choose from! I'd like to craft a story about each, then submit, along with a photo essay, for your consideration.

I truly believe, because I am local, my insight would appeal to your readership. An 'insider's view' can go a long way sometimes.

I appreciate your time and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Theresa St John
4316 Route 50
Apartment 5E
Saratoga Springs, New York 12866

It took less than a week to hear from the editor, who loved the idea and gave me the green light. Besides that, I was actually able to gain free entrance to many attractions, in exchange for coverage in an article.

This is one of the articles I wrote for 'Discover Saratoga's' website.

<https://discoversaratoga.org/saratoga-weddings/discover-the-canfield-casino-in-congress-park>

I didn't wait for it to come out. I visited another attraction, wrote a second article and sent it in, just a few days later. Over time, I built a solid relationship with the editor, was sent on several assignments and at the end of that year received a \$100 gift certificate to my favorite restaurant in town. It was a nice surprise!

Think about paid publications, we all want to see the money!

I still kept it local, but this time it was a farmer's market that I wanted to write about.

Saratoga Springs has a huge following in Farmers Markets. Fresh fruits and vegetables, organic gardening, it's an entire mindset here in our area.

I got in touch with one of the founders, asked if I could come talk with a few of her vendors, and take some pictures for a story I wanted to write. She was thrilled!

I took the idea further and did some research on the history of Farmers Markets. Where and when did they start? How did it become a culture and how did they make their way to Saratoga?

Once I fleshed out some historical facts, I came at my travel story from a specific angle, moving from the past into the present day farmers markets.

And I looked hard for paying publications.

I learned something interesting in that process; Just because I lived in Saratoga and often wrote about Saratoga didn't mean I had to keep my story in a local publication. I decided to cast my net further and went to work, searching Google's tool bar.

This is what I typed in, and I believe it would work for **whatever** genre of writing you decide to pursue.

“Submission guidelines to farming magazines that pay freelance writers”

I prepared my query letter, included my published links and sent this pitch to 10 magazines I thought might be interested.

My article ended up in a beautiful print publication called **Farming Magazine** and it paid \$125.

It's actually the first link that comes up on Google. If you'd like to go view back issues, Mine appeared in Winter 2015. (Note: The process from pitch to publish can take awhile sometimes. I queried in April of 2014! So, keep in mind, patience is a virtue. Every writer needs it.)

The truth is this: Everything, everywhere, is a story

There might be a local restaurant or new theater you want to write about. A stay in a luxury hotel or visit to a hole-in-the-wall bar make a great story. And the interest in dog-friendly attractions is huge, no matter where you go!

There are museums that appeal to many, and new coffee shops pop up on all four corners of any downtown block. Believe me, I find new things to write about all the time. Now I have fun, digging for publications I know might be anxious for new, interesting content.

I've moved on to land several covers of magazines. I often write features, round-ups, food articles and profile pieces. I've traveled extensively, most often hosted by visitor's centers, all over the country. I've also been sent to Ireland, Paris and Fiji, covering luxury vacation rentals and writing about local attractions.

I just had to take those first steps.

No matter what area you want to write in, you need to do the same. Take those first steps in the direction you choose to go. Make it happen.

Analysis

This case study shows the creativity that is sometimes needed to get a story published. But — even before her first publication, her thinking required a ‘creative shift.’ She found a niche-within-a-niche that wasn’t obvious to her at first: Travel writing for her home town. This kind of unexpected thinking is often what it takes to succeed in more competitive fields.

Your Turn

- What niche do you write in? Is there another way of thinking about your niche that could lead to new opportunities?
- Is there a way you can find an audience outside of your niche?
- What “insider access” could you pursue, in order to get a better story?

Case Study

Tenacity Leads to Steady Writing Work

Melissa Sharpe works in a university writing center and freelances as a writer, editor, SME, and project manager in the education sector. Her fiction has appeared in *Redevider*, *Pennsylvania English*, and *Zygote in my Coffee*, among others. She lives in the Detroit area.

- Struggled with content mills, earning pennies in exchange for hard work
 - Tried a new strategy and chose one niche to specialize in
 - Found steady writing gigs in her niche that paid well and gave her time to spend with her daughter
-

“

Eight weeks into my twelve week (unpaid) maternity leave, I decided I wasn't going back to work. Or at least I wasn't going back to teaching. We were a two income house, but it was a 50/50 split. My decision would cut our total income in half, leaving us without enough money to pay the bills each month, so I would have to find a way to still earn money at home. A few months before I gave birth, I started tutoring for an online company. Two to eight hours a week I waited in a chat room for students to pop in, send me a copy of their essay, and then watch on a shared screen as I walked through their document leaving notes and comments in Microsoft Word. It brought in about 1/7 of my full time job's income. I would need something else.

I knew I could write. In my early 20s I was sure I would be a writer – *literary* of course – and perhaps also an English professor with a pretentious office globe and wood paneled walls. I had had just enough of my writing published to think it was a possibility. Surprise! Literary magazines, the ones that pay, don't pay enough to make a living. It's a wonderful pursuit and ego boost, but it wasn't going to bring me the money I needed to leave my teaching job. However, I knew if I could write stories, I could write something that did pay. I just had to find it.

I started joining all of the freelance slush pile websites. The jobs were plentiful, but they were mostly looking for content to monetize websites. Write 200 words on a topic for \$1. Each of these \$1 jobs would have several bids from overseas companies specializing in churning out these blurbs in something that was just close enough to fluent English. Turning myself into a one woman content mill wasn't going to replace my income either.

Every now and then something would appear on these freelance sites that looked like a real possibility. Again, the bids would pile up. As a freelancer on these sites, you need credentials to stand out. The sites track how many projects you have secured, how much money you have earned to date, and ratings from the people who hired you. My poor little account was full of zeroes. Zero projects. Zero dollars. Zero stars. I still put in bids, hoping my resume would pull me through. I had a degree in English, a nearly complete master's degree in education, a few of those lovely literary magazine credits, and bylines from a few music magazines – these also dated back to my early 20s when I turned my ability to write short stories in a (non- to low-paying) gig writing features on musicians and local people of moderate interest. It took little more than the ability to write a complete sentence, meet a deadline, and be fine with doing it all for free.

I had to rely on these things to make me more appealing than the freelancers with badges, gold stars, and earnings in the five digits.

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There was a lot of silence and “Sorry, this job has closed and the project was awarded to someone else” emails. I earned about \$25 one week for writing some descriptions for items in an online store. The money I saved for my maternity leave was trickling away. I had to refocus my resume. I chose education. And education alone.

Education was the topic I had the most practical experience in. While I could likely write more product descriptions, or I could try to apply to be a part-time editor for a car parts newsletter, it wouldn’t make sense for me. I had assumed it was being a *writer* as the job I was chasing. That was too broad. I needed an industry.

I refocused my resume around education. I highlighted the English and education degrees, teaching experience, and listed the names of places that had published me that could pass for having something to do with Education. I love you *Zygote in my Coffee*, but this wasn’t the resume for you. I bid on education related jobs only – still sitting in silence.

A lot of the jobs were looking for work samples. I couldn’t attach a short story or an interview with a guitar player as my work sample for curriculum design or lesson plan editing. I could, however, submit my own lesson plans or writing I did as part of my master’s degree. So it wasn’t published – it was still a work sample.

Once I paired a work sample with my newly focused resume, I finally won a bid on a project. Lesson plan writing, \$300 per unit. The company was hiring several writers for what would be a year-long project. I plowed my way through a unit or two a week, knowing that once all the available units were taken, that would be the end of the project. I crafted quiz questions and created projects while my daughter napped.

And I had a real work sample.

A few months into the lesson plan writing gig, I had to start looking for more jobs. Bid after bid after bid – and again nothing. I realized I maybe had just gotten lucky. The freelance slush pile was demoralizing, tiring to sort through, and a waste of time. For an individual writer, the time spent looking for work wasn’t worth the jobs that one could secure. I realized that these websites weren’t offering long lasting jobs in the first place.

If I wanted a writing job in education, I would have to search for one the way I would look for job. I ended up checking the employment pages on the websites of text book and educational publishers. I discovered the wonders of Indeed, where a search for “writer” in a “remote” location made me feel like I was looking for a job and not a random gig that could earn me \$25 for a month’s worth of work. It was through Indeed where I eventually was added to a list of freelance writers, editors, and subject matter experts for a company that produced content for its clients, who ranged from schools to education websites to textbook publishers. I started off writing and revising questions for a textbook publisher’s quiz question bank. I had to remove every “all of the above” or “none of the above” distracters and replace them with specific choices instead.

And the work never stopped. I was offered week-long projects. I was offered projects with steady, guaranteed work for months at a time. I was offered projects that other people backed out on. The best part was that my resume was growing with even more legitimate work samples. I never needed to search for more work, however. I was fine with having a project and then nothing for a few weeks or a month. I had started working as an adjunct before my master's degree was even mailed to me, and that was regular enough pay to fill in the gaps. By the time my daughter was two and a half I was out earning what I made before she was born. Six years later, I still work with this client and one other textbook publisher I met along the way. I occasionally turn down work from them, as I am also employed full time in a university writing center, but I continue supplement my income writing and editing educational materials. I may not be the *writer* I thought I would be fifteen years ago, but I do get to put *writer* on my tax forms each year.

Analysis

This is a story that so many writers can identify with. You know you want to break free of a nine-to-five work schedule and work as a freelance writer, with all of the flexibility it entails. But how? There are obvious answers that end up being dead-ends: Content mills and freelancing platforms such as Upwork. Melissa found herself in those very traps. She got out of those traps by choosing a niche and focusing on finding work in that one niche. This can be more challenging than it seems. It can require removing prestigious credentials from your resume, because they don't align with the niche. Letting go of valuable experiences is not easy. But, as Melissa's example shows, focusing on one niche can make it much easier to win clients and to build a solid income. But, this is not all she had to do. She also stopped looking for work on freelancing platforms, and found where the real jobs were posted in her niche.

Your Turn

- What could you remove from your portfolio or resume to make it more focused on a single niche?
- What type of clients are available in your niche? Are there potential clients you haven't found yet?

Case Study

The Ghostwriting Grind

Timothy Sholtz is a freelance content writer, former law enforcement officer, and lifelong martial artist who loves to bring different perspectives through writing and content creation.

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- Found a steady writing gig through a freelancing platform
 - Wrote 5,000 words a day on a wide variety of topics
 - Learned how to quickly write about nearly any subject matter
 - Left the client for other work
-



The Ghostwriter. A mysterious, often less chosen path not taken by most. Often met with perplexed looks and conjecture, I love the bewildered looks I often get when I tell people what I do. Often, I just give a vague job description to get a reaction. In all reality, ghostwriting is merely a small cog in the well-oiled machine that a writer is required to be.

What Do Ghost Writers Do?

If you don't know the definition, Dictionary.com defines a ghost writer as:

a person who writes one or numerous speeches, books, articles, etc for another person who is named as or presumed to be the author.

So yeah, ghost writers are the men and women who work, often uncredited, behind the scenes. Ghostwriter's primary objective is to ensure their client's stories are told.

Have you ever wondered how all these famous people have written impeccable autobiographies, let's tilt our hat towards the elusive, mysterious ghost writer.

“The Client”

The first client I worked with was a “Content Mill” of sorts, where you're given a daily word count. Lets put it this way, it was a grind, to say the least.

I met the client, let's just call him Gary, on a content platform which I'm sure many of you have considered at one point. This was my first go around with freelance writing so I was eager to begin. The entire process was very vague aside from “Add this person on Skype and create a login on this website.” Before I agreed to anything, I wanted to get to know who I was working with so I asked plenty of questions of who he was, what his origins are, and what direction he wanted to take his company in. I found out Gary is a website designer from the United Kingdom who generally employs foreign writers to provide them with a decent wage, but wanted to work his way into writing for American clients.

The Interview

The interview with Gary was straightforward. I just submitted my proposal and my best works I had saved in my portfolio. I was the writer he was looking for, so I eagerly accepted his offer of X amount of dollars per Y amount of words and we discussed which niches I would want to write about. Writing for word counts instead of an hourly rate was a new concept for me because I was so accustomed to the generalized ways of doing things so I realized this could be very beneficial or it could be a significant hit to my financial situation.

Structure of Writing

The structure Gary incorporated with his business made ghostwriting a very simple task. I had a virtual assistant, or “my handler” as I so affectionately called him, let’s call him “Malik,” handled all the assignments and questions I had.

At first, our platform was just “Hey, here’s your article, make sure to meet these guidelines from the client.” After a while, Gary finally finished programming our content platform and we had a dedicated portal where we could interact with the client, view our earnings, and a word count tracker. It wasn’t a bad gig, especially for my first real client.

I created a dedicated folder on my laptop for Gary and our projects so I could easily manage writing 5000 words a day. The inconsistency is what killed me. I would start my day by writing a product review for one project then a study on DNA sequencing methods the next. It was a grind, to say the least. I am thankful for all the feedback I received writing for various niches throughout my days working for this company, it made me a versatile writer very quickly.

This was my daily routine:

- Get assignment from the portal
- Research the topic I was contracted to write about
- Edit and revise
- Submit article for client feedback
- Re-edit and submit
- Start the next assignment

Once I felt proficient of my capabilities, I started to get less and less feedback and more assignments throughout the day.

Staying Focused

Writing multiple articles in various niches a day may seem like utter chaos, which it can be, but with structure and discipline, you can flow easily. When I felt stuck on a certain topic, I realized I was slacking and procrastinating, which as a freelance writer, can be a death sentence to a professional career. Having an organized and structured routine can save a lot of headaches and downtime. One of my personal systems is working for an hour then taking 20 minutes to work on various tasks on my daily to-do list. By keeping busy and getting things done, I was always productive and preventing myself from allowing my inner critic to babble self-doubt on whatever I was doing for the day. I highly recommend every writer has a set schedule or routine to maximize productivity, you will be shocked by how much you can really get done when you set your mind to it.

Conclusions

All in all, ghostwriting can be extremely beneficial for a writer to incorporate into their skillset. It’s a simple matter of Risk vs. Reward. If you know you have the discipline and structure to do so and the rewards are worth the rewards you will get for your work, I highly recommend you

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consider a career as a ghostwriter. It's not as alluring as published works but it can be very rewarding for a writer as long as the passion is your motivation. I've since moved on from Gary and his business but the experience and knowledge gained are invaluable.

Analysis

I included this case study for two reasons. First, to show the overwhelming work that is required to make a living from most content mills. It is simply unsustainable. Second, even though it is unsustainable, successfully pulling this off requires learning how to write consistently, no matter the subject matter or mood of the writer. Learning to write, no matter what, is a skill that can serve any writer.

Your Turn

- How would you structure your day if you have to write 5,000 words a day?
- How can you develop your research skills, so you can comfortably write about any topic, without prior knowledge?
- How would you motivate yourself to write for six to eight solid hours a day?

Case Study

How I Transitioned From Content Mills to a \$30,000 a Year Part-Time Writing Career

Julie Wilson is a serial entrepreneur, mother of three, and dedicated freelance writer. She holds an MPS in Publishing from The George Washington University. She is a regular contributor to several print and online publications including Mobile Cuisine and Golf Car Advisor. She is obsessed with helping those with entrepreneurial spirits travel the path to self-employment and her blog, AllAboutSelfEmployment.com is dedicated to this mission. Julie can typically be found in line at the vegetarian food truck or at a high school sporting event. Reach out to her at Julie@allaboutselfemployment.com

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- Got stuck in the content mill trap
 - Found a unique source of high-quality writing clients
 - Used a simple technique to get \$1,070 in recurring income in less than a week
-

“

Writing was always a dream of mine. Until I was in desperate need of Christmas money and came across an advertisement for a writing service (aka: content mill) looking for writers. The dream quickly became a reality. I signed up, submitted a writing sample, and began receiving writing jobs. They were far from the glamorous jobs I had envisioned, but they added up and Christmas was a success. Over the course of a year, I averaged \$1000/month in earnings. Here are a few of the writing jobs I picked up:

- Writing catchy clickbait headings
- Crafting legal blogs about medical malpractice
- Creating business profiles for hundreds of retirement homes
- Documenting case studies in standard formats

Although I enjoyed the extra cash and developed relationships with a few clients, the demands of the content mill were unrealistic. I had to get out.

My Challenge

I experienced three main challenges while working with writing services.

Poor Communication. Content mills are designed to extract content from writers, while protecting their clients. In other words, the content mill will go to any length to keep writers from communicating directly with clients. This makes writing difficult when the writer needs clarification or a deeper understanding of the job. Having to go through customer service reps and chat messaging to understand the scope of a job sets writers up to fail. And when I failed, I did not get paid. Even though the client had possession of my work and was likely using it.

Impossible Deadlines. When a writer accepts a job, the clock starts ticking. Most deadlines were automatically set for 24 or 48 hours. It didn't matter if the job required clarification from the client, or if my daughter had a softball tournament. The deadlines were not discussed; they were assigned. At times, I was forced to reject jobs because of impossible deadlines. The client was disappointed and wanted to know why. I later learned that clients tried to adjust deadlines to accommodate my schedule, but the inflexible platform would not allow it. And if I missed a deadline, I received a "strike." Too many strikes and I would be fired. Just like that.

Low Pay. I mentioned before that I submitted writing samples when I applied to the writing service. The service evaluated the samples and assigned a level to my writing. The higher the level, the higher the compensation. I was assigned the highest level, which was four-star. A four-star writer received 6.6-7.6 cents per word. THIS IS THE MOST A WRITER CAN EARN! That is

unacceptable. Keep in mind that most writers are assigned a two-star level, which only pays 2 cents per word, so I guess I was one of the lucky ones. My average blog post was 500 words, so I earned \$33 for an average post. And then there were edits and rewrites galore. Since I was unable to speak to the client, it was tough to get it right the first time. Spoiler alert: I typically earn \$75 for a 500 word post today.

The bottom line is that content mills do not care about the writer or the client. They can't because for them to earn a profit, they must process jobs like an assembly line. Quantity is prioritized over quality every time, which is every good writer's worst nightmare.

My Solution

I began to plan my escape. I created profiles on Upwork and Contently and sat in line with thousands of other broke writers, but then it hit me. I discovered a large pool of potential clients that desperately needed my writing skills and just didn't realize it yet. I began to create a list of every service I had used in the past year. This list included my hair stylist, chiropractor, water service, landscaper, pool service, auto mechanic, dermatologist, and Crossfit gym. I sent out this email:

"Thank you for providing such great service! I am on your website right now and notice that your blog has not been updated in a while. Adding regular blog content is a great way to improve your website's discoverability and get in front of more potential customers. Over the past year, I have been crafting content for businesses like yours and I would love to write for you, also. Since I have first-hand experience with the high-quality service you provide, I can start with sharing my testimonial in the form of a blog post.

My pricing is pretty simple. I charge \$75 for a 500 word post, \$112 for a 750 word post, and \$150 for a 1000 word post. But, if budget is an issue, I am open to working out a barter arrangement. Let me know if you are interested and give me a call. I can also conduct some keyword research and write website content if you want to improve your website and drive more traffic."

I sent out 30 of these emails with a few personal touches added for each service. Then, I waited.

The Results

Over the course of the next week, I received five emails and three phone calls. Four of the services were interesting in bartering and four wanted to pay me on a monthly subscription basis. Two clients hired me to research keywords and rewrite their website content in addition to creating monthly blogs. Here is the income breakdown from that first batch of emails: Local fishing charter company: Complete website rewrite at \$350 plus \$75/month for a blog post.

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- Hair stylist: Two blog posts per month at \$75/each.
- Water service: One blog post per month in exchange for water service. Value: \$50/month
- Chiropractor: One blog post per month in exchange for monthly therapeutic massage. Value: \$85/month
- Landscaper: Two blog posts per month in exchange for monthly landscape service. Value: \$150
- Crossfit gym: Two blog posts per month in exchange for membership. Value: \$110
- Dermatologist: Two case studies per month at \$150 each.
- Local party rental company: Complete website rewrite at \$275 plus two blog posts per month at \$75/each.

First Month Income: \$1695

Monthly Recurring Income: \$1070

None of these clients had ever been contacted by a writer. I had no competition and already had an established professional relationship. Since that first month, I have been hired for additional website rewrites. Using this same technique, I have grown my part-time writing income to over \$30,000 annually.

Analysis

I love this case study for one simple reason. Julie recognized what wasn't working, and moved on, repeatedly, until she found something that did work. She didn't stick with bad content mills. She didn't struggle to play the writing platform game. While both were able to be successful, she looked for an opening where there was little competition. She put herself on a much easier playing field, and yielded great results.

Your Turn

- What companies do you regularly visit or work with? Do they have a website that needs content?
- Would you be willing to barter content, in exchange for services?
- What opportunities have the lowest level of competition?

Case Study

A Celebration of Successful Pitching and Local Networking

Leanne Flynn is a former crisis intervention worker and teacher. She now enjoys part time freelance writing and photography for both non-profit and paid opportunities.

-
- Took a chance writing for a new magazine
 - Partnered with a photographer
 - Working with the new publication became an important stepping stone, leading to new opportunities
-



About two years ago, I was looking for paid writing opportunities and I was feeling grief-struck and sad. Maybe I was sad because I wasn't getting paid writing opportunities- or maybe I was sad about other events in my life.

Celebrating the proverbial 'place I was in' seemed impossible. Don't read me wrong. I was doing alright financially; I was healing quickly from injury; and I had some great friends. Then an ad asking for local writers caught my eye on Facebook. The ad had a great logo and the word 'celebration' was in the headline. I couldn't believe that the ad was for my local area.

So, I turned my eye towards my local area with the idea of 'celebration' in my mind. I found many things, almost immediately, that I could celebrate. Conversations with friends turned to celebration. Before I had published or been paid for writing about celebrating our local area, many conversations about local places, people, events, history and legend took place.

I was nervous. This was a new magazine, but it was obviously a serious publication and I didn't want to send less than my best effort. I took a cue that I had learned from someone whose name I no longer remember: Ask the people what they would like to read about and let that guide your publication. And, wonderfully our focus was the word 'celebration.' What vivid memories were recalled by local pensioners; what visions of municipal success and tourism success were described by younger people.

The editor requested a bio and a pitch. The idea for my pitch came directly from asking friends and neighbors what they would like to read about. I also partnered with a friend, a photographer, to make the pitch a more complete offering. My first pitch to the publication, Grey Bruce Life, started like this:

"Good morning. Our article is a celebration of Owen Sound Harbor winter ships, and a quick look back at harbor history and the recent 're-discovery' of over 20 shipwrecks within the harbor. We will review the findings of this past year of the marine archaeologist hired by our Owen Sound City council after 3 wrecks were located near our water treatment plant. "

Read the [complete pitch here](#). We also sent a sample of photographs. The pitch was long and detailed, but it was accepted right away by magazine editor, Jeremy Walpole.

In fact, Jeremy felt that the article should be a two-part series and he published both articles in the e-zine almost immediately. Article 1, **"On The Beauty of Owen Sound Winter Ships- A Photo Essay"** [can be viewed here](#). The second article **"They Rise Again! Ghostly Ships and New Shipwrecks in Owen Sound Harbor- A Photo Essay"** [can be viewed here](#). Grey Bruce Life magazine paid \$90 per article at that time.

Those articles led to another article about the harbor, as one of our ships that winters over in Owen Sound, the Chi-Cheemaun was undergoing some interesting upgrades and renovations. I went to the Chi-Cheemaun website and located a phone number to ask if there was a chance of

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boarding the ship to take a few pictures of the inside renovations. To my delight, I was offered an onboard tour and an interview with the VP of Operations to discuss the upgrades to the ship. You can read the [pitch for that article here](#). The [finished article can be viewed at this link](#).

The house that I was in was also an inspiration for an article for Grey Bruce Life magazine, as it has a phenomenal history and we had been doing some restorative work on the antique brewery gardens. I decided to pitch a photo-essay, as we I had a collection of excellent pictures of the gardens. That was also a successful pitch. You can [view the pitch at this link](#), and the completed [article here](#).

I also conducted a successful [phone interview with the CEO of a major nuclear energy company](#), Mr. Duncan Hawthorne of Bruce Power, while working with Grey Bruce Life.

Few of my pitches were rejected and I think we did a great job of celebrating our area that year. Since then, Grey Bruce Life has changed formats and no longer prints articles by contributing writers. But you can visit [Grey Bruce Stories](#), and founder Jeremy Walpole, on Facebook.

What I learned while pitching and writing for Grey Bruce Life was invaluable. Placing the focus on celebration created opportunities for discussions and meetings with people in my local area that were productive and phenomenal. I heard the voices of local authors, my own neighbors, that I had never heard before. I gained confidence in my ability to network. I also added some valuable pieces to my own portfolio and do retain all rights to republish them.

My advice to other freelancers is to take a good look at publishing opportunities right where you live, and pitch to every new magazine that you come across. New magazines offer a platform that might not be a lasting opportunity – as we know the publishing industry is unpredictable at best – but new magazines offer fresh perspectives and vibrant opportunities for dialogue that are really priceless.

Analysis

Leanne makes a very good point in this case study: New publications can be a good opportunity, as long as you are willing to take a risk that they may not survive. They are often less competitive, and more likely to give you both leeway and direct feedback. Leanne's pitches also show the value of adding photography to your repertoire, or partnering with a skilled photographer. Magazines are often willing to pay significantly more for photography, in addition to an article, and are often much more likely to accept a pitch if it includes skilled photography.

Your Turn

- Are there new publications in your area that may need freelance writers?
- Are there local networking opportunities, where you can find new publications or photographers to partner with?
- How can you add value to your pitches and proposals, beyond just providing writing?

Case Study

How I Got Featured on The Penny Hoarder and Doubled My Website Traffic

Shelcy Joseph is a freelance writer and the voice behind A Millennial's Guide to Life, a career destination for multi-passionate creatives who want to make a living by doing all the things they love. On her free time, she loves to read, vlog, try out new restaurants and visit new places.

-
- Pitched an article to a popular website
 - She was offered money or a link back to her website
 - Doubled her website traffic by taking the “link” as opposed to the direct payment
-

“

As a freelance writer, I am always looking to grow my personal brand, earn additional income and expand my network. I recently had the opportunity to do all three from being published on [The Penny Hoarder](#).

If you're interested in personal finance, you're probably familiar with the blog. With over 6 million active readers, it's the ultimate destination for tips on managing, growing and saving your money.

A year after subscribing, I came up with an article that I thought would be a great fit for their website. I was going to talk about my side hustle as an [Instagram micro-influencer](#). They had several articles relating to making money on the side, but none of them addressed monetizing social media in that way. So I did my homework and found the email to send submissions to. I was excited to reach out and share my idea. Below is the exact email I sent:

Hello,

My name is Shelcy Joseph and I am - first and foremost - a serial side hustle starter. I'm also a blogger and millennial coach who wants to help creatives make a living by pursuing their passions.

I've been reading The Penny Hoarder for a few months and I'm a huge fan! I recently took it upon myself to become financially literate and your articles have helped me make smart choices! As someone with multiple sources of income, I take particular interest in your "Money Hacks" section.

I was reaching out because I have a story that might be a great fit for your website:

"How A Micro Fashion Influencer Leverages Instagram to Land Paid Opportunities"

I have a solid portfolio of work and below are some writing samples:

<http://www.amillennialsguidetolife.com/3-things-you-can-do-right-now-to-diversify-your-income/><http://www.amillennialsguidetolife.com/secret-to-financial-freedom/>

<http://www.amillennialsguidetolife.com/i-added-700-income-month-heres/>

<http://www.amillennialsguidetolife.com/how-i-made-310-from-craigslist-gigs-in-a-week/>

<http://www.amillennialsguidetolife.com/how-i-made-310-from-craigslist-gigs-in-a-week/>

I would love to contribute to your website! I hope to hear from you soon.

Best regards,

Shelcy Joseph

[LinkedIn](#) / [Blog](#)

They got back to me the following week and their email read:

Hi Shelcy,

Thanks for your interest in contributing to The Penny Hoarder. Can you elaborate on this pitch and include figures? Bullet points are fine.

I followed up with an elaborate outline of the article. They then asked a series of specific questions relating to the side hustle. It was like a screening questionnaire to assess what I could contribute. They eventually (four weeks later) gave me permission to write the full post. It took me two weeks to finish it and two months for us to edit it together. I was given the choice to get paid \$75 or include a link to my website. I chose the potential traffic over the money. In hindsight, I'm glad I did because the return on investment was huge. I was thrilled when [the post](#) finally went live at the end of April!

I couldn't have imagined the amount of publicity the post brought me. With over 50,000 readers, it was their biggest story of the week! I later did a Facebook live with them where I went into details about the article and it boosted the numbers by 11,000 readers.

Almost a month later, I gained over 60 new email subscribers and doubled my website traffic (from 475 monthly visitors to 988). I also increased my Instagram following by 150 and landed the opportunity to be a guest on a podcast.

Being published on a publication I love was a dream come true. It taught me about the value of guest posting as I learned that not all rewards are monetary.

Analysis

This case study shows the potential advantage of running your freelance writing career as a business, and not just as a path to publication (and income). Because Shelcy has her own blog, it gives her the opportunity to build an audience, as well as get paid for her writing. Sometimes she is forced to choose between the two options; in this case, she chose to build her audience, and it paid quite well. In some cases, she can have it both ways: Getting paid and getting links to her website. (As is the case for this case study!)

Your Turn

- Would you have chosen to take the money or the website traffic? Why?
- What could you potentially promote on your own website?
- What else could you promote, besides your website, through your writing/publishing? A book, a business partner, or a charity?

Case Study

From Nine-to-Five to Say-At-Home

Victoria Womersly is Australian born, but moved to the UK in 2004, travelling through South East Asia on the way and visiting various development projects in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Nepal. She has a long standing interest in environmental, equality and human rights issues and enjoy writing about related topics. She combines many of her interests with her love of writing and has had her work published on a wide range of websites and printed media, as well as working directly with non-profits and businesses around the world crafting content that informs, excites and supports them to create a kinder world.

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- Wanted to work from home when her maternity leave ended
 - Shifted to thinking about her writing career as a business
 - Developed and implemented a marketing plan
 - Matched her income from her traditional job, working 16 hours a week
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For years I worked in a regular 9 - 5 job, dreaming of becoming a writer. Eventually, I signed up to a creative writing correspondence course and wrote in the evenings, working my way through the practical assignments – learning all about the different types of non-fiction markets, styles and opportunities.

Throughout that time, I had some success with articles and letters being printed in magazines, however, it was never big enough to warrant me quitting the security of my job.

With the arrival of my first child, my partner was made redundant from his position and began freelancing as an archaeological illustrator. After nine months of paid maternity leave I chose to return to work part-time to help provide some stability of income for our family.

Around the same time, I responded to an ad for volunteer writers and began writing for a charity's blog about maternal health, equality and social justice issues and carried on submitting the occasional piece to magazines and newspapers on my own and as my correspondence course instructed.

It wasn't until three years later when my second child was born and I opted for voluntary redundancy that the opportunity to move away from the 9 – 5 grind seemed feasible. We needed to move to a bigger house to accommodate our growing family, and as I didn't have a job to return to after my maternity leave ended, we decided to move somewhere for lifestyle rather than work – North Devon in England. Around this time I was offered the Volunteer Editorial role with the charity blog and began editing contributor's works, along with occasionally writing posts.

As the end of my paid maternity leave drew closer, I began to feel the pressure to return to work. I really didn't want to go back to a typical office type of job, be it full or part time. I wanted to make the leap into the world of freelancing writing and wasn't sure of how to go about it despite the correspondence course preparation.

Initially, I tried finding work on freelancing platforms like Elance (which has now become Upwork) with limited success - my income was sporadic at best. I 'won' some difficult jobs and some pretty low paid work that had me earning around £5 per hour (sometimes less). I took them on despite the awful pay just to build my account profile and positive feedback. I also took on a few jobs for free from friends to build my portfolio and had a few articles accepted by the local papers, but although they accepted work, they didn't pay freelancers. Competition was tough and I could see that these platforms were simply taking me closer to the situation of needing to find a 'proper job'.

What I really wanted was a regular income writing about topics that mattered to me with clients whose businesses or causes I believed in. I wanted to be able to work on a brief given to me by the client – just as my partner did with his illustration work - rather than complete hours of market research on magazines, brainstorm topic ideas that *might* published and then send countless pitches trying to get paid for the time I'd already taken so I could write the piece I had in mind. But everything I'd learned in the non-fiction modules of the creative writing course told me that that was the life of a freelance writer.

Then it came to me – just like any other business out there selling a product or service, I needed to get in touch with the people I wanted to make my customers, to let them know what I did and why it would make a difference to their cause or business. I had to reach out and stop waiting for the perfect client to appear on freelancing platforms, or the editor that would love my article and offer a regular writing gig.

I decided to take a chance and write to local charities and businesses in my area. I grabbed the local phone book and took down the details of EVERY charitable organisation, web design company and marketing agency in my area. I researched those I had listed on the internet, noting what their websites were like (if they had one), who the business or organisation head was, and their contact details. If I couldn't find what I needed on the internet I called them to ask for the information. I spent around ten minutes on each prospect and put basic details into a spreadsheet so I could track communications.

I bartered some content work for business cards with my brother in Australia and had him send me 250 cards with my contact details on one side and the writing services I could provide on the other. While I waited for these to arrive I thought about what made me unique, what I could bring to those businesses and organizations and how I would like to work with them if I did get a positive response. I created two prospecting templates – one for businesses and one for charitable organizations. I decided to send these out by post along with my business card, rather than an email as I wanted my pitch to be noticed and not get lost in someone's junk mail.

I recorded the date these letters were sent on a spreadsheet and followed up with each of the organizations who'd not responded to my letter two weeks after posting. Most of calls went something like this:

Me: 'Hi, my names Victoria, I was wondering if I could speak with x about the letter I sent two weeks ago as I haven't yet heard back.'

Receptionist: 'Sure, may I ask who is calling?'

Me: 'Yes, it's Victoria.'

Receptionist: 'I'll just put you through.'

Client: 'Hello, X speaking.'

Me: 'Hi X, I'm just calling to follow up on the letter I sent you on x date. I've not heard from you and I was wondering if you received my letter and if so, what you thought about using my writing services.'

I received some great feedback from the calls which I used to refine future prospecting letters and expand my prospecting.

I carried on sending out around 3 prospecting letters a fortnight to charities, web designers, printing companies and marketing agencies as well as contacting the organizations I had already sent letters to, which included a local charity. I was put straight through to the Managing Director and invited for a meeting the following week to discuss my proposal.

At this meeting I clarified what I could do for them and my hourly rate. (A project fee wasn't applicable for the ongoing work they wanted.)

The Managing Director took the details to the next trustee meeting and I was subsequently authorized a limit of £500 per month to manage their social media accounts, work through the content of their current website and re-write it for the new site, and also to write blog posts about their work and news articles for the local media. I logged my time working for them manually on a word document and invoiced them at the end of each month for my time, detailing the tasks I had carried out in the hours they were being invoiced for.

Shortly after this, I heard back from a web design agency I had contacted requesting a meeting with me. I met the owner to talk about what I could do for her and her clients. She was very eager to tell me about how successful she was and that I would find it impossible to find work with anyone other than her. She wanted a 20% cut of any work I did for her clients. Despite writing up a detailed proposal for her, no work was ever sent my way.

While working for the local charity, I carried on contacting web design agencies by post. When calling one agency to obtain details for my letter, I was asked to chat with the head designer over the phone about why I wanted to write to them. After explaining what I was doing, they asked me to email their Managing Director immediately as they had some content work they needed doing almost straight away. I did as requested and received my first job from them that week – crafting content for a sail making company's location pages to improve the Google search ratings.

After that first job I received occasional content writing work from them every second month or so, usually to the value of around £150 – the web design agency asked me to bill their clients directly and never asked for a cut on the work I did through them – I was adding value to their business by supplying the content their clients needed but did not have the experience, expertise or time to do themselves.

I should note that although I work for an hourly rate with the charity, this is mainly due to the nature of the work they have me doing. I prefer to charge a flat project fee to most other clients, which I base on how many pages and what kinds of pages I am writing content for (Landing pages cost more than other web pages), or by how long I estimate a job will take me

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with a little bit of breathing space added for unexpected issues arising. I charge a lower rate for working with charitable organizations (£16p/h, and a higher rate for other work £20p/h)

Six months into my contract with the charity, I requested a meeting with the General Manager; I'd found I was spending more time on their account than what I was budgeted to. I explained to him what I had achieved for them over that time and that I needed to cover the additional time I was spending. He asked me how much extra I was working – about £100 – and immediately increased my budget to make up the difference.

After 1 year I was working a maximum of 16 hours a week writing, with two regular clients and additional occasional clients (through referrals) requesting one-off jobs, I was earning £800 per month - the same as my income as a 3-day office worker all those years ago after the birth of my first son. However, I didn't have any commute costs (I work from a cupboard in our dining room!), child care costs were vastly reduced and I am able to flex my work time so it fits around my family life, allowing me to be the kind of parent I always wanted to be – present and able to enjoy time with my partner and children without the worry of income.

Victoria's Prospecting Template:

Contact Name	Victoria Womersley
Contact Title	Freelance Writer
Business Name	Address Line 1
Address line 1	Postcode
Address line 2	Ph:
Town	Email:
County	
Post code	

DATE

Dear **Contact Name**,

Recently I came across (**Business Name and where I discovered them**) and wanted to make contact as I am interested in your business and the possibility of working with you. As a freelance writer who has recently moved here, I am looking to build my local client base and know that I could offer great value to your company and its members.

For the past 5 years I have worked with companies across the globe providing a variety of business writing; my most recent project being the (**insert relevant high profile project here**). In addition to this I am the Blog Editor for [REDACTED], writing myself and managing a group of volunteer writers and photographers to ensure content stays fresh, on theme and is renewed daily.

My background is in Communications and Customer Services within the charitable sector, and since finishing my contract with [REDACTED] I have refocused my efforts toward building my writing into a full-time occupation.

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Today's customers make most of their purchasing decisions online, often visiting a company's website before ever walking through the door, so web sites, blogs and other social media are more important than ever. It is not enough these days to simply be the best at what you do, you need to let the world know this through the various social networks that we are all now familiar with. Better copy now translates to increased interest and sales for businesses and this is where I can help.

I specialise in providing the following types of business copy, and would like to offer these services to you:

- Company materials for promotion/information or internal use
- Web content and Blog posts
- Social media support – tweets, LinkedIn profile management, blog editing, Facebook page management.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume and contact details, I would also be more than happy to provide examples of my work. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Kind regards,

Victoria Womersley
Freelance Writer

Analysis

There's a lot to like about this case study. First, Victoria's focus on her writing career as a business gave her the tools she needed to find new clients. The mailing campaign, followup phone calls, and the level of organization she used to track her results are all standard aspects of many businesses.

Your Turn

- How can you structure your new-client acquisition from a business perspective? More specifically, what tools and systems can you use?
- Have you built a "prospect list" of potential clients to contact? If not, how can you go about creating such a list?

Your Next Steps

This book raises many questions for the potential freelance writer. It also presents many answers that your fellow writers have found.

The next step is for you to begin to create your own case study.

Imagine the path you want to take with your writing career. You can blend together these case studies, bring in your own fresh ideas, and start to take action.

Here are some possibilities:

- Choose a niche
- Start to approach potential clients
- Build a portfolio of published writing
- Continue learning by enrolling in [The No B.S. Course on Freelance Writing](#)

If you have any questions, feel free to email me: jacob@freedomwithwriting.com

