

# The Freelance Writer's Marketing Plan

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An intensive, self-guided workbook to help you jump-start your freelance career, market your skills, and get more clients.



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# How to use this eBook

As much as many freelance writers hate to admit it, when you work as an independent professional, you're a one-person business. In this business, there's the writing department, the accounting department, and the marketing department.

With recent changes in the job market, more self-employed writers are competing for freelance and contract jobs. With many magazines folding and websites closing, many writers have found it necessary to venture out of their area of expertise and seek out new clients. Other freelance writers that are just getting started may have no idea how to target markets or find clients that fit with their skill set.

## A special note to newbie and "will-be" freelance writers:

Don't become a victim of "putting the free in freelance." Many new writers fall prey to stingy businesses and are "scammed" into writing for free, with the belief that they will be "discovered." There are certain situations that writing for free can be rewarding and profitable in the long run, however, most of these opportunities don't come from future clients. Before you quit your day job or give away your valuable rights, try out this workbook to create a valuable plan for self-promotion.

This workbook is designed to give your "marketing department" a jump-start!

Like any good writing, your marketing plan will start with the general and move toward specifics. You'll first define your skills, clients and prospects. You'll create a capabilities statement that you can base your marketing plan around and integrate with your promotional materials.

Once you have defined these basic business aspects, this workbook will guide you through brainstorming promotion ideas and provide you with an effective plan template that you can follow to get the most out of your marketing efforts. **You can use this workbook over and over again -- when you want to enter a new business area, market new skills, or seek out new clients!** Whenever you want to change the way your career is going, you'll have a great template to work from and expand on.

You'll notice in this workbook that we refer to various places online to find writing jobs and list your skills. You can find many of these places using search engines. However, this workbook was also created to be a "perfect companion" to our eBook, *The Writer's Online Survival Guide*. We'd like you to keep this in mind. :-)) With your marketing plan, you can plan all of the steps and promotional materials to make your freelance writing business a success. With the *Writer's Online Survival Guide*, you can put your plan to the test with over 250+ writing-specific job boards, directories, and service-auction websites. You won't have to search for jobs and you won't have to market blindly!

All of the workbook pages can be printed out and worked on. You'll want to get into "brainstorming" mode. You can take a day to write out your plan or just a few minutes a day to prevent burnout. **Just remember, the sooner you write the plan, the sooner you can put it into action!**

**Hint:**

Gather all your resumes, writing samples, published and unpublished clips together while you fill out these worksheets. You'll be amazed at the wealth of knowledge your past holds!

## Step 1: Defining Your Skills

Okay, so.... You're a great writer. You can be serious, quirky, "teenage cool" or collection-agency conservative. These are great skills that show how well you adapt to different environments, audiences, and writing styles. However, your future publishers and clients are looking for a specific set of skills, and "generalist" may not be one of them.

So, let's narrow it down a little and get specific about what you are capable of. Freelance clients may be interested in skills that may include software expertise, industry knowledge, and publishing credits. However, even if you're a homemaker or a bakery clerk, there are still things you're capable of that may not be apparent to you.

**All** of your life experience qualifies when you're a freelance writer. (Isn't that a beautiful thing?)

Print out the worksheet on the following page and take your time filling it out.

# Step 1: Worksheet A - Assessing Your Skills

**1. What kind of writer are you? What is your primary writing experience? (Example: I am a freelance business writer. I've written white papers, brochures, etc.)**

**2. What fields have you worked in? What are your hobbies and interests? (Example: I have worked in customer service, telecommunications, and a brief stint as a data entry clerk. I enjoy arts and crafts, movies, and music.)**

**3. What types of publications and/or businesses have you written for? What industries do they serve?**

**4. Who are your competitors? (Okay, this can be tricky -- but if you work as a copywriter, you may have to compete with ad agencies. If you write web content, you may have to compete with full-service web design companies.)**

**5. What technology is available to you? (Do you have a fax, cable modem, etc.)? What software do you have on your computer? Can you program HTML? (Some clients may actually require these skills, so if you have them, you'll want to include them!)**

**6. What is your education? What degrees do you hold? Have you won any awards?**

**7. What committees or organizations do you belong to?**

**8. Take a look your answers to the questions above. What areas are "thickest"? What skills set you apart from the rest? What benefits will your clients and publisher receive from your services? Circle or highlight the three strongest areas and move on to worksheet B.**

# Step 1: Worksheet B - Capabilities Statement

**1. Create an "About Me" Statement:** Emphasizing your 3 strongest areas, write a paragraph on what YOU can DO for your client. If you have little writing experience, mention other skills you've proven in the past -- such as meeting tight deadlines, excellent research skills, or proven interviewing abilities.

**2. Create a "Services List":** Make a list of specific writing and editing services you can offer to your clients. Cover any and all project types you would like to explore and feel comfortable with.

**3. Resources and Technology Statement:** List all technology, software, and document formats you are comfortable with. If you have access to business databases or the Library of Congress, list it here.

**4. Experience and Education Statement:** List your education, recent projects, clients, and publishing credits. (If you don't have a long list of clients, specific projects will work here. If you have little or no experience, you may want to emphasize your education or industry experience here in paragraph form.)

**Once you've finished the worksheet, you may want to polish your work and type it out. See the following page for an example. Consultants call this a "Capabilities Brochure."**

# Sample Capabilities Statement

**Note:** I wrote the following Capabilities Statement my first year as a freelance writer. The client list isn't very long and my education is omitted. I created a cover sheet with a nice graphic and the title "Capabilities Statement for Melissa Brewer" with my name, address, and contact information and sent it out with a letter and writing samples to prospective clients. It worked!

## Services Available:

Web-based clients need content-driven solutions to attract and retain website users. I employ effective, unique content for business, nonprofit, and startup websites. I create content that attracts and retains users, enhances credibility and establishes trust. I also create corporate and technical documents that generate goodwill and enhance my clients' external and internal communications. Combined, my web content and print writing services are powerfully targeted to reach customers in a voice they trust and in a style they understand.

Specifically, my writing services include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Online articles written according to web style guidelines
- ◆ Web-based training and course content
- ◆ Website copywriting
- ◆ Email copywriting, newsletter creation, and direct marketing pieces
- ◆ Direct mail print, sales, and fundraising letters
- ◆ Print brochure, annual reports, and postcard copy
- ◆ Technical documentation, white papers, and user manual creation
- ◆ Press releases for both print and web
- ◆ Advertising copy
- ◆ Business and marketing plan rewriting, editing, or "overhaul"

Your print and web documents are delivered in the technology you are comfortable with. Delivery options are:

- ◆ Mail, Fedex, or other overnight , hard-copy delivery methods
- ◆ Fax
- ◆ CD Rom
- ◆ Disk
- ◆ HTML format
- ◆ MS Word (.doc) format
- ◆ Adobe Acrobat file (.pdf)
- ◆ Zip disk
- ◆ Email
- ◆ Other standard file formats (call for details)

A few of Melissa Brewer's recent projects have included:

## **PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS**

### **Fun101.com**

Created a series of unique tag lines and signature lines for promoting the new Fun101.com online storefront.

### **Trailjournals.com**

### **Optinmarketing.com**

Series of press releases relating website services to current events, announced new product developments and features.

## **TECHNICAL WRITING**

### **Port2Web.com**

Re-wrote 3 user manuals for end-users of web-based ASP geared toward the telecommunications industry. Manuals included Help Desk, Sub Administrator, and Customer. Wrote technical documentation, bug testing, and quality assurance.

### **Service911.com/Learnlots.com**

100 web-based tutorials on Cyber Snoop software consisting of 4 to 8 steps each. For each step, I performed a screen capture and resized graphics to meet their specifications.

### **Comcore Utilities Products**

Created user manual for their shoring, roadplates, and manhole covers. Instructions on assembly for construction crews.

## **ARTICLES (WEB AND PRINT)**

### **Pagewise.com**

"Discipline Your Children More Effectively"

"How to Ask for a Raise!"

"Spruce Up Your Resume!"

"Fibromyalgia: Definition and Diagnosis"

"How to Correct a Bad Credit Report"

"Volunteer Your Way to a New Career"

"Cut Your Grocery Bill without Cutting the Meal"

"How to Write Haiku"

"Build a Great Credit Record"

"Teach Your Child Responsibility"

"Help Your Kids Get Their Homework Done"

### **Webmastersuite.com**

"Drive Business to Your Website Using Auction Sites"

"Checking Out Shopping Carts"

"Merchant Accounts and Payment Processors"

"Keeping the Customers You Find"

"Protect Your Website with Policies"

How's it going?

So, how do you like this eBook so far? Are you feeling more confident about your writing prospects yet? Do you have suggestions or comments? We'd love to hear from you. Email the author at [mysmys@comcast.net](mailto:mysmys@comcast.net)!

## Step 2: Targeting Clients

You now know what you want to write, what skills you want to market, and what general industries you want to market to.

It's time to set your sights on prospective clients and publishers. Keep your Capabilities Statement and Worksheets A and B handy while you answer the following questions to narrow down the companies you do, or don't, want to work for.

Print out the worksheet on the following page and take your time filling it out.

## **Step 2: Worksheet C - Targeting Clients**

**1. What types of businesses or publishers would benefit most from your freelance writing services? How can they benefit from your expertise? (For example, if you're a work-from-home mom, you can lend some great advice on balancing work and career. If you worked as a nurse, you can lend insight to the medical community. Look at your list of interests, hobbies, and experience and make a list!)**

**2. What kind of values and attitudes best describe your prospective clients?**

**3. What type of problems do these clients face? (For publishers, what problems do their audiences face?)**

**4. Where can you find these businesses? (If you are interested in writing about pets, how do you go about finding pet websites in need of articles? You can use a search engine or go to a guideline database online. If you want to write technical manuals, are there websites that list technical writing gigs? If you just want work, you can browse the hundreds of job boards and listings and apply to them all!)**

**5. What is the best way to approach these prospects? (For the pet websites, you can query an editor. For technical writing job boards, you can weed through the ads and respond with a resume and samples.)**

## **Step 2: Worksheet D - Preparing to Market**

**1. Take a look at your capabilities statement. What can you change to target the clients on Worksheet C?**

**2. With these client types in mind, what types of promotional material would work best for outreach? (For example, a busy corporation may respond better to a letter and a brochure than a phone call. Web content companies would most likely be more responsive if you have a website. Magazines would be interested in a published clip and a query letter.)**

**3. Which of the following do you NOT have?**

- a. Website**
- b. Brochure**
- c. Resume**
- d. Writing samples**

**(OK, this was a trick question! You can use a Capabilities Brochure in place of a resume; you can create samples on your own if you need to, and you can now easily write a brochure about the services you offer. If you don't have any of these, get writing! These can be great samples in and of themselves.)**

## **Step 3: Planning Your Marketing Efforts**

Now is time for the "painful" part. It's time to write the "plan." This part is the meat of your marketing plan, and it requires brainstorming and research.

The following pages will guide you through brainstorming marketing methods, pinpointing places you want to promote, and establishing credibility both on and off-line.

These pages are pretty thorough, so you may want to do them a day at a time.

## **Step 3: Worksheet E - Planning Your Marketing with Direct Contact**

The most difficult thing I've had to do as a freelancer is cold calling -- looking up names in a phone book or directory and asking them if they hire freelancers. Direct contact can be frustrating and humbling. You can also directly contact prospects through postal mailings and email lists. This method is listed first so you can get it over with -- if it helps, think of it as a "backup" plan if all of your other marketing methods fail.

**1. How can you find prospects to contact directly? (Directories, phone book, email list rentals.)**

**2. What information will you want to have about them on hand? What will you say to them? (Will you get a copy of their brochure and pitch them on some better copy? Will you explain that your expertise in X industry for X years can lend some valuable experience to their sales efforts?)**

**3. If you write a direct mail or email to them, what will you say? What materials will you send them?**

**4. How will you follow up with prospects? (Forward them a copy of your recent article from a trade magazine in their industry? Send a Christmas card?)**

## **Step 3: Worksheet F - Planning Your Marketing with Referrals**

Referrals can often be "miracles" for the freelance writer. When times are slow and you've exhausted all your options, a referral may send a client your way out of nowhere. If you've never had a client before, perhaps you have a friend or colleague that can send some business your way. Alternatively, many companies on the Internet have set up paid and free referral networks for freelancers around the world.

**1. What clients, past or present, would recommend your services? Do you feel comfortable soliciting referrals from them?**

**2. What print directories list freelance writers? (For example, many trade publications and writing associations have member directories available for potential clients to browse.) What do you need to do to get listed in them?**

**3. What referral networks exist online? (There are hundreds of these, see my post-it note to bypass the research!)**

**4. What online freelance directories can you get your services listed in? (There are hundreds of these, see my post-it note to bypass the research!)**

**5. What freelance placement agencies, ad agencies, and creative services firms (see "competition" on worksheet A) have subcontracting opportunities available? How can you solicit them? (There are hundreds of these, see my post-it note to bypass the research!)**

## **Step 3: Worksheet G - Planning Your Marketing through Networking**

Ah, networking. It lends credibility, dispels the writer's stereotypical loneliness and doubt, and keeps you "in the know" about projects that are available or upcoming with certain "would-be" clients. At times, networking can be boring or feel wasteful. At other times, you'll make some valuable contacts and great friends, both on and off the Internet.

**1. Where can you network in the real world? (Take a look at worksheet A -- chances are, there are plenty of places you already go to! Also, consider local business organizations, writers' conferences, etc.)**

**2. Where can you network online? (Do you belong to a freelance writing discussion list? What about discussion lists, newsletters, and message boards in the industries you are targeting?)**

**3. How can you find more places to network off-line? (Look in professional directories, find out about trade shows, attend seminars?)**

**4. How can you find more places to network online? (Join discussion lists, message boards?)**

**5. How will you participate in networking? (Will you lend your expertise by writing an article -- for free -- for one of these organizations? Will you participate as an active member on discussion lists?)**

Newbies and "Will-Be" Freelance Writers:

This is the section that discusses writing for free!

## **Step 3: Worksheet H - Planning Your Marketing through Subtle Self-Promotion Strategies**

On the Internet, and in the real world, the best way to get the attention of prospective clients is through subtle self-promotion. While self-promotion strategies can work with direct contact and networking, **blatant** self-promotion can wreak havoc and likely get you banned from those valued discussion lists or shunned at your local Chamber of Congress. As writers, we often think of self-promotion along the same lines as begging for a project. This is the furthest thing from the truth! Many of us write promotional materials for our clients and think of creative campaigns to help them get media attention. Why not put some effort into getting media attention for yourself?

1. Take a look at worksheet A again. What accomplishments and skills stand out as uniquely yours?
  
2. What articles are you uniquely qualified to write that highlight your expertise? What nonprofit organizations, nonprofit websites, etc. would be interested in these articles? (For example, many websites for writers need articles on the craft of writing, but typically cannot pay. There are also countless "free content" websites and lists that accept free reprint articles and give you a "blurb" about whatever aspect you want to showcase. "How To" articles are typically the most effective and require the least amount of research.)
  
3. How can you leverage your email communications and discussion lists to get free publicity? (Do you have a signature line in your email? Can you announce to the group when a new article goes online?)
  
4. What projects or aspects of your services are press-worthy *right now*? Can you write a press release to announce them?

Want to save a lot of time?

Blatant self-promotion here.

The *Writer's Online Survival Guide* lists over 250+ writing-specific job sources. You'll get instant access to networking resources, directories to list your services, job boards, lists, and more! (And free updates all year round, too.)

You'll still want to finish this workbook if you have the *Guide*, but you won't have to spend hours searching and researching to find the places online you'll need implement your plan!

## Step 4: Implementing Your Plan

By now, you've probably had an information overload. There are so many techniques, resources, and events you can use to promote your services; it may seem an overwhelming task to get started!

Anyone in the corporate world can tell you that your marketing plan never ends, it only adapts and evolves. In fact, it may simply grow more complex over time.

Luckily, you don't have to do it all at once. Decide how much time that you will initially dedicate to marketing your services each week. An intensive effort can help you gain results both immediately and in the long-term. What works best? It depends on your schedule. If you can afford to dedicate an entire day to marketing, go for it! If not, why not start or end your day with an hour of marketing?

Once you're listed in the right places and know where to find the job listings you're interested in, you can step your marketing efforts down a notch. Potential clients will be able to find you, freelance placement agencies will know how to contact you, and your referral network will be working for you.

The next page is a sample outline of a week's worth of marketing plan. There's a blank page following it that you can print out and fill out on your own. You can plan weeks or months ahead, or take it a week at a time. Always include at least one activity from each of the planning worksheets to cover your bases. And don't skip the marketing, even if you're swamped with projects! Freelance writers often spend weeks busy working, only to find that the months ahead are a standstill.

## Step 4: Sample Weekly Marketing Plan

### This week I plan to:

#### Contact:

Editors for PetSmart.com and Petco.com and introduce my services via email. I'll ask if they are interested in a weekly advice column. I will send a query with my signature and website address. If they are interested, I will follow up with relevant published clips on the pet industry.

I will also go to WritersDigest.com's database to look up relevant consumer magazine guidelines and choose a few to explore and/or query.

#### Referrals:

I will list my services with the following freelance directories/referral networks online:

[www.freelancers.net](http://www.freelancers.net)  
[www.guru.com](http://www.guru.com)  
[www.bizcardz.net](http://www.bizcardz.net)

I will also fill out the applications at Aquent.com and [www.eecomcommunications.com](http://www.eecomcommunications.com) to be considered for future freelance work.

#### Networking:

I will find 2 discussion lists for writers and join. I will also seek out pet industry discussion lists and actively participate. I will call my local Chamber of Commerce and inquire about membership.

#### Self-Promotion:

I will send previously published articles (which I own the rights to) on dog breeding to free content databases and websites. I will create a "blurb" linking to my website and/or resume at the bottom of the article. When I get notification that one of these articles is published, I will forward the URL to the industry discussion lists I belong to.

I will create an email signature that will be set up to go out with every email I send.

# **Marketing Plan for the Week of \_\_\_\_\_**

**This week I plan to:**

**Contact:**

**Referrals:**

**Networking:**

**Self-Promotion:**

Thank you for using this workbook!

If you liked this eBook, you'll love The Writer's Online Survival Guide! The Guide will give you access to 250+ writing-specific websites to market your work, list your skills, and join referral networks. And you'll get free updates throughout the year. Visit [WebWritingBuzz.com](http://WebWritingBuzz.com) to get the Guide and eliminate your freelance job search.

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