

Freelancing Firebird



Your Guide to Setting up a Profitable Commercial Writing Business

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Introduction

I first started freelance writing by complete accident. I was casually surfing the internet one day and came across an advert promising to make me a [Wealthy Writer](#). I immediately bought it. My son had just turned one and I had just turned down the opportunity to take a job as a teaching assistant because I simply could not afford the childcare.

I was frustrated and bored sat at home, and although I loved being with my little boy, I was upset at leaving a job I loved so much just because the childcare costs were beyond me. I went through the writing course eagerly I bought previously and by the end of the week, I had a plan of action which I was going to follow.

It turned out to be the best thing I ever did. Although it was great for getting me started, I realised that writing online would be a pointless exercise for me because the competition was far too stiff. There were literally thousands of writers all over the world competing for the same writing jobs as me.

There had to be a better way. Although I did get a few jobs following the advice in the [Wealthy Writer](#), this is not where the bulk of my work came from. Over the next few months, I honed my skills as a writer and made many financial mistakes along the way, buying things that perhaps I didn't need or could have done without.

Eventually, I made myself a marketing plan and stuck to it religiously. I changed direction in my work and found big success in the commercial writing field. I was no longer writing for random clients from all over the internet (although I did this too on the side) but was now writing for professional and full time businesses that paid really well.

When the money started rolling in at rates like \$125/hr, I knew I was onto something big. I started advertising in local magazines and started branching into copywriting which I did very successfully. And I managed to do all this from home whilst raising a toddler and a seven year old, not to mention looking after my elderly parents-in law and my home.

Freelance writing was my last ditch attempt to do something worthwhile after having my children. Looking back, I wish I had done it earlier, although I don't regret my other jobs, because I learned so much from them.

If you can write well, you can freelance. This guide assumes you can write well. Teaching you to write well is beyond the scope of this guide. If you are serious about freelance writing and making a profitable career out of it, but lack the grammar and English skills necessary, then I strongly suggest you should do an English course at your local adult education college first.

Freelancing is not a 'get rich quick scheme' or anything like that. Like all businesses, it takes time to nurture and grow into something profitable. Once you do it though, I can guarantee you will never go back to writing for online sites at dirt cheap rates or going back to work for a boss ever again.

Freelancing gives you freedom which is unparalleled to anything else I know and gives you the satisfaction of turning a few hours work into the equivalent of a full week of the daily grind.

Outlined in this guide are all the tips and techniques you need to build and sustain a profitable commercial freelancing career. Hitting six figures freelancing full time is perfectly achievable within 3 years, and here's the best bit – you can do it until you're a hundred years old if you want to, there's no age limit or cut off point!

Why Freelance Writing?

Mention freelance writing to most people and a quizzical look appears on their face. Freelance writing, or should I say commercial freelance writing is when you write for businesses and organizations such as educational services, councils and healthcare providers etc.

One day you maybe writing for a small shop selling computer hardware, and the next you could be writing newsletters for a larger solicitor's firm. The work varies hugely. You may get web work one day and write a report for a college another day. Whatever you do, one thing is for sure – you will never be bored doing it, as projects come and go and the work changes massively with it each time.

Whatever you write, I can assure you that you never have to take on work you are not happy with. That's the beauty of working for yourself. No boss, no being tied down to unrealistic working schedules. You can work in your pyjamas. You can work in your underwear and no one will ever know!

You can set your own rates and you can decide how long it will take to work on a project. You never have to worry about when to book holidays – you have the freedom to take on as much or as little work as you want. You can tend to your

family's needs whenever you need to, and if your kids are sick, you don't have to take unpaid leave to look after them.

You will never have to worry about childcare or a babysitter. You can spend as much or as little time as you want with your family and you can work on building your business in your spare time. If you are already working and want to switch careers, you can do so easily and painlessly by preparing your business and building it up in your spare time.

If you are sick of the fact that you are rushing in the morning to do the school run and get to work on time as well, then freelancing gives you the freedom to do the school run, tend to your home, prepare dinner and build a business from home instead.

The financial freedom from freelancing is amazing. In one job I did for a local college, I made more money in 6 hours than I did working 64 hours of my regular part time job. Now that's what I call smart working. And it is something you can do too.

If you have just had a baby and are already worried about how you are going to manage going back to work, then freelancing could be a viable and very rewarding alternative for you. Whatever your reasons for freelancing, rest assured you **can** do it, and you can do it **well**.

Starting From Scratch

Could You Freelance Full Time?

I freelance part-time because it fits in around my family. I have a young baby that demands a lot of time and attention, so the part-time set up works perfectly for me. That said, ask yourself this, if you have considered giving up your day job and freelancing, how would you cope?

Freelancing full time requires a major commitment. Add to that the need to be a stickler for detail and organizing your time responsibly. After all, you may have other commitments such as a family for whom you have to provide. You are your own boss, so if you struggle with motivation and being able to set your own targets and goals, freelancing may not be for you.

Also, could you live without a full time wage? As all freelancers know (and don't I know it!) you go through cycles of feast and famine. I went through a period of about six weeks without any paid gigs, and while it was depressing, it was certainly far from catastrophic. You see, I'm not the breadwinner, and thankfully, my husband has a good job and fulfils the role of providing for our family. I don't have that stress, but you may not have that luxury of a safety net.

If you are sick, no one is going to pay you. The fact that the life of a freelancer is so ad-hoc prevents many a would-be full timer from taking the plunge. You have to set your own rules. You have to do the leg work. If you cannot be bothered or don't have the time, forget it, you'll never succeed.

Freelancing full time requires gusto and drive - more so than working for someone else. You ARE your business and have to treat it like one, or you will fall pitifully by the wayside with all those other would be freelance writers.

My advice? If you are looking to go it alone, keep your options open. Work full time and spend your spare time setting yourself up. It typically takes about 6 months for many freelancers to find their feet and really get going. If it is something you passionately believe in as I do, go part-time if you can afford to and spend the rest of the time putting your all into your work.

I know of freelancers who work on weekdays and spend their weekends doing a part-time job to ensure that there is money rolling in. Whatever your reasons for going freelance, ALWAYS have a backup plan in order to support you when things

are slow. A sensible person would ideally save enough money to comfortably quit their day job to go it alone.

Your Home Office

First things first. You need a place to work, and what could be better than your own place of privacy? Let's be honest though, if you want to do well as a freelance writer, you need to lose the idea that you can just work wherever you fancy at home.

Set up a designated work space for yourself. It doesn't matter where it is, as long as you take the following into consideration:

- Should be comfortable and not cramped
- You should have ample room for files, folders, books and a proper place to work
- Somewhere where you are unlikely to be disturbed repeatedly (you will be if you are working from the dining table!)
- Somewhere that doesn't have any distractions like a TV or radio or anything else which can prevent you from focusing on your work

Wherever you choose to work, you should be happy working there. Don't forget you can end up spending hours a day in your office, so ensure that you have all your creature comforts to make it a place you will enjoy working in.

I know it sounds obvious, but these are the things you should have when working:

- Comfortable chair with adequate back support and which can be height adjusted
- Desk with a large work surface
- Laptop or PC with an external mouse
- printer
- broadband (try and avoid modems as they are slower)
- fax
- scanner
- telephone
- photocopier (you can buy all in one printers with fax, copy and scan facilities on them)
- diary
- Dictaphone
- Mobile phone
- Notebooks (paper)

You probably already have most of the above. What you need to do now is organize your workspace. I suggest that you do it in a way that is positive to your writing.

Too many times a messy or disorganized workspace is the reason why many writers don't feel 'in the mood to write'. It's your workspace, so make the most of it and personalize it.

You may wish to get an ergonomic keyboard with a mouse if you are concerned about repetitive strain injury (RSI) to your hands. Believe you me, it's worth paying a bit more for at least a mouse rather than using the touchpad mouse that many laptops feature.

I had severe RSI to the point where my elbows were swollen from repeated use of the touchpad mouse. Within days of using a mouse, the problem subsided dramatically.

One that I recommend is the KeySonic remote keyboard. If you have a 'clunky' keyboard, this too can cause problems with your hands. I recommend you buy this one.

Laptop or PC?

Most homes have either a laptop or a PC. I recommend a laptop if you can because they are portable. I often go and stay at my moms during vacations, so taking my laptop with me is a must.

Ensure that yours has the following installed on it without fail:

- [Carbonite](#) – this costs around \$50 a year and is something I would urge **everyone to have**. It's an online backup server which automatically backs up **everything** you write or create and backs up changes automatically. At least if your computer is broken, damaged or stolen, you will always have a backup of your work no matter where you are in the world. Forget external hard drives, because even they can crash and corrupt. This is the backup of choice for every professional. I certainly would not be without it.
- [Dropbox](#) – this is a brilliant bit of software that allows you to share larger files with other users and clients instead of attaching them to emails (which usually have a file limit). You simply drop your files into the dropbox folder (which you will install on your desktop) and away you go. There is a tutorial on the website of how to use it.
- Microsoft Office – this is the software of choice as you will need Microsoft Word to write all your documents in. You can also use [Open Office](#) which is free to download and is similar to MS Word and compatible with it as well.

- [Adobe Reader](#) – you will probably need this to read PDF files as well as create them for clients. These are simply published documents which cannot be changed or altered once downloaded.
- Security software such as [AVG](#) which can be downloaded for free and has free upgrades for life will protect your computer from hackers and viruses. An essential for every computer. If you can afford the paid version, you get identity protection as well, which makes things like buying online even safer.

A good bookshelf with ample room for all your books and materials is a necessity. Also consider a filing system – it doesn't have to be posh – something simple will do to help file away invoices etc.

Most clients will pay online and give you a digital receipt, so ensure your computer is organized carefully so you know where everything is and you don't end up spending hours searching for things afterwards because you can't remember where you stored them.

Invoicing Clients

A long time ago, everything was done by cheque or by card. Boy, have things changed! I suggest that you get yourself a [PayPal](#) account if you haven't already done so and use this as your primary means of invoicing clients.

The great thing about this is that your clients don't have to have PayPal to make a payment. You simply make a 'Request Money' transaction and fill out the details. Your other alternative is to issue a paper invoice (I suggest you use a free template which you can download from [here](#)).

The standard time length for an invoice is 30 days, but you can choose 14 days or 7 days instead if you like. Just make sure your client is aware of this.

Showcasing Your Work

Building Your Portfolio

Ok, you have set your office up and now you want to start writing. Great! You have the right idea...sort of.

Most people who start freelancing have no idea where to start. Before you can land yourself ANY job at all, you need to start building your portfolio. How do you do that when you have no clients?

Simple, start with what you know first. What are you naturally good at? Are you a good cook? Do you have extensive experience in a particular area that you could easily write about? What about hobbies? Identify the areas you are most comfortable writing in and start from there.

I recommend all serious writers do the following:

- Start writing for www.suite101.com - it's easy to register and requires a minimum of 10 articles of around 500-600 words each within 3 months. You earn money on a commission basis, and while the pay isn't that great, the idea is to build your portfolio so you have working samples to show clients
- Create a [hubpage](#) and start posting content on things you like. Be professional in your written approach at all times, because you're putting your writing skills in the shop window.
- You can also create a [squidoo](#) lens to post content to and earn money
- Create your own [blog](#). Choose a theme and build upon that.

There are of course many other places where you can build your portfolio, and these are just a sample of what's available on the web. You should, however, also have samples from the offline world too, since this is where most of your business will be coming from. I would encourage anyone serious about writing to do the following:

- contact your local free paper and ask to volunteer as a writer
- ask friends and family if they would allow you to write some promotional stuff for any of their businesses
- find an advert that you think you can improve and re-write it - you can use this as a 'before and after' demo of what you are able to do
- enter writing competitions where you are able to see your name in print
- ask your workplace if they have any brochures or adverts that need re-writing and have a go

- Build your portfolio by doing some live work for free for not-for profit organizations and charities. This type of work is known as building your portfolio pro-bono
- Get a graphic designer to mock up the pieces into proper samples. A good way to do this is to approach graphic design students by placing ads in a student union. They are always willing to build their portfolios and will only be too glad for some work. Their rates will be a lot cheaper than a professional designer

Of course, you are only limited by your imagination. Your aim is to have several samples that showcase your ability to diversify in writing tone and style. For example, you may wish to write a serious health article, a light-hearted advert, a corporate style brochure, poetry and a short story etc.

But to really attract the attention of high profile business clients, create ads and brochures and other promotional material which have been mocked up by a designer.

All these show potential clients that you are easily able to adapt your writing to various styles. A word of caution though - don't EVER throw away work you don't like. Believe you me, you may find it inspires you to write other stuff and give you more ideas for other projects.

Now go get scribbling!

Setting up a Website

You now know that in order to start getting clients, you need a portfolio. Once you have enough samples under your belt, the next step is to set up your own website. This isn't as daunting as it sounds and there are lots of options open to you.

A website is your online portfolio and your online brochure about your services. In the old days, writers would physically have to take huge portfolios with them whenever they had to meet with clients. Nowadays, all you need to do is point people to your website instead.

You have three options: Pay someone to develop your site (which can be expensive), buy a package like [Mr Site](#) which allows you to buy a dot com name for yourself plus the tools needed to set yourself up, or you can choose one of the many free sites out there with free hosting.

Personally speaking, I would go for one of the free tools - clients are not going to give you work based on how cool your site looks - they want to see real live samples of writing and your CV/Resume. My choice would be to use the free website by [Weebly](#) - it's what I use and has served me well.

I add to it whenever I like, updating information and adding new samples. You also have the option of placing a contact form in it so clients can contact you directly. Once you have established yourself, you can easily upgrade to a dot com address instead of using the .weebly.com extension.

You can also use Wordpress as a website. You will need your own hosting account such as [Hostgator](#) which is what I use and recommend. In the cPanel, you are looking for an option called Fantastico which you use to do a one click install of WordPress. Of course, you can always contact a Wordpress designer to do this for you, but is very simple to do yourself.

The advantage of Wordpress is that Google and search engines love it and it comes with some great plugins which can really optimize your site and get you noticed. If you want to customize it, Wordpress comes with lots of different themes which can be customized to create a certain look and feel you want.

Once your site is set up, it should state the purpose of the site on the home page. Have a look at [my site](#) to see how this is done. Keep your site functional at all times - nothing puts clients off more than dithering about with this and that and having an 'all fluff, no meat' approach.

You want your site to explain what your services are about. Think about all the things you could write - articles, adverts, press releases, ebooks, copy, ghost writing, creative writing, report writing, CV/Resume service. The possibilities are huge, and you are encouraged to explore these.

Finally, play around with the layout - you want to set up your site in such a way that clients find it easy to find what they want. If they can't, they will simply click away and go elsewhere. Make sure your navigation is clear and to the point with defined headings. Always have a contact form and have a section in there called 'Samples of Work' and a 'Publishing History' if you have had work published in print previously.

You need to post samples of your work on your website so that clients can see how well you can write. Several different pieces should be enough to generate a keen interest.

Another thing to mention here is that you should submit your website to search engines so that they know how to find you if someone searches for you. Use a free tool such as <http://freewebsubmission.com/> which will submit to all the major sites for you.

One last thing – once you have setup your website, you will also need to 'sell' yourself on the site by creating a sales pitch for your services. Your pitch should be highly beneficial to your clients and compel them enough to go through the rest of your site.

This can be scary when you do it for the first time, as you want your site to convey your message clearly and in a persuasive way. If you require someone to do this, I can always do it for you! J

Finding Work

As an aspiring or serious writer, where do you think you will get the bulk of your work from? The internet? Job auction sites? Let's think about these options and how well you can realistically make money from them.

The internet seems like a great place to start - lots of opportunities and unfortunately lots of competition. I signed up with two writing sites when I started, and ended up paying around \$100 for subscriptions to sites which promised the best writing jobs ever. They were making crazy claims such as 'Make \$300 a day easily writing blog posts'. The reality is that there are literally MILLIONS of people who have already joined these, and your chance of getting work is very slim. In fact, I am willing to bet you won't even recover your subscription fee.

Job auction sites also seem like a good idea because you can attach samples of your work and really show off your experience. The truth is, most people end up undercutting one another on their bids and the job is usually awarded to the lowest bidder, not the best writer. Highly paid jobs are given to more experienced writers. Don't get me wrong through - you CAN get work here, and I recommend using Elance and oDesk as well as Guru.com. Forget the other sites, there are far too many low paid projects which are likely to be picked up by a low paid writer.

Your best bet is to work at a local level. Join your local Chamber of Commerce and advertise in their directory. My own town has literally zero competition, and I have just been hired by a school to write their reports and their newsletters. And guess what? They are paying for out of pocket expenses such as petrol and babysitting, and the money is excellent.

As a writer, you need to keep your options open, and while the internet can present some good options, you should really build your reputation locally - this way you will have steady work coming in for years to come.

Finding Clients

Clients are the lifeblood of your business. Without them, you will struggle. I know this only too well - I went 6 weeks without a paid gig once, despite sending off a dozen proposals, applying for about 60 odd writing gigs and goodness knows what else.

When you start working, get yourself a notebook and note down your clients and the date you last did any work for them. Build a file of clients and when work is slow, flick through your book and see which clients you haven't worked for in a while and drop them a line to see if they need any work doing.

Alternatively, add the clients to an email list. Use a free list builder like [Mailchimp](#) to do this. This way, if things get slow, you can simply send them an email and create some special offers they may be interested in.

There are lots of ways to find clients and they include:

- Cold calling
- Referrals
- Working pro bono
- Business networking
- Visiting businesses in person
- advertising

A good way of finding clients is by looking through the yellow pages or phoning up local businesses you think may be in need of your services. Places to start would be advertising agencies, the local council, hospitals and educational services.

Cold calling may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it works. Armed with a copy of the yellow pages, or better still, the Chamber's Business Directory, you need to contact at least 200 or so companies. Those that express a keen interest in your services will need to see more – and a promotional pack or brochure is ideal. I explain cold calling in more detail later.

A promotional pack should contain a business card, your bio, samples of your work, an explanation of your services, any promotional offers you may be holding, a list of any top clients you have worked for and of course your contact details which should contain your website.

Always follow up a week later - make a note of who you spoke to and as a courtesy, follow up by reminding them of who you are and if they had a chance to look through your pack. Chances are, out of 200 or so calls, you should get yourself at least a dozen or so new clients.

Lastly, always make a point of networking whenever you can and keep a supply of business cards at the ready. You never know who your next client will be.

Join your local Chamber of Commerce and get familiar with the various businesses that may be in need of a good writer. Scour your local paper and mail shoot every company that places a big advert in the paper. Chances are if they have a sizeable budget for advertising, then they are the type of company that will spend good money on hiring a writer to do anything from writing brochures and promotional material to writing their web content and maintaining it.

If you can, go and visit web design companies as they often require someone to write the content for their site. You may be able to strike a deal with them, give them a good rate and in return they may give you regular work for years to come. The same goes for ad agencies and marketing houses. There is plenty of work to be had if you know where to look.

Chamber Networking Events

Every month or so, the Chamber of Commerce holds networking events. These are designed to help businesses market their services and products to other businesses. You literally have one minute to deliver your elevator pitch and explain what you do.

Always, always and always state the biggest benefits you offer for your customers. Don't just say you're a commercial freelance writer who writes brochures and newsletters etc...say that you help businesses expand their profits and boost their bottom line by offering exceptional sales and marketing material which puts their customers at the heart of their business.

When you attend a networking event, remember that a warm smile, a pleasant aura and dressing smartly help to convey a very businesslike persona and show that you are a true professional.

And don't be afraid to reach out to new people. As daunting as it can be, networking events work because you are in a room full of warm leads, and not cold prospects. They WANT to learn about you and your business, so make the right impression each and every time.

One other thing – always take a supply of brochures about your service with clear instructions on how to reach you. Don't forget to collect business cards either. Take a pen with you. If the person expresses a keen interest in working with you, mark their business card with an asterisk or something.

When you get home, I suggest you email them **IMMEDIATELY**. You will still be fresh in their minds, and you want it to stay that way or they will forget you. Send a personal email thanking them for the chance to speak to them at the event and that you would love to work with them in the future. Tell them you would love to offer them a free consultation (more on this later) and that you will call again to talk.

Give them about 3-5 days to respond. Even if they don't, follow up with a phone call. It is nowhere near as scary as you think it may be, since you have met and talked to the person and you have already made the effort to contact them once before.

You can learn more about follow ups later.

Making The Most of Your Chamber's Directory

One of the most effective tools I found for doing my research when freelancing was none other than the Chamber of Commerce Directory book. Stuffed full of every local business and hence freelance writing opportunity, it's the one place I go to repeatedly to do my mailing shoots and contact people.

You could also use your local Yellow Pages, call me weird but I prefer the colourful pages of the Chambers Directory. And the hotspots? Think media agencies, PR firms, consulting, academia and healthcare.

In fact, ALL businesses can ideally be approached for work and as your work piles on, you will find you get repeated work and recommendations from your clients. Word gets around when there is a good freelance writer around, so be prepared to get booked up!

As one college administrator told me: 'We simply don't have enough staff or enough hours in the day to get this type of work done.' Bingo! Take advantage of this and you will hit the jackpot each and every time.

Cold Calling The Easy Way

If the idea of cold calling fills you with dread, realize one thing – once you make the initial few calls, it becomes easy. It's a good idea to have a script pre-written so when you do make the call, it's as easy as can be. (I cover this again a bit later on with a different script. Experiment and see what works best)

First up, you should ask for the marketing department or ask for the person responsible for written media. Then, when you get the correct person, try the script below.

An ideal script would go something like:

'Good morning/afternoon. My name is [your name] and I am a freelance writer who specializes in writing for businesses and local organizations. I am just getting in touch with local companies to ask if you have any need for a good writer to help write your in-house and client material.

I can write press releases, marketing material, newsletters, reports, web content and a whole host of other things. Is this something you would be interested in?'

A good, steady and confident voice is all that is needed to really make you sound as if you know what you are doing. Always ask for an email address and a name and contact number and make a note of it.

The likely story here is that most people will happily give you details to get you off the phone. Now, I know what you are thinking – why bother cold calling then? Once you have names and an email, your next step is to send out a general email all about your business and what you do.

ALWAYS focus on the benefits to the CUSTOMER (your potential clients) and not on why you are so brilliant. No one is interested in how good you think you are. They are only interested in what's in it for them.

For example, your benefits to the customer could be:

- Writing material which they simply don't have the time or the expertise to do themselves
- Help them be more productive by doing the writing tasks they need doing, without having to hire a full time member of staff
- Help clients boost their bottom line by writing high-impact marketing materials

Whatever it is that you are offering, ensure that it is of benefit to the customer and that the customer needs it to make their business work.

Finding Work on Auction Sites

If you want to add to your writing arsenal, I would recommend that you sign up with a few auction sites - these are job sites which advertise posts that invite writers to bid for work. The downside of these sites is that competition can be stiff. The flip side is that once you do start work and clients like your work, they are more likely to offer you long term work.

I suggest that you stick to one site such as Elance and then use the free plan. Because if you are focusing your efforts online, you are only going to be bidding on projects you really want to do online.

When I started freelancing, I thought it would take me forever to get started and I never believed that I would find work so quickly. Within 6 weeks of starting my business, I had landed myself three long term clients. That was a buzz. These clients provided me with enough work to see me through until I landed my first big contract.

The best places to find work on the web are:

- www.elance.com
- www.guru.com
- www.odesk.com
- www.ifreelance.com

Stay away from www.freelancer.com which is notorious for low paid jobs. It may be worth subscribing to their jobs alert service and perhaps you may even find a rare bit of well-paid work on it!

Other places to look would be your friends, colleagues and local businesses. Get some free business cards which are available from www.vistaprint.com. Hand them out to local schools and stores - you never know what work you might get.

Try placing an advert in your local paper to see who responds. Perhaps you could offer new clients a discount? If you are wondering how much you should be charging a word, I would recommend that you charge between 5-7cents a word. Use the lower limit to start off with and work your way up.

In case you are wondering, your spelling, punctuation and grammar need to be excellent to get the higher paid jobs. That said, no one will pay you good money if your writing style is terrible but your spelling is perfect. You need to have both skills.

Auction Sites – Writing Your Bids

It's not enough to just post your profile on a job auction site. You must also learn the art of bidding. This is extremely important because there are literally hundreds of other writers out there who will also bid on the same projects as you. So how do you stand out?

Firstly, identify your unique selling point - what are you offering that other writers are not? Why should the client choose you over everyone else? What particular experience do you have that you can mention in your bid that is relevant to the project you are bidding for? This is crucial because it is all about selling yourself as someone unique.

Don't just put something like: 'I will provide you with an excellent article' say HOW you will and WHY it will be excellent. Perhaps you're an expert on the topic concerned. Maybe you have brilliant research skills. Whatever it is, MAKE SURE your prospective client knows about it.

And this brings me to another point. On most sites you can see what others are bidding. IGNORE THIS. Look at the project budget that the client has set. Now ask yourself if you can achieve a fair price for the work involved and the money being given.

DON'T undersell yourself at all. In fact, unless you are seriously desperate, don't even consider low paid work just to make money. I learnt this the hard way when I was working on a project that paid me 5cents for every 100 words or so - and I had a huge database of work to go through. After three days of hours and hours of typing, I had swollen wrists and fingers. In fact, my elbow was also swollen and my shoulder was painful. Was I anywhere near completing my task? No. And worse still, this company only paid up when you had completed the work to a total of \$50.

Ok now, let's do the sums. I was expected to write 100 words (per question - it was a question and answer database) on average for 5cents. I had to complete 1000 of these BEFORE I got paid. So basically, that's $100 \times 1000 = 100,000$ words!

\$50 for writing 100,000 words? (most novels are between 50,000 and 80,000 words) Do you understand the importance of working to your value and not out of desperation? Nowadays, you would not catch me dead working for less than **5cents a word**. If I had been charging my minimum rate of 5cents a word, for 100,000 words, I would have been paid \$5000. I actually charge more per word :-)

There will ALWAYS be low paid work and there will ALWAYS be takers for this type of work, but that will NOT include you. Those who take low paid work will only ever get more low paid work.

Here's something to try. Write down all your strengths in your writing. Now write down WHY they are your strengths. Always refer to these when making bids. It will change the way you get paid for work.

If you are stuck, I strongly recommend you check out ['Write to More Money'](#) and buy it:

This excellent guide explains the art of being able to write for more money. I personally found it to be an excellent investment and worth its weight in gold. Thanks to this report, I have been able to secure work for higher prices.

Running Your New Business

Ok, by now you should have samples, have a website and have learnt some tricks on getting clients. Now you need to really get the process rolling, and rolling quickly.

You want to avoid the dry spells that are typical of freelancing. And, if you are intending on doing this full time in place of your regular job, you should seriously consider going part time first and building yourself up before taking the plunge.

It is always recommended that anyone considering any type of freelance work should ideally have some savings to one side so that when you do decide to ditch your day job, you have the insurance of some income in the bank while you get started.

If you follow the suggestions in this guide, you can easily be self-sufficient within a few months.

Partnering with Others

Any successful freelancer will tell you that the most profitable relationships are based on referrals and 'add ons' to your service. If you can, I strongly recommend you partner with a graphic designer who can do the printing and the design. In fact, I would say don't even consider going into business without one.

They can be your strongest ally and best source of work. Currently, the designer I work with has an arrangement with me. I do any copy for him for free, while he does my graphics for my business stationary and anything else I need for free.

We refer clients to one another actively by sending out emails. A great incentive is money – we recently came to a 10% project fee arrangement whereby any referrals from him which result in a sale means I give the customer a 10% discount and that I pay him 10% of the final fee. And he does the same for me.

The other advantage here is that any brochures and business cards I have printed and distributed through my designer, we effectively split the printing cost between us. It's a highly effective relationship which garners great results.

This can be used to upsell your services very easily, since naturally, clients are more likely to work with people who can provide them with complete turnkey solutions.

Although not necessary, I have also teamed up with a proofreader. The advantage here is that while they are editing and checking your work, you can be getting on with what you do best – writing. I find the editing process laborious and boring, so is best left to someone who actually enjoys it. I pay my proofreader \$9 an hour, and in that time, she gets through around 12 sheets of A4 in an hour.

Differentiating Yourself From Others

For any business to succeed, it has to have a unique selling point or USP. You have probably heard of this term thousands of times in business and it is very true – you need to decide what your USP is and really play on it.

In order to do this, you should first and foremost check out your competition. Try searching your local business directory, local yell.com and Gumtree or Craigslist listings for 'writers', 'commercial freelance writers', 'copywriters' and 'business writers'.

If they have a website, check it out. If they don't, I wouldn't sweat about it – there is more than enough work in every City for numerous writers. In my own home town of Huddersfield, there is only one other writer who writes exclusively for the web. Competition? Hardly. But, I didn't stop here – I moved onto the surrounding cities of Leeds, Manchester and West Yorkshire. Result? Between them all, only two other writers!

Happy days! You are most at risk if there are many different writers out there. Even so, check out what services they offer and re-evaluate what you can offer them. I recently teamed up with an SEO consultant and refer any SEO work to her. In return, she has me on board as her 'go-to' writer for any work she needs doing.

If you write articles, think of investing in some good quality software for article submission to the main directories. Other than this, you could simply find cheap article submitters (there are plenty of them, simple Google it) and use them to submit to directories on your clients behalf.

Upselling Your Services

You are primarily a writer, but what else could you do? There are times when writing alone is not enough and people want to see diversity. You don't want to be jack of all trades and master of none either.

I used to be a webmaster and database developer many years ago before having the kids, and can easily leverage this to my advantage. When I first started working, I used to evaluate websites for their effectiveness in usability and navigation. This is still something I offer clients – evaluating their websites and advising them on the best practice in design.

You can also offer simple marketing services – it doesn't have to be too technical. For example, I was asked to consult with a niche magazine to expand their brand.

So, here's what I did:

- wrote a new brochure for them
- wrote their writer's guidelines
- offered to consult with them for free in return for testimonials and using their business as a case study on my website (this is in progress as I write this)

There are the things I consulted on:

- I sent them a questionnaire asking about all their current advertising and marketing efforts
- Identified gaps in this and made suggestions on how they could expand their subscriber base. For example, they don't have a Twitter account or have a blog. Nor do they have a lead generation system on their website
- I checked out their competition and noted each of their competitors strengths and weaknesses and used this information to suggest ways they could improve
- I did a keyword analysis using the [Google Keyword Tool](#) of the most obvious keywords for the niche that my client was in and created a spreadsheet of them
- I identified the most popular keywords and their competition and suggested my client use these to rank for their website
- I checked their Google ranking – they were listed on page 2, so suggested the keywords that they should rank for
- I also used [Google Trends](#) to search the most popular keywords and provided a recommendation on which keywords were on the rise and the most popular. Using the trends tool, I also identified the countries where the greatest searches on this keyword took place – this is valuable information for a client as it alerts them to where they can place more advertising emphasis
- Suggested ways that they could make money e.g. selling other information products and audio related to their niche

- Analysed their advert on YouTube and critically evaluated it – in this case, there were no benefits or advantages to the advert – it was just music and pictures of the magazine

There are many other things that could be done to help clients. These are just some ways in which you could do so. It's all about knowing what you are good at and offering this up as a service. For example, I am also a trained copywriter, so additional services I could offer may be to do a copy critique service or re-writing bullet points for clients who can't afford to have a sales letter written for them.

You could create training packs and presentations for training course instructors based on their notes. This leads me on nicely to talk about something which I feel is very much in need, but highly underused in business today...

Training Sessions

You can easily offer training sessions on any form of writing. Most business professionals are great at what they do, but are useless at taking minutes, or writing a report or creating a proposal etc. The list goes on! You can put together training sessions with notes, handouts and a PowerPoint presentation for clients and go into organizations to deliver workshops and one day courses.

This is a highly lucrative but underused way of leveraging your writing talents, and it pays very well. You can typically make around \$500 for about 2-3 hours of work, plus you can charge travel expenses. Full training courses which can take place over two days can make you around \$2000 for two days work. If you are not confident on delivering the training course yourself, you can always find someone who will and pay them a flat rate of say \$500 for two days worth of training. Even still, you would be pocketing \$1500 for doing nothing.

If you decide to offer training, you can have trainer packs created for you from scratch. Check out [Phoenix training](#) who specialize in this and they provide you with absolutely everything you could possibly need to set this up.

You can also check out ebay for listings of training packs, although you may need to do a search on Writing Courses to find something. I found a [Report Writing Course](#) pack with all the notes for delegates and the PowerPoint slides.

Get Your Name Out There

When you first start freelancing, it can be difficult getting the word out. Always start with your family and friends since this is the quickest route to some work. Perhaps you could first do some work at a discounted rate before jumping in with larger prices.

Contact friends and familiar business owners directly – you would be surprised how well this strategy works, and it's a lot better than cold calling. When you approach a familiar business owner, ask them how their business is doing and if they need any adverts or brochures/leaflets producing. Be friendly and polite – you should think about networking first and business second.

If you come across as pushy and bossy, they will back off so fast you'll never stand a chance. Hand them your business card and don't forget to ask for theirs – after all, you will need to follow up too.

Other ways to get your name out are as follows:

- write a press release about your business in your local paper
- leave your business cards in gyms and clubs and waiting rooms of any health practitioner
- place an advert in the newspaper or on a local community's news bulletin
- mail out your brochure of services to places that are likely to hire a freelance writer such as:
 - health services
 - not for profit organizations e.g. educational establishments
 - design agencies
 - temp agencies
 - technical staffing agencies
 - business coaches and mentors
 - training agencies
 - local councils
 - vets
 - web design agencies
- client catching campaigns (more about this later)
- tell your Facebook friends
- marketing and ad agencies
- using Twitter to tweet about your business
- using LinkedIn as a professional networking source

Creating Winning Marketing Campaigns

If anything is rewarded, its consistency and perseverance. That and being able to deliver the goods. A winning marketing campaign is one which identifies your potential prospects, involves contacting them in several ways and then following up well.

A good strategy which consistently brings in work on a regular basis for me involves:

1. identifying a target base
2. direct mailing
3. cold calling
4. email campaign
5. follow ups

Identifying a Target Base

The easiest way of identifying your target base is to grab your local business directory (the Chambers of Commerce Directory is perfect) and collecting names and details of the business owners including emails.

For example, you decide that this week, you will target health professionals – in particular opticians. Use the directory to identify all opticians. If their email address and business address isn't listed, you can ring and ask for these details, or you can simply Google them. If you are still having no luck, you can try www.manta.com to find the business owners names.

Sometimes, the only way to find the name of the business owner is simply to call them. There are no monsters on the other end of the phone – most businesses are only too happy to help.

You can also use www.superpages.com , www.yell.com and www.switchboard.com to find business details. Your library website will have a detailed company list which is ideal for direct mail.

Dun and Bradstreet's Million Dollar Database is perfect for generating lists for you and is super easy to use. Just ask the librarian to help you. You can also try the Book of Lists and the Business Journal in your local area.

Once you have your information – categorize the businesses by type and add to a simple spreadsheet for later.

Direct Mailing

This is where it gets interesting. You should mail shoot everyone on your list by direct mail. Ideal pieces to send include postcards and simple tri-fold leaflets. I would stick to postcards at this stage, since you don't have to mess about with envelopes.

You can easily use your local printing services or upload your own design into www.vistaprint.com and print away. You should have your title and logo on it plus a tagline. You also need to mention the services you offer. Finally, have a sentence in there asking them to find out more by booking a discovery meeting with you and give them your email and web address.

Then get mailing. The reason why I like postcards is simple – they are cheap and if done well, they are a very effective marketing tool. You can contact postcard marketing sites such as www.modernpostcard.com and www.amazingmail.com for more ideas.

Cold Calling

Once you have mailed the postcards out, you should wait at least 2-3 days before calling each of your list members up. When you call, ask for the person by name. If you don't have a name, ask to speak to someone in marketing. A great way to get started is by following the simple script below:

'Hi, my name is [your name] and I'm calling on behalf of Freelance Writing Services. What we do is write high-impact marketing materials and things like newsletters, press releases, reports and brochures.

The reason why we are calling is that we are currently contacting local businesses to ask if they have any need of a good writer. You should have received one of my postcards in the mail by now, and we are offering all businesses a free consultation to discuss their needs. Is this something that you would be interested in?'

It's short and sweet and doesn't blab on. In the worst case scenario, someone will hang up or say no, but most people are polite and will let you down gently. Even if

they do say no, ask them if it's ok to send them some information by email and take down the email address so that you can follow up.

At this stage, your aim is not to secure work, but an appointment if you can. If they want to talk about work then, fine, if not, try a meeting.

Email Campaigns

For this to work well, you need to set up your list with an autoresponder. You can simply send out a normal email, but it's a lot harder to track and maintain. Try www.inmicamail.com as they are one of the cheapest around. If you can't afford an autoresponder service yet, you can use the free service provided by www.mailchimp.com which allows you to build up a list of a 1000 people for free. You can always transfer your list elsewhere once you hit the limit, as it is expensive.

A word of caution though – always have a backup of lists on a spreadsheet, just in case!

Now for an email campaign, you are doing one of two things. You are either sending out emails in response to the cold calling, or you are doing email campaigns in place of cold calling. Both require different strategies.

For responding to the calls where businesses gave you their email address – a simple email introducing yourself and your services is sufficient. Always point them to your website so that they can see your portfolio.

To email people in place of cold calling, I would write something like:

Subject: Free 30 Minute Marketing Consultation

Dear [client name],

My name is [your name] and I am a commercial freelance writer based in [your location]. I understand that you are busy, so will keep this email very brief.

My aim as a commercial writer is to help businesses boost their bottom line by helping them attract more profitable customers. I do this through a variety of ways, but primarily by analyzing existing sales and promotional material and identifying weaknesses in them.

I would like the opportunity to offer you a free 30 minute marketing consultation either by Skype, phone or in person.

If you are interested in this opportunity, please email me at [your email] or call me on xxxxxxxxxx and we can arrange an appointment.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Thanks for your time,

Kind regards

[your name]

[your website address]

All I have done here is simply outline what I do, how it can help them and offered a free consultation.

Admittedly, I hate cold calling. But it does work. By sending out emails via your autoresponder, it's easy to keep track of who opens them and who doesn't.

Now don't get worried about the marketing consultation bit – it's not as scary as it sounds, and I'll explain more about it in a moment.

Follow Ups

I find follow ups difficult if I am ringing someone who for example I just sent out a general email to and who hasn't opened it. These people are usually the hardest to get on board and I find are the more resistant ones.

What you need to do is ensure you have used as many different ways of contacting a business as possible. This way, you are getting your name out in front of people.

A simple follow up should be done in batches. So, for all of our healthcare professionals who I am targeting, the first thing I will do is check who opened my email. Ring these businesses first. Ask for the person responsible by name first and then say:

'Hi, how are you today? I am calling on behalf of freelance writing services and I am just touching base with customers today to see if there is anything I can help them

with. Hopefully, you should have received some information from me by now and I was wondering if you had had a chance to have a look at it?’

Now, if they say ‘no’ and you know they have opened your email, it’s possible someone else opened your email on their behalf and they haven’t seen it. In any case, say something like:

‘Ok, that’s not a problem. I can send something out for you to have a look at again. While I am here, I would just like to ask if you would be interested in a free 30 minute marketing consultation. This aim of a consultation is to evaluate your marketing material and your marketing strategy, and to identify your strengths and weaknesses, as well as discover any profit leaks you may have, or areas where you could get more customers. We can have a phone consultation or a Skype meeting. If you prefer, I can arrange to meet you in person.’

And take it from there.

Again, the trick here is not to secure work at this stage. If people want to talk about work, great, if not, don’t worry about it. What you are trying to do here is show businesses your worth by providing them with value first, so that they are more likely to hire you later.

The Marketing Consultation

Always book a marketing consultation with enough time to do a quick bit of research into their business. Simple things to look at include:

- Their website – how well is it written?
- Do they even have a website?
- What's their Google search engine rank as a local business? (simply type in the name of the business followed by your location to find out)
- Do they have a lead capture system? (where customers can sign up for more information)
- What kind of marketing materials do they currently have?
- How effective are they at communicating the business message?
- What kind of products and services do they sell?
- Is there another type of service they could offer?
- Do they have a newsletter and how often do they send it out?
- Do they advertise anywhere such as the local paper or business directories?
- Do they have a yellow pages listing?
- How well are their adverts written?

This is more than enough information for you to get started on. Make a note of all of these points so that you can discuss them when you talk to them. Always ask them how they keep in touch with their customers – this is vital in gleaning work from them.

Most business owners don't bother going to the trouble of touching base with customers other than the odd advert in the local press. This is a prime area where they can improve their customer retention and bring in new business.

Once you have gone over their details, you can ask them which areas they would like to work on – at this point, always make suggestions.

If they don't have a website, point them in the direction of a good website designer. Now, a clever thing to do here is team up with a website designer. Have an arrangement where if the designer brings customers to you, you can give them a 10% referral fee from the commission. If you bring a customer to them, you get a 10% referral fee from the commission. And it also saves you the hassle of trying to find a reliable web designer at the last minute.

Ensure that the site has a simple lead generation system and a contact form. Write the content for them, and always ensure that the content is all about what the business can do for the customer rather than all about the business itself.

This is true of all of your marketing materials – keep them customer focused. Customers always think and ask ‘What’s in it for me’ and think in solutions and benefits.

Once you have discussed the needs of a customer and completed the work, there are a few things you should keep note of:

- Make a note of which businesses used your services and what you did for them
- After each project, always ask for feedback and how you could improve
- Ask for testimonials – this is very important and you can add these to your portfolio
- Ask if they will allow you to use their work as samples on your site
- Ask if they wouldn’t mind referring you to others if they are happy with the work you provided
- Always touch base with them once a month – a simple email with suggestions of other work you do to remind them works well. Keep the email generic.
- When you invoice them, you could always put at the end of the invoice a list of other services you provide as a gentle reminder
- Keeping in touch via a newsletter is an excellent idea. It doesn’t have to be long – just two or three topics that are easily digestible and which subtly upsell your business. For example, you could focus a newsletter on the benefits of a website or the benefits of training staff on report writing etc and at the end provide your details and what you can do to help

As you can see, there is no easy route to getting clients other than being focused and consistent, having a plan and then following up on it. Always start with referrals first – this is probably the quickest and easiest way to get work. You may decide to offer some services for free in return for referrals and a testimonial – something that most people will only be too happy to provide.

The Issue of Money and Hourly Rates

This is probably the single biggest challenge of any start-up writer. Knowing what to charge and what you are worth. A good place to start is by checking out what the competition charges and undercutting them by a very small amount – say \$5 or \$10 dollars – NO MORE.

The reason being, you don't want to end up in a situation where you are writing for ridiculous amount of money and scraping the bottom of the barrel as it were. As a general guide, commercial freelance writers are looking at anything between \$50 and \$125 dollars an hour.

It sounds like a lot, and it is – but you should always remember exactly why people will pay you this – the truth is, most people are bad at writing. As intelligent as they are in business and running large corporations, when it comes to putting pen to paper, most people draw a blank.

This is where you come in. I had one client say to me that he didn't have a clue how to write a report and neither did any of his colleagues. I happily completed a report for him which took me 6 hours of my time at a rate of \$125 an hour. Do the maths. It's a LOT of money.

As always, you have to show your value and your worth. I strongly suggest you start off with a [rate calculator](#) to find out how much you should be charging as an absolute minimum. The great thing about this calculator is that it takes into account your overheads and expenditure and living expenses before suggesting the ideal rate for you. Use this as a base and work from here.

Of course, it is sometimes difficult to explain to others exactly why you are worth that much.

Rates are sometimes a bit of a problem when charging clients on auction sites for example. Say you have been invited to bid on a project and other writers have also put in a proposal. How do you convince the client of your proposed worth? As with anything in life, you need to provide proof – and lots of it.

Avoid clichés like 'I am a high-quality writer', because everyone says it! Instead, show what makes you a high quality writer. You may say that you spend a great deal of time and effort in exhaustive research to ensure that the work you produce is very accurate and up-to-date with key ideas that are relevant now.

You may be an expert in a niche and so you should mention where and who you have written for, so that clients can see your breadth of experience. You may have a particular background that you are leveraging to write about a certain area – so mention it!

And here is the other thing I suggest to give more accurate quotes. This does take a while to get good at, but is a great rule of thumb when working with clients. If someone wants a piece of work doing and asks for a quote, here is what I recommend:

- Decide on your ideal hourly rate which is reasonable for the client or niche you are working in (remember that small businesses aren't going to pay you \$125/hr, but a large corporation can)
- Next, determine the lowest minimum you would be willing to work for – again be reasonable and look at the budget constraints of the client
- Workout roughly how long it will take you to complete the project
- Multiply the number of hours you estimate to do the project by your ideal rate and then again by your minimum rate
- You now have two figures. Ask for the higher rate as a flat fee instead of asking to be paid per hour. This has two distinct advantages
 - Client knows upfront how much they need to pay, so no nasty surprises
 - Client has reassurance that it will not go over this amount regardless of how long the project takes
- If your client is unhappy with the quote, you can negotiate down to the lowest fee acceptable to you – after that you can either accept or reject the work
- I strongly suggest you work on a 'pay half now and the rest after the project is complete' basis – better than being ripped off by a client or better than a client feeling as if *they* have been ripped off!

To get a rough idea of rates, expect to earn:

- Technical writing is around \$40-\$75/hr
- Marketing and high spec work is between \$50 and \$125 and sometimes up to \$150/hr
- Copywriting is around \$100 or more an hour

If you have any doubts on the length of a project – don't guess, ask! This is the single biggest mistake most newbie writers make, which can end up losing them a lot.

As a general rule, it is better to over-estimate than under-estimate a project – usually by as much as 25%. This is because in reality, projects usually do end up taking far longer than originally thought. If you have estimated 3 hours to do some work and are charging \$50/hr for it, it is better to ask for \$200 on the assumption that you will need an additional hour for edits, revisions and spell checks.

Another tip is to always offer a flat fee and not an hourly rate, since hourly rates put people off. Recently, I told a client I never work for less than \$75/hr. As you can imagine, I never heard from them again! Don't do it. Present a flat rate and negotiate to where you are comfortable – ALWAYS.

If you feel you aren't getting anywhere like this, stand your ground and be firm. Never, ever let the client feel as if you need them – because the reverse is true. Stick to your guns and even if you do end up working lower than you hoped, do so on the condition of your client giving you referrals and testimonials.

Finding Time to Work

Going through the various processes can initially be a long and drawn out process. But, it is vital you remain firm and consistent in what you are doing. Freelancing has so many wonderful advantages that when the money starts coming in, you will never go back to working for someone else again.

It takes time to build a successful business and I am a testament to the fact that even on a time-crunched schedule, you can create a successful and thriving business in just a few short months.

When working full time, it often means sacrificing nights out and your favourite TV programs to get the ball rolling. Weekends can become pre-occupied with starting up. If you work part-time, it can be easier to find the time to build your business. I know someone who has a weekend job and freelances the rest of the week.

Not only does it ensure she has time to build her business, but it also means that steady weekend work puts food on the table during dry spells. I know of a lady who works mornings only during the weekdays, and then spends her afternoons catching up on chores, while her evenings are free for freelancing.

Finding time is easy once you know how. Even if you are a busy mom with lots of kids, the secret of building a successful career is to be organized. Have an early bedtime for your children. I have two children including a one year old and both are in bed by 8pm. I never watch TV in the evenings – I tape favourite programs instead. I work from 8pm till midnight on most nights with the odd night off. Heck, my husband even has to schedule time with me beforehand!

Once you have found your ideal time to work – stick to it. If you are on your own, motivation can be hard – simply write down small goals and achievable steps that you can aim for easily in a week.

When starting from scratch, you can be setup with a website and samples in less than two weeks, and theoretically start getting clients immediately.

If you are living with a family – get them on board to support you. Have a designated work time and stick to it. You may find it easiest to work when kids are at school or when they are sleeping.

Lastly, get out and socialize too – freelancing can be lonely and cause you to spend long hours in front of your computer. Do a sport or take regular exercise. If that's

too difficult, get up after every hour and run up and down the stairs for a minute to get your circulation going and prevent you from putting on weight due to inactivity.

Conclusion

In this guide I have discussed ways on how to start your own successful freelance writing business from scratch. I have presented different ideas to get clients and market your services.

I have also explained how to upsell your business and add on extra services to make the most of your talents and leverage any additional skills you may have.

Building a freelance business takes time, and is certainly not a 'get rich quick' scheme. If you do this part-time, you can easily build a successful career and ditch your day job in less than 6 months. I work part time and built myself up in around 4 months.

I work part-time around my kids, but that's fine for me, as I'm a single mum. Sometimes freelancing can be tough when you are having a dry spell, which is why I always suggest that you have additional skills that you can fall back on such as training or consulting.

Whatever you do, once you have built credibility, your name will get around without a problem. Businesses are always on the lookout for a good writer and will happily share this knowledge with others who are also in need of a writer.

Best of luck with your endeavours and I would love to hear how you are doing!

Arfa Saira Iqbal

<http://freelancewritingcoach.com/>

PS - Want To Know More? How About 5 weeks of LIVE Training to teach you about starting your business from scratch and client attraction?

The stuff I cover in this report is just a part of what you'll learn on the course!

Find out more here: <http://freelancewritingcoach.com/>