

Working With Freelance Writers

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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Working With Freelance Writers

Many companies are turning to freelance writers to get their projects completed. After all, there are plenty of advantages to dealing with freelancers: no salaries, vacation time, sick days, health insurance or benefits. Also, using an outside writer will ensure a fresh perspective. Here are some tips for working with freelance writers to build relationships and ensure a successful project.

Negotiating Fees

When determining freelance fees, remember that you get what you pay for. Busy, reputable writers must earn enough money for their time in order to maintain a profitable business. If you only offer less, you may have to settle for beginners who will likely require more editing and fact-checking on your part. Until writers get used to your style, you may have to put in more time with them.

One way to estimate writer's fees is to determine what annual salary this writer might if she or he were on staff at your company (\$35,000 for example). Divide the annual salary by 2,000 to obtain a "net" hourly wage (\$17.50). Double the hourly wage to cover the writer's overhead (\$35). This is the gross hourly rate. Then, increase the gross rate by 25% to cover overhead time (\$43.75.) Thus, it is not unreasonable for a freelancer to charge a project fee based on \$40-50 per hour. Finally, multiply the billing rate by anticipated production hours to arrive at fair price for the assignment.

Always discuss payment terms before starting a project. Some writers will expect payment on acceptance of the project. For major projects, they may require one-third to one-half upon accepting the project with the balance paid upon completion. Others are willing to use a standard "net 30" payment like other businesses.

You and the writer should negotiate fees, dates of payment, and rights purchased. When negotiating payment, consider the value of the material to your publication, and the value to the author in appearing in your publication. It is also a good idea to estimate the value of the piece if it were to appear in a competing publication.

More Ways to Save

Another way to save on freelance fees is to buy previously written/published articles. You can purchase second rights to articles that have appeared in other publications in your field or on other web sites. A generic article prepared by a freelance writer can be modified for your company. The freelancer will often try to sell a version to different editors, and this will usually cost less than articles written specifically for your publication.

Doing your part

Give the writer as much background information as you can. Share background information that a staff writer would have access to. Let her/him know about the publication, website, business or product; about the angle you are trying to write from, the style you prefer, and about the subject of the piece and potential contacts.

Keeping the Project Running Smoothly

Require periodic status reports on a project. That way you will have better communication and fewer problems when a "surprise" pops up.

Be available for your writers. Offer to be contacted by more than one medium: Use the phone, fax, email, a cell phone, or instant messaging to allow them to reach you easily.

Understand that freelance material may require more extensive editing or revisions than pieces done on staff. However, as you and the writer establish a relationship through ongoing projects, she/he will learn your style and tone.

If you are hiring a writer for the first time and are not sure about her/his work, assign a less important project -- perhaps something that could be eliminated if it were poorly written or not in on deadline.

Once you find a writer you like, become an important client by giving her or him regular assignments. Later, if you need help in a pinch, they are more likely to give you their time.

Linda Elizabeth Alexander is a business writer and marketing consultant specializing in web and sales copy. Call or email today to discuss your freelance project!

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