

A Good Writer is Hard to Find

by Alexandra O'Connell

The Disconnect

You need to launch your website. You have a new brochure you want to produce for your business, or a blog you need a ghostwriter for. You have a PowerPoint presentation which desperately needs to be checked for errors or inconsistencies and style. You're not a writer, and you have a small staff -- or no staff. So you hire a freelance copywriter to create the text for your website or your brochure or your blog. They're a writer -- they know what they're doing, right? They'll give you exactly what you need.



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Alas, not necessarily.

What happens when the writer you've contracted with returns something to you which doesn't match your needs at all? What if the tone is all wrong, or the vocabulary out of touch with your clients or customers? What if it's not the style you were going for?

What happens if the work is late or riddled with errors?

There are **many** qualified writers out there who can provide you with exactly what you need, and yet the foregoing problems continue to happen to small businesspeople on a regular basis. Why is this? And how can you make sure that you don't run into the same mess?

Writing is about communication

The number one cause of a writing expectations-results mismatch is also one of the most straightforward to fix. Most difficult experiences originate in a lack of communication.

Communication begins at the very first contact. Your writer, or writing team, should take the time to talk through your project concept before work begins. They should be responsive to your questions and concerns, and willing to explain the process through which your project will go. And most importantly, your writer(s) should have questions of their own.

O'Connell: A Good Writer is Hard to Find

Certain questions are critical for your project's success. Who is your audience? What is your company/brand's overall style and message? Are you casual, witty, serious, dramatic, formal, sarcastic? How will this project fit in with your other communications -- website, email newsletter, and so on? Do you have examples of what you are looking to create, or samples of your other marketing materials to use as guidelines for consistency?

Your writer needs to know the answers to these questions. Is your writer asking them?

If it sounds like this information will take more than five minutes to elucidate, you're right. Good communication does take more than five minutes. And this brings us to another pressing question: what is it going to cost you?

Choosing a writer by the lowest common denominator

There are a lot of websites that promise to provide you with writers for \$5 a blog post, \$20 for web copywriting, or white papers, and so on. You can place projects up for bidding at sites like ODESK and create fixed budgets on Elance. These virtual clearinghouses are un-affectionately known as [content farms](#), because the business model promises to churn out as many projects as possible for the lowest price per unit.

It can be tempting to use price point as the most significant criteria in choosing with whom you contract for work. But there are problems with this scenario.

As a business owner or entrepreneur on a budget, you might believe a marketplace where writers try to outbid each other in the lowness of their prices benefits you, but the fact is that writers working for \$5 or \$20 a project can't afford to spend much time working on yours. They're busy collecting as many projects as they can. Doesn't your project deserve more?

In fairness, you can find competent writers at content farms, but the business model doesn't benefit either party in the long run. Results run the risk of being superficial, alienating your customers and clients, who may draw negative conclusions about your professionalism or value.

How much do you value this project?

Meanwhile, your project is worth more than \$5. You are using the website, the brochure, the blog post, the white paper to **engage** with your clients and customers. You want the resulting product to **communicate your value**. This is your showcase. This is your business! The newsletter, website, brochure, or presentation needs to connect with **more clients and customers**. This is its whole reason for being.

O’Connell: A Good Writer is Hard to Find

Your project has a goal, a purpose. Unlike the laundry, its work is not done once it has been through the wash cycle. Nothing is more off-putting to a prospective audience than a slap-dash job that bears only the faintest relationship to their interests or their needs.

One size does not fit all

Your website, blog post, or brochure is not the same animal as a size 10 pair of jeans at the GAP®. It isn’t pre-fabricated according to cookie-cutter conditions and ready to pull off the shelf.

What is your business? What industry are you in? What are your goals? Are you trying to attract more clients? Are you building relationships with existing customers? Do you need to explain your services and present yourself in a professional manner? Do you need something longer and in-depth? Do you want something short, snappy, and with zing? What kind of a voice do you want your piece to have? Do you need to have it today, next week, next month? One-time or on a repeat basis?

The answers to these questions directly affect the size, shape, and final appearance of the written piece. If we left monkeys at typewriters long enough, there is a possibility that they could write Dickens... but is that a timeline and a probability that you want to rely on for your work?

A good investment

Make sure your writer spends some time talking to you about the goals and needs of your project, and the goals and needs of your business. They should be able to communicate what is unique about you, in a way that matches your goals, and within a reasonable timeframe.

At the end of the day, this will be time and money well spent.

About the author:

Alexandra O’Connell is a freelance writer and editor currently resident on Colorado’s Front Range. She has been on both the giving and receiving end of the writing relationship, a humbling and rewarding experience. Her clients include medical education agencies, graphic designers, and small businesses. Find her and more of her work at www.alexoconnell.com.

