

# MAKE MORE BY WRITING LESS!

Or How I Went from Charging  
\$2,500 for a Direct-Mail Letter  
to \$22,500 by Turning  
Business Away!

By

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In this very brief report, I'm going to reveal to you the single most important improvement I ever made in my freelance copywriting business to help me attract more clients, better clients, and, most importantly, better-*paying* clients. The secret is so simple and so obvious, you're going to wonder why you never thought of it before. In fact, chances are you *have* thought of it before, but you never put it into action. You didn't think it would work. You thought it was too risky. You were afraid that it might actually cause you to *lose* business. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Because once you make this tiny little change in how you conduct business (and, by the way, it has nothing to do with copywriting technique, it's simply a matter of how you run your business), you'll find that your reputation will be enhanced. You'll have more clients clamoring for your services. Your fees will rise ... *without ever having to ask a client for more money*. You will, in fact, join the 50 to 100 people in this country who are considered "major-league" freelance copywriters and can make six or (in a few cases) even seven figures a year.

Oh, and by the way, it has nothing to do with charging royalties, bonuses, or other forms of incentive compensation for your work. I know there's been a lot of talk on the Internet recently about charging royalties for freelance copywriting. But I'm primarily a flat-fee copywriter, and the vast majority of my colleagues are, too. The mouth-watering hype that you've been hearing about royalties for copywriters recently *is* true ... but you should know that it probably only applies to about ten or fifteen copywriters across the country at the most. And if you're someone who's just starting out in the business, your chances of joining them are pretty slim. No, I'm talking about something you can do *today* ... something that you can do *yourself* ... something that requires nothing more than a little willpower and courage on your part.

I'll reveal the secret in the moment. But first let me talk about what I went through when I was starting out as a copywriter, and what you're probably going through right now.

The greatest scourge of the newly-minted freelance copywriter is the boom or bust cycle. For the first few months of your new business, you probably have no work at all. You spend your time waiting for the phone to ring, putting out promotional mailings,

making sales calls. Then, suddenly, it happens. You get your first assignment. Great! You do a wonderful job, and the client is thrilled. Then guess what happens next?

Nothing. Nobody else calls. You go back into the deep freeze. You're twiddling your thumbs. You're starting to wonder if the first assignment was a fluke.

Then word gets out that you're a pretty good copywriter, and you get another call. Great! You're all gung-ho to get started on the new assignment when something strange happens. You get *another* call. Another assignment. "Oh, and, by the way, we need this *immediately* ... we need it *yesterday*." So you put the first assignment aside for a few hours to work on the new one. Then another assignment comes in! A rush job, of course. Next thing you know you're working 36 hours a day to meet your deadlines. Finally, your freelance writing career is on its way. Nothing can stop you now, except...

It slows down again. For a few days. Then a week. Then a month. Nobody calls. What happened. Is it you? Did they hate your copy? Did your copy fail in the marketplace?

No, it's just the way things work in this business. Boom and bust. Boom and bust. Boom and bust. You're like a thirsty man in the middle of the desert. When you finally come upon the oasis, you drink water until your bladder is ready to explode ... because you never know when you're going to get another drink again. You *never* turn any business away, no matter how busy you are, because you know that it could all dry up at a moment's notice and you might not be able to pay your rent when it does.

Well, fairly early in my freelance career, I was in the middle of the boom to end all booms, working night and day to keep up with it, when I got yet another call from a potential client. But this time, I'd had enough. I was about to explode. If I took another job, I'd have to check myself into what Billy Bob Thornton calls "the nervous hospital." So I said:

"Look, I really can't take your assignment right now. I'm too busy. The earliest I could get to your assignment would be a month from now."

And do you know what he said?

He said, "No problem."

“I don’t think you understand,” I replied. “I won’t be able to *start* on your project for another month, so it won’t be until two weeks after *that* that I could deliver final copy. So I’m talking *six weeks* until you get your copy”

“Fine with me,” he said. He explained to me that his mailing wasn’t going out for another five months, so it was no sweat off his back to wait six weeks for copy. Then he asked about my fee.

Well, to tell you the truth, I was so swamped, I *still* wanted him to get out of my life. So without even thinking about it, I quoted a fee that was TWICE what I’d ever charged before.

“Sounds good,” he said. “Why don’t I send you half now to secure the date, and half when you finish the job.”

“Well, er, I, uh, yeah, that sounds fine.” Getting half the money upfront had never happened to me before either.

Now let me explain what happened here. This guy had heard that I was a good copywriter, and that’s all he wanted – good copy. He didn’t care if he had to wait for it. He didn’t care if he had to pay a high price for it. He didn’t care if he had to make a deposit and not see any copy for six weeks. As far as he was concerned, that’s just the price you have to pay to work with a good copywriter.

Well, right then and there the scales fell from my eyes. On that very day, I established two “policies” in my business that I’ve never departed from since:

- 1) I don’t accept rush jobs under any circumstances; and
- 2) I book my time just like a dentist. If I’m booked at 2:00, you can’t see me ‘til 2:30 and if I’m booked at 2:30, you can’t see me until 3:00 ... and so on. Although, as a copywriter, obviously, we’re not talking about half-hour intervals. We’re talking about intervals of a week, or two weeks, or a month, or even more.

In the early days, I used to do one direct-mail project a week, and I charged about \$2,500 for a direct-mail package. But over the years, three things have happened: 1) the projects have gotten more complex; 2) the projects pay more than they used to; and 3) I’ve gotten *much* lazier. So now I only do about one every four to six weeks, depending on complexity. As a result, I do about ten projects a year now and charge somewhere between \$12,500 and \$22,500, again depending on complexity. My annual income

would probably put me on the low end among top direct-mail copywriters in the country. But I only work about three hours a day. Most of the seven-figure copywriters only *sleep* three hours a day.

Now, I know this sounds very easy and simplistic ... and it is – *until* you try to do it for the first time. Believe me, it's going to *kill* you the first time you tell a client that you can't do his job for a month and he says, "Well, then I'll just go hire someone else." And yes, that *will* happen to you. And when you tell your wife or husband about it, he or she is going to say, "**ARE YOU CRAZY? WHY DIDN'T YOU TAKE THE JOB? WE HAVE TO PAY THE MORTGAGE!**"

And, in fact, after you've done this to three or four clients in a row, you're going to be sweating bullets. You're going to be ready to strangle me. You're going to think I just gave you the worst piece of advice in the world. Until one day you get a call from a client, and he says, "Fine, no problem. I'll expect your copy in two months."

So now you're booked *two* months in advance. And sometime in that two months, you're gonna get another call like that ... so now you'll be booked three months in advance.

Nowadays, I'm booked an entire *year* in advance. And, believe me, the only reason I'm not booked *five* years in advance is that I don't believe in going out more than a year. Hey, I don't even know if I'm going to be alive next year, so at a certain point it just gets silly. That's why I don't accept assignments more than a year in advance. But guess what happens when you tell somebody that you can't work on their project for a month, or six months, or a year?

They start to think you're really good, that's what! They tell all their friends, "Hey, I just talked to this copywriter who's so good he's booked a whole year in advance!" After all, this is a fundamental copywriting technique that you should be very familiar with. There's nothing that enhances desire like the knowledge that something is hard to get. Why do you think we write "Supplies are limited" in our copy? Scarcity and rarity increase desire and increase value, that's why.

What happens when people start to think you're hard to get and you're really good?

They offer you more money! If you're currently charging \$5,000 for a direct mail package and you're booked six months in advance, it won't be long before somebody says, "What if I paid you \$10,000, could you move me up in the line?" Well, you can accept that offer or you can reject it. But one way or another, you now know your market value is actually \$10,000, so the *next* guy who calls has to pay \$10,000. And so on and so on. In this way, your clients take care of your pay raises by themselves. You never have to go to anyone with your hat in your hand and say, "Will you please give me more money next time?" Either they keep up with your going rate, or you'll work with someone else who will. [By the way, that raises an important point. You've got to get rid of old clients from time to time. I know we get to be fond of people, and they become fond of us, but if the fees get stuck at a low level, you've either got to move 'em up or move 'em out. One of my oldest and dearest clients is still a little pissed at me for letting her go about ten years ago. But this is a business. Why would I work for \$2,000 doing a project for one client when another client is offering me \$20,000 to do essentially the same thing?]

And please, remember the first rule: NO RUSH JOBS! No matter how much they plead. No matter how much money they offer. Doing rush jobs just sends the wrong message about who you are and what you're all about. Do you think Michelangelo did rush jobs?

I was sitting next to someone at some direct-mail industry luncheon once, and she told me that her agency hired freelance copywriters. She said she might be interested in hiring me, when would I be available?

I said I wouldn't be available for about ten months.

She laughed in my face. She said, "That's ridiculous. In my business, we have to hire copywriters who can do a quick turnaround. All of our jobs are rush jobs. We need copywriters who can do a project in a few days, a week at the most."

Well, I don't like to be rude to strangers, so I tried to put it to her as gently as possible. But it was still something she needed to hear. I said:

"I hope you understand that your policy effectively makes sure that you'll be working with the world's *worst* copywriters."

She didn't speak to me for the rest of the lunch. But big deal. I didn't want to work for the woman anyway. She was essentially telling me that she ran a low-rent sweatshop, and working for that kind of client isn't going to do a damn thing for my career, financially or otherwise.

I've also had a few prospective clients over the years call and ask if I could work *at their office* for a period of time. The only reasonable response to that is to say, "You're not looking for a freelancer, you're looking for a temp. *Click.*"

As a professional, your professionalism is one of your most valuable commodities. You can't do anything to jeopardize it. You can't allow yourself to work under ridiculous time constraints. You can't accept fees that don't fairly compensate you for your time and expertise. You can't work at your client's place of business, like some glorified cleaning lady. Most of all, you've got to work on *your* schedule, not theirs.

So that's the secret:

- 1) Book your time in advance; and
- 2) Never accept rush jobs.

One of the wisest things Ronald Reagan ever said was this: "There *are* simple solutions to our problems – just not easy ones."

The advice I've given you is very simple. But it's not easy. It'll take some courage and determination on your part to pull it off. But if you do, and if you stick to it, you will thank me many times over for this one simple piece of advice.