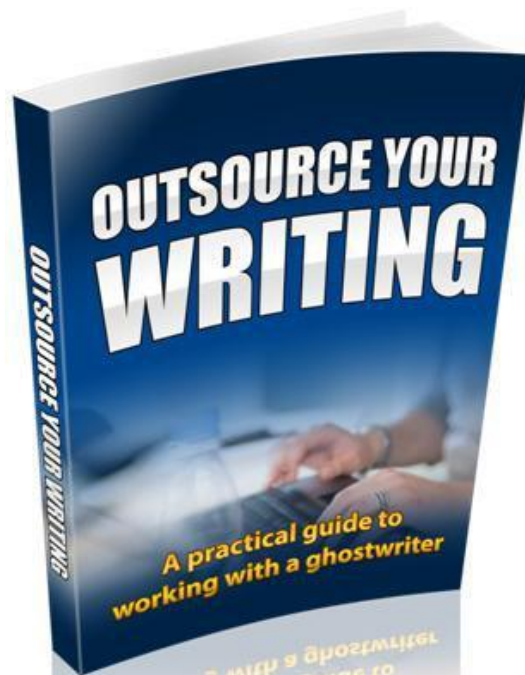


Outsource Your Writing

A practical guide to working with a ghostwriter or hired content writer



About the Author

Peter J Prins is a freelance writer and ghost blogger from South Africa - a country with a relatively weak currency. Due to the linguistic diversity of the population (11 official languages), English remains the most widely used medium of communication.



For more detailed information, you may want to visit:

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Introduction

There are various reasons why people outsource their writing, and there are just as many reasons why many prefer not to. Many a dreadful tale has been told about outsourcing projects gone wrong...

The results range from pathetic writing to poor communication, to missed deadlines, and of course to the wrong tone of voice. Depending on your project specifics, any one of these can cause serious damage to your business.

On the other hand, however, many well-known companies and internet marketers use ghostwriters on a regular basis - successfully.

The question is: What do they do differently in order to have everything running smoothly?

There are a number of things you need to pay attention to. Unfortunately, the less you pay, the more carefully you will need to be paying attention. What you pay for is what you get - and as with everything you buy in life, cheaper often means you are exposed to more potential problems.

In short, it comes down to this:

- a. Decide exactly what you want - and do not want.
- b. Have realistic expectations.
- c. Put systems in place to ensure your product is delivered on time, and that your expectations are met.

1. Decide What You Want

Many people make the mistake of only presenting a vague idea of what they want. If you do not know what you want, how on earth is your writer supposed to know?

Decide who your writing is aimed at, and what would constitute value to those readers. Also consider the purpose of the written piece. If it is a short report aimed at getting people to buy something else, it has to be well written - regardless of its length - in order to get the reader as far as buying, or contacting you about providing services or products.

On the other hand you may just want "so-so" content articles to attract search engine traffic to your blog, hoping that the visitors will click on AdSense ads and make you some money. Alternatively, you may even want articles to distribute as part of a link building campaign. While these need to be grammatically correct, they need not be of the highest quality, or address in-depth topics.

On the other hand, if you target a niche or market where your credibility is crucial, you may want to - once again - reconsider the quality of the writing you put out there. If, for instance, you want to position yourself as an expert, you will need to have your (blog-, content- or syndicated) articles written to impress your target audience.

What you want will directly impact how much you will need to pay up, and what your requirements for hiring will be.

2. What do You NOT Want?

This is equally important. If you can tell your potential writer what you do not want, you will help him or her to steer clear of the wrong tone of voice, the wrong content composition, and the wrong angle.

Additionally, your dislikes may relate to the performance of your employees, so - for instance - you might dislike not being kept up to date, or you may dislike deadlines being missed. You might dislike being questioned, or having your instructions questioned.

NOTE - depending on your own experience (or lack thereof), and the experience and capabilities of your prospective writer, you might want to take your writer's suggestions and/or objections seriously, or at least consider them without getting upset. After all, he or she works with writing on a more regular basis, and can identify (and offer solutions to rectify) potential problems before they get out of hand.

A quick example: A few years ago I was commissioned to write a series of ebooks on real estate investment. I was given access to research material, but also given strict instructions as to what the content of each ebook should be. I noted shortcomings in one of the volumes, but when I pointed them out, I was told to adhere to the

instructions....

I did. Upon delivery, the client sent it back, insisting that additional information be added (at no additional cost) - ironically, those were exactly what I had proposed earlier. Unfortunately for him, I had by then already racked up the agreed word count, and actually spent more time doing so than anticipated because I was limited on topical content options.

I refused. I did what he (originally) asked me to do, and I was not about to sacrifice time I could have used to earn money for a mistake that was not mine.

Always keep in mind that you cannot change your mind AFTER the project had been delivered. Plan well, or face the consequences.

3. **H**ave Realistic Expectations

Your content- or ghostwriter is not slave labor (unless you just want junk articles). He or she has to produce quality content. As such, you will have to accept that he or she can only produce so much good content in any given period of time, and that "the pencil becomes blunt" at times as well.

Yes, it is possible to push oneself beyond one's limits - but then the quality tends to suffer. Always keep in mind that, even while writing a factual piece, the writer still has to create an engaging piece of content. If not, the resulting piece will - even if it is factually correct - be drab, boring, and even lack cohesion.

Additionally, please keep in mind what you are asking, and from whom. If you expect a college dropout to write about medical topics, don't expect any doctor to be fascinated by it. If you are asking someone from the Philippines to write about US tax laws, don't expect it to be correct or to be of any reasonable quality.

As with all things in life, you need to pick the right person for the job. After that, you have to keep in mind that you are dealing with a human being who may or may not have his or her own problems to deal with (and considering what most ghostwriters are paid, many of them struggle to get by - which does have an impact on their capabilities).

4. **W**hat You Pay for is What You Get

In most cases, what you pay for is what you get. DON'T expect to pay some eastern writer \$20 for a 10,000 word ebook which you want to sell on Amazon Kindle, and expect it to make you a hundred times what you paid for it.

If you want to buy something cheap, you can expect it to be cheap. If you do happen to strike it lucky and get something great written for dirt cheap, don't be too happy. Once that writer has proven him- or herself, he or she will start moving on to better paying clients, so your chances of building a long term business relationship are not really good - unless you offer more for the next project.

Additionally, consider your expectations. If you want an awesome final product which has to make you a good amount of money, you will need to keep in mind that expertise comes with a price tag.

5. Choosing a Writer

Freelance writers are a dime a dozen. Just go to places like Odesk, and see how low prices are being thrown around, reflecting what many people think of the writers who have to create the content that has to make them good money...

On the other hand, good writers are not that common. Once again, it comes back to expectations - do you want something you can put your name on without being embarrassed about doing it? If not, go and pay \$1 per article. Good luck with the results. Go and pay \$50 or even \$100 for a 10,000 word report/ebook. Good luck with that, too.

If you can get what you want for that price, good for you. You are one of a lucky few.

When trying to find your perfect ghostwriter, the ideal is to find one that has samples of his or her writing published online. This way, you will immediately be able to see if he or she has a reasonable command of the language you want your writing in. You will get an idea of the writing style as well, but what you see might not always be the only style in which he or she can write, so it might pay to ask.

When choosing a writer, you need to look at capability, availability, communications and price.

NOTE: It is often difficult for ghostwriters to offer references. After all, how would YOU feel if your ghostwriter went and told the whole world that he or she wrote your book? Additionally, if the writer used to work for an agency, the agency might not be happy with the fact that this writer is now going freelance, and refuse to offer a positive reference. As such, it is often up to you to determine if your prospective writer is going

to cut it or not. Remember the "ghost" in ghostwriter - we are "not supposed to exist", since YOUR name is on the final product.

In order to establish capability, you can simply commission your writer to produce a (paid) sample on a specific topic. It can be a few articles, or it can be a sample chapter. It can be completed at a mutually agreed reduced rate if need be.

The weight you attach to availability depends on what you need written. If you just want a few articles per week, you do not need exclusivity. On the other hand, if you want him or her to write a 40,000 word ebook, you do not want him or her to spend time working on other projects in between and dilute their focus. If you are paying a decent amount of money for your book, you expect your writer to clear the table until the project is finished.

On the other hand, if you expect your ghostwriter to work (even temporarily) for you exclusively, you will need to ensure that he or she can live off what you pay.

Yes, there are people who just write as an additional stream of income for whom the payment rate is not that much of an issue. Unfortunately, you will have to keep in mind that those writers have already given their 8 or 9 best hours to their employers for the day, so whatever you get will be the result of off-peak efforts and capability.

Communication is crucial. This does not only pertain to how you contact one another - which needs to be stipulated (for instance daily updates, and/or a Skype session every few days), but it also revolves around being able to communicate your expectations. Does your prospective writer have enough of a command of your language to be able to comprehend your vision for your project, your guidelines and your ongoing instructions?

If not, you have a recipe for disaster.

6. Negotiating Price and Payment

This is - for most people - the tough part. They either let themselves be led by con artists telling them they can get miracle results for next to nothing - and end up hiring incompetent people, or end up paying too much, and never show a profit from the project.

Consider your expectations, and what the capabilities of your ideal freelance writer should be. Consider what a person of those capabilities should rightfully be earning in his or her country of residence. This is where most people rush towards countries with

weak currencies and low household incomes like India and the Philippines in order to save money...

Unfortunately, they also risk dealing with someone to whom they cannot communicate their vision and expectations, as well as dealing with someone who might live in unfavourable conditions (like overcrowded accommodation) which might negatively impact the quality of their work.

So - consider your expectations, and what a reasonable salary structure would be for the ideal candidate in his or her country of residence. Keep your eyes on the exchange rate, because it might open up possibilities, or close some of them down. Here in South Africa, the local currency strengthened (a few years ago) to the point where it was no longer viable for me to do freelance writing. In fact, my earnings dropped by about 40% from what I used to earn when I originally started out as a freelance writer. I quit writing, and turned my attention elsewhere. However, during the past year it weakened again against the major currencies, making it worth my while to - once again - offer my services.

When it comes to payment for work delivered, it is pretty much a matter of consensus between you and your prospective writer. In most cases, ghostwriters writing an ebook ask for 50% upfront, and 50% upon satisfactory completion. It might seem like a huge risk, but the ghostwriter faces an even bigger risk: If you do not pay him or her, there is little chance of legal recourse, and being in a country with a weaker currency, the financial impact will be harder on the writer than it would be on you if you had to lose the deposit.

Alternatively, you can arrange to make payments as sections of the work are delivered. That way, the risk is less, while your writer can have a steady cash flow.

In the case of articles or content writing assignments, payment will depend on the amount of work involved and the duration of the project. If it is a long term project, you might arrange to make payments on weekly basis. While you might prefer to make payments on a monthly basis, please bear in mind that this poses a huge risk to the writer. If anything should happen to you (for instance if you should land in hospital, even if only for a week or so over payday), the consequences could be disastrous for someone who is wholly dependent on that payment.

At the end of the day, there is - for both of you - an element of risk involved. Your job is to manage that risk as best as you can to ensure that your product is delivered, and that your freelance writer can survive.

7. Getting Started

First things first: Draw up a simple agreement stating that you hold the sole rights to the finished product, and that any breach of the agreement will warrant legal recourse. You cannot have your writer selling your content to someone else again after you paid for it.

Then...

How much your involvement in the project will be will depend partly on the writer you chose, and partly on the expectations you have. It is, however, crucial that you bring your vision (of the finished product) across before anything is written.

Remember the old saying: "If you aim at nothing, you are sure to hit it every time"

If you do not specify exactly what you want, you can't complain if it turns out differently. How you specify it need not be complicated. You could - for instance - present your new ghostwriter with samples of writing similar to what you want, or in the case of an ebook you can present him or her with a similar ebook, and point out what you want differently in yours.

The better you can communicate this, the better your chances of getting what you want, even with an inexperienced writer.

Present a proper framework for the book, with clear instructions. If your writer has some experience, consider any input he or she might offer. The final choice is yours, but they might point out something you have overlooked, or something that can be improved at no extra cost to you.

Provide the necessary research material - depending on the topic, the depth and the capabilities of your writer. Also make it clear that it is not acceptable to just "mildly rewrite" the content, since that could leave you looking like a rip-off artist, and destroy your credibility. Anything written has to pass Copyscape (an online tool to test for copyright infringement and plagiarism). The research material is exactly that - research material - and not the base material for your brand new ebook or course.

In the case of articles, you can get away with just rewriting existing articles, since it is only a small number of words.

NOTE: On the topic of rewriting - if you need to have articles rewritten into multiple versions, it becomes more challenging for the content writer with every new version, since there are only so many ways in which you can portray the same set of facts.

Additionally, be warned that, if you ask for articles to be written according to given keyword phrases, providing multiple keywords that are essentially slight variations of one another will pose the same challenge. When negotiating price, keep in mind that

only the first rewrite is simple, and that it becomes progressively more challenging after that.

Next, decide - along with your writer - what the time frame will be for the project (or each phase), and how this will be monitored. Be sure to follow up, especially if it is the first time you are working with the specific writer.

Keep in mind who you are dealing with (especially if you are not paying much) - in most cases you are dealing with someone working from home, struggling to make ends meet. Conditions are often less than ideal, and circumstances may arise (stress at home, a sick child, etc) causing your writer to lose his or her creative edge from time to time. Be prepared to spend some additional time on that. If you are working with cheap labor, there is a reason why it is cheap labor - but it's not slave labor.

If you find your writer is "going off course" (deviating from your vision and/or instructions), address it as soon as possible - before it gets out of hand and requires a lot of work to fix. As such, it is a good idea to have new writing delivered to you on a regular basis.

Be critical, but don't nit-pick (unless you are paying a lot of money for it). While it is within your right to point out grammatical, spelling and factual errors, keep in mind that your ghostwriter's choice of words might not be the same as yours. Additionally, if you keep sending it back for unnecessary edits and fixes, you will simply delay the final delivery date - and your ghostwriter will never want to work with you again.

Once the final product has been delivered, read it through from start to finish as soon as possible, and if any edits are needed, request them as soon as possible. Additionally, when requesting those edits, be sure to request all of them at once. The reason is simple: Your freelance writer would like to move on to the next project, and needs to "clear the table" for the new client - just like he or she did for you at the start of your project.

As soon as you are satisfied with the product, send the payment as agreed. This builds trust and paves the way towards a long term working relationship with your writer. Keep in mind that, depending on where your writer resides, it might take a week or more before the funds are available in his or her bank account.

NOTE: Keep the standard of living of your writer in mind. Many of them live hand to mouth. If they had been able to wait a month or more for payment, they would have been writing for Amazon Kindle and not for you. After all, your writer does have the capability to write, usually on various topics.

Lastly, evaluate your experience with your freelance writer, and decide if you want to work with him or her again in the future.

In Conclusion

There is an old saying: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail". It is so true it is scary...

So:

Plan - decide what you want, how you want it, and what your ideal writer should be like.

Negotiate - evaluate your writer's capabilities, and decide on a schedule, monitoring, price and payment.

Follow up - keep tabs on what is happening as it happens to correct possible problems as they arise.

Wrap it up - once finished, finalize any remaining edits - and payment - as soon as possible.

Evaluate - and decide if you want to use the writer again.

To Your Success

Peter J Prins

For more detailed information, you may want to visit:

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