



Ghostwriters From The Inside Out

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How to Find and Hire the Perfect Ghostwriter

Why You Need a Ghostwriter

As a successful entrepreneur you need to communicate all day, every day, with your customers, suppliers, partners, employees, and others.

Chances are you are pretty good, perhaps even excellent at spoken communications. Chances are you are also pretty good when it comes to very short factual written communications, like emails, or short business letters.

However, whether you have major writing-related business plans such as creating in-depth websites, or writing white papers or e-books, books for traditional print publishing or presentations to be distributed, you may benefit from the services of a so-called “ghost writer” or “ghostwriter.”

Ghostwriters can help you with fiction or non-fiction; they can help you with materials you have in development or they can help you with crafting materials from scratch. They can even help with every day business communications, though they may not be as cost-effective for that.

Like any ‘human capital’ resource, the trick with finding and using a great ghostwriter is in understanding what you’re trying to achieve, matching the resource to your goals, timelines, and budgets, and recognizing what a ghostwriter can and cannot do for you and your business.

Chances are, he or she can do a lot!

Ghostwriters Are Your “Secret” Weapon

You’ve probably worked with various writing professionals before, such as copywriters or an ad agency.

Ghostwriters are different from other forms of professional writers for hire, mostly in one important way. The understanding with ghostwriters is generally that the written material will be published under your name – as if you wrote it. This is the explanation of the term “ghost” since in most situations the ghostwriter will be “invisible” to the normal reader of the material.

In other ways than this, ghostwriters are not too different from any other writing-related professional you might hire, such as a marketing or ad agency, copywriters, lawyers, or others.

In almost all of these situations, everything you pay for becomes your material through a legal concept called “Work For Hire,” but there are often specific restrictions on what you can do with the materials.

With a ghostwriter arrangement in most cases you can do whatever you want with the materials, including present them as if you wrote them, cut up and reuse the materials any way you like, or, and most importantly, sell them!

Who uses ghostwriters?

More people than you would think. Ghostwriting is an “open” secret, not only in the world of consulting and internet marketing, but also in major publishing.

All the celebrity books that come out each year, for example, are almost all written by ghosts, and sometimes this is credited openly and sometimes it’s not. There are even well-known ghostwriters who work on any number of political, sports or entertainment titles in a given year. Once they are known, of course, they are “collaborators” or co-authors, but the idea remains the same. Hollywood scripts are often rewritten by ghosts. The most famous of these recently is Carrie Fisher – a “script doctor” – who is of course best known for playing Princess Leia in the original *Star Wars* movies! Some of her rewrites are credited and many others are not, though her involvement is usually known about among the industry. And there are hundreds of lesser known writers doing this too.

Regardless of whether it’s a screenplay or a book on business ideas, unless you’re borrowing the “expertise” of your ghostwriter to gain credibility, you generally won’t want to use his or her name -- you’ll want to use your own.

Is this like hiring someone else to write a paper for you in school? Of course not, although some entry-level ghostwriters actually do write school papers (and we recommend against ever using a writer who is willing to do school papers – this is a seriously grey ethical area to say the least).

There is however no ethical issue with using a ghostwriter for business writing any more than there is in hiring a mechanic to fix your car or a landscaper to do your lawn. You hire professionals to do what they can do better than you, when it needs to be done right. Or in this case, done “write”!

The bottom line is there is no shame in using a ghostwriter! And a ghostwriter can help you accomplish things in your business you'd never otherwise achieve.

How To Choose, Find, Use and Profit From A Ghostwriter

The rest of our report will teach you about how to find, choose, use, work with, and get results with a ghostwriter; as well as some of the major pitfalls and red flags to avoid; and some ideas to get you started in finding that great ghostwriter for your next project.

For a moment, think about *why* and *where* you might want to use the services of a ghostwriter:

- **E-books** – without question this is the most popular use for ghostwriters today. While traditional big-house publishing is out of reach for most entrepreneurs and would-be authors, it is also unnecessary with the advent of the “e-book,” or electronic book. E-books range in length from just a couple of dozen pages in Microsoft Word format to elaborate “publications” in formats like Adobe Acrobat, complete with illustrations. E-books have a variety of business uses including brand-building, promotion of a services business, and in many cases, the direct sale of information itself.
- **Traditional manuscripts or screenplays** – another common use of ghostwriters is where people have ideas for, say, a novel or movie, and can't quite flesh out the story in the way they want. You can present a ghostwriter with some chapters, a full book that needs to be “scrubbed” or “punched up” or even just some ideas, and get a better book written much faster than trying to complete it on your own.
- **Articles for publication** – one great way to build a consulting brand is to publish articles in relevant places, online, or elsewhere. Frequently though, subject matter experts have great insight into materials but less than great ability to craft compelling reading about it. A big percentage of the articles in major legal, medical, marketing, and other trade and professional journals are ghostwritten, and it's a great way for anyone to look like a star in print.
- **Marketing materials with a byline** – such as letters, direct mail, emails, “welcome” materials on web sites, auction listings.

Now that you're thinking about how you might be able to use a ghostwriter, how do you find one, and what should you expect when you do?

Finding a Ghostwriter

Ghostwriter is not normally a title you will see advertised, nor can you generally look up "ghostwriter" in your local yellow pages. Chances are also that if you have friends or colleagues who use ghostwriters, first, they may be reluctant to admit it, and second, they generally won't pass the person along to you, because he or she is *their* secret weapon.

Certainly if you have friends or associates who rave about a reliable ghostwriter, you can start there, but we're assuming for most of you that isn't the case so we need to think about where to go to get started.

Fundamentally ghostwriting is just a form of freelance writing. It may be a more advanced and valuable form, but most ghosting is done by professional or part-time freelancers, so you can start looking for ghosts the same way you would look for any freelance writing work.

Five Ways of Finding Freelancers

Finding freelancers was never difficult – most are hungry and fairly eager! With the advent of the internet this has gotten much easier, as various online marketplaces and classifieds-style websites have popped up.

You can find freelancers at least five ways online.

1. Online open access freelance project auctions
2. Online restricted-access project auctions
3. Online open classifieds
4. Job boards
5. Freelancers' own listings

Let's take a brief look at each one.

Online Open Access Freelance Project Auctions

These work very much like eBay, except they are a services and therefore inherently “reverse” auction. You as the owner of a project and person seeking the service post an ad for your project. In this ad you can describe in detail what you want to achieve, how long you expect it to take, what kind of expertise you require of any potential partner, what your budget is, how you prefer to pay, whatever you like.

Then freelance resources will submit bids to you, stating their plan, their qualifications, their price, and so on.

In many cases you don’t need to specify your budget. You can say you’re unsure, or even if you are sure, you can say you don’t want to say. Like any buyer, you are in control.

You’re free to craft the ad any way you like, bearing in mind that different kinds of writing resources will respond to different kinds of descriptions and budgets.

Typically auction durations are about as long as eBay, ranging from 3 days to 10 days, in some cases longer.

When we say “open access” project auctions we mean those where

- There is no professional qualification or certification required to bid
- There is no special fee or membership required, other than perhaps a basic auction system membership, to bid
- There is no restriction on location or other factors

Essentially we mean “anyone can bid” on your project, and given the nature of the Internet, “anyone” probably will. We’ve seen writing project postings get proposals from 10,000 person shops in Bangalore India as well as proposals from one-man writing firms in Bangor Maine! And everything in between.

There are dozens of project/freelance auction sites and they come and go all the time.

To see the latest at any time we’d recommend running some Google searches on words like “freelance” and “freelance auctions” and “freelance marketplace” but there are two main project auction sites that remain among the highest-traffic, have reliable payment and feedback systems, five year histories and are likely to be around for a while.

These are:

www.elance.com

www.guru.com

These and most other similar sites are organized categorically by work type – generally you’ll find ghostwriters lurking in whatever section is called “writing” or “copywriting,” which, for arcane reasons, is often joined with “translation” services though these are hardly related at all other than in, obviously, dealing with words.

The major auction sites are free to browse, and often free to join as a buyer (just like eBay).

And because they *also* offer restricted-access (as do other more exclusive services) we’ll discuss them further in the next section.

Online Restricted-Access Freelance Project Auctions

Elance and Guru.com offer multiple levels of service to both project owners and prospective vendors of the services they need. In theory, the more you pay in fees, the better projects you have access to as a vendor – and the better providers you will get responses from as a buyer of services.

There may be some truth to this; there may not.

In most cases including Elance and Guru.com, the buyer (you) has to do very little to open an account, has almost no requirements other than to verify the ability to pay, which is usually no more complex than registering a credit card, and you are under no obligations until you affirmatively award business to someone.

“Ghostwriting” is not a regulated trade, as, of course, writing is not generally. This means there are thousands of people who make writing services available who may or may not have the qualifications you want, or any qualifications at all. They may have been successfully writing for decades, or may have decided last Tuesday to try their hand at freelancing.

The “restricted access” levels on Elance and Guru.com and the more exclusive online project auctions – some of which charge annual fees in excess of \$5000 – are intended to weed out truly unqualified vendors on the premise that hack

vendors will not spend money to win business, and serious business professionals more likely will.

There are also some online auctions that have higher requirements of both buyers and sellers – verified references, a verified street address, business registration proof and so forth.

In short hand, expect somewhat higher quality but also higher prices from the more exclusive levels of the auction sites; from a buyer standpoint there are also budget minimums in some cases. Some sites only take projects over \$1,000, for example.

But in many cases the “step up” level costs almost nothing. For instance, to list on Elance “Select” as opposed to the regular level of Elance, will only cost you a \$25 deposit per project. Almost any improvement in the quality of submissions is worth that.

Most of the project auction sites (open and restricted) have feedback systems similar to eBay’s, so you can do a little reading about anyone you might want to work with before committing, and you will have feedback to use as some degree of safety that your work will be done well.

The good news about writing is that *res ipsa loquitur* as the lawyers say: The thing speaks for itself. Think about it. If a writer’s response to your online auction is literate, grammatical and brilliant chances are you may have a good resource, at least on the subject of general writing skills. If your submissions are word-challenged or have glaring grammatical mistakes, move on...

The project auction sites also offer services in addition to connecting buyers and sellers, such as “online project management” tools, bulletin board systems, and other things and often require buyers and sellers to use their own payment systems. Generally speaking the burden for paying for all this falls on the seller of the services, not you, but if you want a simpler way of dealing with people, classifieds might work for you just as well.

Online Open Classifieds

Unlike an auction, which on the eBay model will have all sorts of built-in management mechanisms for both buyers and sellers, along with fees, interfaces to learn and so forth, classifieds online are not much different than classifieds

have been in the local paper for generations – you can post an ad for something you want done, and you can peruse ads for “situations wanted” where many professionals will advertise their services for you to find.

There are hundreds if not thousands of online classifieds sites in the US alone, but one of the better ones – because of its interface, popularity and fee structure – is Craig’s List.

See www.craigslist.com

Starting in the San Francisco area, Craig’s now carries listings for dozens of US cities. And as of late 2005 the fee structure is compelling – ads from a few major metropolitan areas carry fees, but in 75% of the country, they’re completely free.

Craig’s carries personals and a lot of other material, but can be very useful when looking for freelance support such as writing and ghostwriting. Craig’s does offer some basic protections along the lines of traditional classifieds (where you would respond to a box, not a person) in the form of anonymous re-mailing and so on.

If you prefer to work with someone locally, though in most cases there is little or no advantage to that when using a project ghostwriter, you may want to look into the classified sections online of your own local newspapers and magazines.

Online Job Boards

While you are not precisely offering a “job,” you are looking to employ a writer for a period of time, and we know for a fact that freelancers – particularly higher-end freelancers looking for multi-month contracts – check the major job boards routinely.

Today the three major boards include:

www.monster.com

www.hotjobs.com (now part of Yahoo!)

www.careerbuilder.com

And there are dozens of smaller ones, including some that are geared specifically towards “contract” employment, which is the fancier way of saying freelance or project work.

As long as you are clear that what you are offering is a contract position with specific deliveries and limited duration, you may find that the big job boards get you a much wider audience than even the biggest of the online auction sites.

Of course, the “bidding” aspect and other facets of the online auction are gone. You need to have an idea what you want to spend, or be open to discussing potential budgets with prospective writers directly.

Also with job boards, the burden for covering the costs (though generally minimal) shift to you as the “employer” versus the auction model, where the vendor (i.e. employee) covers the major fees. This minor investment may well be worth it, however.

Freelancers’ Own Listings

Freelance writers are generally *always* looking for work. In addition to the various auction sites, classifieds you can post, and job listings you can post, you may be able to find freelancers themselves through their own ad campaigns, web sites, “situation wanted” classifieds, or similar means.

The fact that a freelance resource is advertising says nothing about the nature or quality of his or her work.

Use your judgment – if a freelance listing looks professional and appealing to you, get in touch and discuss your project. This is as close as it gets to the yellow pages in this business!

Now that you have a pretty good idea of where to find a lot of eager ghostwriting resources, how do you qualify and select one?

Choosing Your Winning Ghostwriter

The first thing is you should be precise in what you’re looking for. If you need someone to flesh out an e-book on the subject of your time in Vietnam, that is a very different project, and will attract a completely different set of resources, than a project to write, from scratch, on how to build an internal combustion engine or a set of six articles on how to get your website the top rating on Google.

As an example of the number of possibilities Elance boasts that it has “50,000” professionals available at any time. Even if this is true, and you decide to peruse Elance in your search for a great ghostwriter, how can you possibly select from among 50,000 or even 50 writers effectively?

The answer is, you can’t, really. What you can do is “qualify out” the majority of potential submissions and then develop the ability to quickly assess the rest, culling the herd down to just a few from among which you will then choose.

First, you can – and we generally recommend you do – avoid offshore resources for writing. This will reduce the bidding pool significantly on any of the project auction sites or the response rates to your classifieds or job listings.

How About Offshore Resources?

While offshore resources offer a compelling price point, our experience is in writing you are dealing with subtleties that are both cultural and linguistic and the money saved using someone in India, Mexico, Argentina or China to write prose will be spent two or three times over fixing their work, as well as wasting time and causing frustration.

Remember we are talking about *ghostwriting* – not general copywriting for example for search engine optimization purposes. That sort of keyword-driven work can easily be done offshore with great results. Ghostwriting of longer pieces with personality and skill, cannot.

When you are producing “content” for a series of websites or RSS feeds or similar kinds of “word hungry” situations where the actual quality of the writing as writing is less important than length, word frequency and other factors that can be handled by almost anyone who has basic competence with written English, we encourage you to go for a cheap resource that delivers. You need volume and speed primarily, and volume and speed can be had for a song.

On the other hand, when you’re writing something more meaningful, intended to be read and reread, that you may charge money for and that will have your name and or your company’s name clearly associated with it, you want something better than just OK.

We'd say you want US, UK, Canada or similarly-based resources. You can shop regions. A typical NYC writer will generally charge more than a typical Katy, Texas writer, for obvious reasons.

What About Prior Experience? Can It Be Verified?

You definitely want to hire experienced writers, but unfortunately, specific experience can often not be verified, either because the work was actually covered by a Nondisclosure (as a huge percentage of ghostwriting and indeed copywriting is), or for other reasons.

Also, when we say "experienced" we mean experienced at the kind of writing relationship, deadlines, and project you have – and except in a few complex scientific, tech and medical areas, specific subject matter background generally matters less than basic skills and professional writing experience. A truly talented writer can write on almost any topic effectively, if given time to do the necessary research.

In terms of qualifying, bear in mind that you can ask things of an independent contractor that you might have legal trouble with asking a potential W2 employee. You can ask detailed questions about experience and background, you can even ask how old someone is, since experience in a contractor is not the same as in an employee – and while the law is evolving on this, you are unlikely to get sued by asking a contractor who claims 25 years of experience how old he is. If he's 28, that should tell you something, since some writers might well start professional work in their late teens, but none start at age 3!

Writing Samples – And How To Read Them

You can and should request writing samples, as well as having a detailed written exchange with any potential writer. Writers write – you should get fairly fast, fairly literate replies to any questions you may have.

You can also start to gauge whether you and the writer will have a personality fit, from the interactions about the samples and other early discussions.

About the writing samples themselves, chances are that the writer will not have “just” what you are asking him or her to do, as a sample. What you are looking for in a sample is a sense of the person’s skills and style.

Ask these questions when you review writing samples:

- Does the writing make sense?
- Does the writing get the point across?
- Does the level of vocabulary in the writing match your style, preferences?
- Are there obvious mistakes in the writing?
- Does the writing style, tone, pacing, organization, “feel” and quality match the subject matter and intended audience or purpose?
- Are the intended audience or purpose obvious?

Also don’t be afraid to ask for specific context for the sample, which can make all the difference in whether it reads well or doesn’t read well at all. Who was it for? When? Why?

We once saw a proposal document that was as dry as burned toast. When we asked what it was for – it was the introduction to a proposal that was accepted, for about \$10 million! Since we wanted a proposal writer, the fact that it worked was far important than whether it was fun reading for a lay person.

References

Most writers will have some sort of references, but we’re cynical enough to suggest you rely more on the writing you see and your own “gut” about the person than on any references unless the references are people you already know and trust. We would say the same in a fulltime hiring situation.

If a ghostwriter or for that matter any potential vendor or employee had no references at all we’d be a little nervous, but we also have found that some of the worst contractors we’ve ever seen have great references, and some of the best can have very few.

When it comes to judging personality – just Use the Force! As you would in any other situation.

Pricing

You want it cheap. Well of course, everyone wants everything cheap – but also of course as a general rule you will get what you pay for in a ghostwriter as in most anything else in business and in life.

Copywriting – of which ghostwriting is a specialized sub-category – has no “standard” pricing models. Freelance copywriting had a traditional model of print articles for things like newspapers and magazines, which would generally be on a price per word basis. The old rule for decades was 0.10 per word. Like gas prices the rates are going up a little. The more recent standard is closer to 25 cents.

If you needed a 350 word article for a local magazine, at 10 cents a word that’s almost nothing – \$35 – and at a quarter a word it’s still not much – \$87.50.

If instead you needed a 100 page e-book, at 400 words per page, 25 cents per word, you’re at \$10,000 – when in fact the going price for a 100 page e-book by a domestic writer on a non-specialty topic with quality is probably closer to \$2,000 – 2,500.

The problem with the per-word model is first, it encourages overall length which is not necessarily a good thing. Second, it encourages use of more words per sentence, per paragraph and per page. Also not necessarily good. Third and most important, on smaller projects it is a waste of time for the writer and on bigger projects it will get too expensive for you!

Some writers will work on a per-page basis and for shorter projects this may well make economic sense for you. Expect to pay around \$25-75 per page for a good US, UK or Canadian writer. You can find offshore resources who will charge \$1 per page. But remember what we said about getting what you pay for...

Many writers will offer to work on hourly rates. You can find offshore rates as low as \$5 per hour. Domestically, in most markets writing rates are \$25-45 per hour in 2005. In some metro areas, or for specialized expertise, you can expect to pay far more – medical and technical writers can easily charge \$75-100 per hour, legal writers even more. Whether it’s worth it depends on the nature of your project.

A better approach in many cases than per word, per page, or per hour is a project model, where you define what you want, and the writer agrees to do it for a set fee.

We'll have more to say about pricing a little later. For now, we're just touching on pricing as a decision-making element in choosing a writer.

You certainly can choose on price – but we recommend choosing on fit, quality and value as long as the price is affordable and makes sense for your business.

Management Style

Regardless of what you're paying, where the writer is located, and other variables, something very important that buyers and sellers of freelance services often fail to consider is style – yours and theirs.

As in management in an employment setting, the way you expect to work with someone will largely define how you feel about working with them.

- Do you prefer lots of small updates?
- Do you have a lot of specific ongoing questions?
- Are you very detail-oriented, are you likely to ask a writer to change a word here or a word there very often?
- Do you want justification for each editorial choice the writer makes?

Or...

- Do you prefer less frequent, bigger updates?
- Do you generally only have a few questions about direction and progress?
- Are you inclined to “defer” to the writer's expertise in most word choices?

There's no right and wrong.

There's just your preferences, and the writers. Which should match, or you are asking for trouble.

This can make a huge difference in the success of your project. A self-directed writer with a bigger personality will be a conflict if you are of the first detailed type; a quiet, slow writer who needs continual prompting will be a nightmare if you are the second more hands-off type.

Think a little about the way you like to work, and factor that in when choosing your ghostwriter, particularly if your project is personal in nature.

Also, if a writer asks you questions about your preferences and style, try not to be defensive about it. Chances are he or she is trying to save both of you potential aggravation, and nothing more.

Getting Started With Your Ghostwriter

Now that you've identified your project, ploughed through a stack of submissions from writers and have selected someone to work with – how do you get started?

First you want to have either an understanding or an actual agreement in place before you do much, including make the first payment (most writers expect an up-front payment to get started, see below). There aren't too many ways a ghostwriting relationship can go wrong, other than just not working out, but you should be aware of them:

Avoiding Potential Problems

There are three basic “bad things” that can happen when you hire a ghostwriter. They're probably fairly obvious but we still think they're worth spending a few minutes thinking about:

1. The writer is not good
2. The writer is too slow
3. The writer is submitting plagiarized materials

Two out of three of these are more or less “gut” issues but there is a proviso for the time issue – and some serious potential problems with number three.

If, in the course of the project, it becomes clear that the writer is different than you thought, doesn't understand what you're trying to achieve, is not a fit from a management or personality point of view, you should have already made an understanding of some kind about what happens if the project is stopped midstream.

Generally speaking you should be prepared to forfeit your deposit if there has been good faith work done by the writer, as well as be able legally own whatever

materials have been written so far. If you feel a project is getting a little off track, such as in the tone or style of the writing not matching your expectations, we'd recommend a phone call rather than emails to try to resolve it.

Why? Remember, you hired a ghostwriter because *your writing skills are not absolutely perfect!* So pick up the phone and tell the writer what's concerning you before calling the whole thing off.

The most common problem is a buyer's perception that the writer "doesn't get it." This may be a function of the writer actually not getting it, of course. It may also be a function of the buyer not explaining "it" quite clearly enough or in a way that the particular writer fully understands. Have a few conversations at the start and anytime things seem to be heading in the wrong direction.

Speed is another issue. Half of ghostwriting projects have real deadlines. But half don't. If for example you have promised an article for publication to someone that you are actually having ghostwritten, you are working against an external deadline.

You should not keep that deadline from your writer! In fact you should make it a basic aspect of the way the project is framed up from the beginning.

On the other hand, you shouldn't create artificial deadlines, and you have to keep in mind that you contribute to the speed of a project yourself.

Be responsive. We knew of one situation where a writer presented a client with a couple of dozen pages within a few days of starting a one-month project. The client did not respond with comments for three weeks. The changes requested were significant and could not possibly be finished in a day or two - the project was "late" but whose fault was that?

If a writer is truly taking forever, or continually misses deadlines, then yes, you need to find a new writer. Whether it's appropriate to ask for any partial payments back will depend on the situation.

On the other hand, being given plagiarized materials is not merely a nuisance. It can cause you serious problems, especially if you are planning on publishing these materials under your own byline and asserting copyright in them.

Most writers - and all reputable writers - will strive never to even accidentally infringe on someone's existing copyright.

Still, a surprising number of writers do cut corners, and in some cases, will lift material wholesale without attributing it properly. Research citations are one thing. Ripping off someone else's work is something else.

To protect yourself we recommend you:

- Require all writers to state in writing (email or contract) that their work will be 100% original
- Ask writers who are willing to do so to sign an indemnification clause relating to originality of content – in other words, if someone later sues you for copyright violations, you can turn around and sue the writer or join the writer in your suit
- Invest the time to verify the originality of content if you have concerns. Again, it should be fairly obvious from interacting with a writer whether they are capable of writing, on their own or with approved resources from their team if they have one, what they are submitting to you. If you have doubts, or if you think you read something someplace before, there are online services that can help, among them www.plagiarism.org and <http://www.web-miner.com/plagiarism#tools> and others.

The Work For Hire Agreement

Almost always, when hiring a ghostwriter you will want to assert “work for hire” rights, which is most easily done with a simple agreement.

What “work for hire” means legally is simply that the producer of the materials assigns all the rights in that material to you – unlike for example when an author writes a book and Alfred Knopf publishes it, the copyright in that book is typically shared, sometimes in a fairly complicated way.

With “work for hire” rules, you pay for it, you own it. Simple as that.

You can find sample work for hire agreements all over the place, including, along with a lot of good legal advice and self-help products, www.nolo.com.

Bear in mind that ghostwriters are a form of freelancer which are a category of what legally known as “independent contractors” so much of the legal material that applies to these relationships will be listed under that term at your library, in a local bookstore, or of course, online.

If you aren't comfortable preparing your own agreements, discuss how to hire an independent contractor with your attorney.

Setting Expectations

Writing is not like building a fence or mowing a yard. These things are done when they're done, and more or less of objective quality.

Whether a piece of writing is "finished" and whether it is "good" are both subjective questions, and unless you and your writing resource have exactly the same point of view, there is a great deal of tension possible on these issues.

Part of the way to control for the tension and to avoid it, is to be very clear about what you want from the writer. If you are absolutely insistent on a certain length, a certain number of words, the inclusion of particular material, the exclusion of particular material, say so.

If on the other hand you are flexible in some areas, such as word count or page length, number of chapters, or other items, also say so. Many writers are quite literal, and others are more interpretive, personality wise. If you say "around" 50 pages, many writers will give you 50 - but some will give you 36 and others 84.

Imitation may be flattery but it also comes in degrees. If, as is often the case, you are interested in a book or article that "resembles" a certain established style, be as clear as you can about how specifically you mean that. A good writer can copy any tone/voice as well as more obvious things like organization of ideas and chapters and a general style. If by "I want it like Hemingway" you mean male-oriented, terse sentences, light on details, clarify this. If by "I want it like Hemingway" you really want it to read *like* Hemingway, down to pacing and vocabulary, say so.

Also allow your writer to express his or her point of view, which, if you are working with a seasoned professional, most ghostwriters will certainly have. The earlier you seek his opinion, the better off you and the project will be. If for example you want a 200 page book on a marketing topic, and your current favorite ghostwriter thinks the subject would be handled better with a 125 page book, consider why she thinks this, then decide if you want to rethink the length, or rethink your writing resource for the project.

Setting The (Actual) Price

Before having the above conversations, the pricing discussion will in many situations have been theoretical, particularly if it started off as a discussion about word counts, page counts, and so on.

If you're going that way, you can skip this discussion for now. If instead you are, or would prefer, to work on a project basis as we suggest, you should come to a final meeting of the minds on price only when you have done the following:

- Discussed with the writer the exact style and purpose of the piece, and agree
- Discussed with the writer the exact length, or approximate length, you want
- Discussed with the writer any and all special requirements or exclusions
- Agreed upon a timeframe for the work

Consider that most writers will want more money to work faster.

Like any professional, the writer is juggling projects, and if she is good, she will have a number of things already happening when your project comes up (so always ask about availability early in your negotiations). If you have flexibility on time, you may be able to save some money - many writers we know will provide a discount for work you don't need finished for a month or two, as well as charge a premium for work you want finished faster.

When you agree on a project price also agree on payment terms and tollgates and put it all in writing, either the Work For Hire agreement itself or another agreement. Again, if you are not comfortable with making the agreements, consult with your attorney about them.

There are a million ways to agree to reconcile contractor work but most writing deals operate one of three ways:

Payment in Halves or Thirds

This is the most common, traditional approach. Few skilled writers will start work for nothing, they will require a deposit, usually half on small to medium projects or a third on larger ones. In most cases this deposit will be nonrefundable unless the writer does little or no work, or misrepresented her qualifications for the work at hand.

The first payment is to start the project. The second payment is on completion if there are only two. The second payment is on some agreed-upon event – such as finishing X chapters – with the third payment on completion.

Payment In Advance

Some writers, for certain types of work, will request prepayment. The fact is that a lot of buyers of freelance services skip out on second and third payments – regardless of the quality of the work – and many writers are leery of this. Whether to agree to prepay is a matter of your cash flow and philosophy, and should take into account what you “read” about the writer. Do they seem likely to try and run off with your money? If not, go ahead and prepay but use a regulated payment system such as PayPal to do it. We don’t recommend prepaying with a check, or certainly, cash.

Payment on Completion

Fully shifting the risk to the writer, in this case, particularly for small ongoing work – such as a certain number of news articles per week – can make sense. If there is regular production and everyone knows what to expect, the writer can write, and on acceptance of each piece, gets paid. Some writers are willing to accept a single completion payment on short term projects, or those with very small budgets, such as \$100 or \$200.

However you agree to pay, please do remember *to* pay, and to pay in a timely fashion. Writers are generally self-employed so unlike corporate vendors who have terms like Net 30 or Net 45 and can carry some accounts receivable, ghostwriters appreciate when you pay fast – and will ultimately resent it if you don’t.

Getting The Best Writing Product Possible

So far we've covered why you might use a ghostwriter, how to find them, how to think about selecting one, and how to handle the contract and payment issues.

For the successful writing project, this leaves one essential element: The collaborative style of the project and how to ensure you get the best writing work for your money, especially considering, with a ghostwriter, your name will generally be appearing on the finished product. In other words, getting the project finished!

While the ghostwriter will do most of the work, there are a few things you can and should do to help make for a successful project:

- **Do** agree to specific review periods on longer projects, either in time increments like every two weeks, or in volume increments like every 10 pages of work.
- **Do** carefully and promptly review the material, ideally marking it up either in a software program that "tracks changes" or by hand with a pencil or red pen. In publishing this is called "red lining" and unless you have complete trust in your writer's talents, you'll want to be hands-on at least in the beginning.
- **Do** be somewhat considerate of the writer's ego when criticizing the work. Some writers are lawyers or consultants by background and will tend to be fairly tough. But others are "softer" more creative personalities, and the reason to be gentle is not so much to be nice for their sake, but because upsetting your ghostwriter will generally cause more problems including delays! Find a nice way to express your concerns.
- **Do** stay open to the writer's ideas as the project evolves. Ideas are more valuable than writing, per se, and in a good ghostwriter you can often get the most value from what he thinks about how to structure your piece as from the wordsmithing itself.
- **Don't** change the scope or terms or the project midstream. If the work you have hired the writer to do is not necessary any longer, say so, and come to some kind of agreement to end the project early - and perhaps, and perhaps not, to work on something else.
- **Don't** ask the writer to make tiny changes you can easily make yourself, such as a single word.

We are confident that your next ghostwriting project will go incredibly well – and that with the right ghostwriter in your business “bag of tricks” you’ll reach your business goals faster, better, and certainly more articulately!

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