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10 Ways To Get Work As A Copywriter In An Advertising Agency

Working in an advertising agency is rewarding and challenging. But for many people just starting out, the challenge seems to be getting that first big. There are many ways you can overcome that barrier and land a job at an advertising agency.

1. Apply for Work Experience At An Advertising Agency

Agencies look at work experience students as potential employees. If you have the opportunity to take up this position, by all means, you should.

This will help you get an "in" to the agency but you'll also be able to work in various areas you wouldn't otherwise.

Once you're in there, speak up and let the agency know you're eager and willing to learn about other aspects of the agency. The experience you gain is invaluable and could lead to a permanent position.

2. Take An Entry Level Position

The advertising industry is hugely competitive and demand for jobs outstrips supply by a long shot. So you need to think laterally about how to get your foot in the door.

If you're completely inexperienced but have some basic office skills, you may like to consider getting in the door as the receptionist, secretary, personal assistant, media assistant, production junior or mail room guy (they almost always seem to be guys!).

If you have more advanced experience, you could consider a marketing co-ordinator role or something similar.

When it comes to hiring people, agencies tend to look within their own ranks before they seek outsiders. If you take up this strategy, don't be backwards in coming forwards about your ambition to move into the Creative Department as a junior copywriter. They can't read your mind so you need to let them know what you want.

What's more, whilst you're paying your dues at the reception desk, you could offer to proof copy or take on boring copy jobs that no one wants to do (there's always a few smelly briefs hanging around that no one wants to work on). You'll win kudos for enthusiasm and brownie points for taking on a brief no one wants. You'll also get to learn how an agency works and what qualities they seek in a copywriter.

3. Create a portfolio

Make speculative ads (see below), buy a portfolio carry case (from any arts supply store) and start collecting every ad you make. Creative Directors will want to see 'your portfolio' so start building up your collection of work now.

4. Create 'Speculative' Advertisements

If you don't have a client, just find a bad ad (there's plenty of them) and re-write it from scratch. Place the old ad and your re-worked ad side by side and that will count as a piece for your Portfolio*

* See below on how to create a great Portfolio.

This is a great way to show your talent because you get the chance to write for a product of your own choosing. In the real world, you don't have much choice as to what accounts you work on, so this is your chance to shine.

5. Volunteer at Community TV and Radio Stations

These organizations run on the smell of an oily rag so they will appreciate any volunteer help. They need to write and produce their own ads so this is an ideal opportunity for you to help out and learn the ropes from the ground up. You can then put whatever work you create on your showreel.

6. Invest In A Training Course

Invest in yourself. Some people have a natural affinity for words and word play, but you'll still need to learn the basics of how an ad agency works.

There are other avenues you can take that can fast track you to working in an ad agency.

One of them is to apply for Award School.

This is an industry-based training programme that runs for about 12 weeks. Entry is by selection only and you will need to submit a portfolio to apply. It is quite expensive (around \$1500) but the advantage is you get to meet copywriters and Creative Directors from the agencies. It's a great networking opportunity.

But be warned – they don't teach you how to write ads, nor do they teach you the nuts and bolts of advertising. What they *do* offer is the chance to receive feedback on work that you create each week, as well as hear industry specialists speak on certain topics.

7. Cold Call:

You've got to have courage in this industry; courage to pick up the phone and ring the Creative Director and ask to see them for 15 minutes. That's all you need. Just 15 minutes to introduce yourself, show them your Portfolio and let them know you're eager to work for them.

Do your homework so you know what clients they have, whether they've just won or lost a big account, whether the Creative Director is new at the agency or an old hand, whether they've just won an award etc. They'll be impressed with your diligence which counts for a lot.

If you don't want to cold call, send a letter first and follow up with a phone-call. You'll have to ensure your letter is brilliantly written as this will indicate to them whether you have promise or not, or else they will just ignore you when you do follow-up with a call.

Tip: One enterprising young copywriter sent in an old pair of tattered underpants with a note saying he's happy to work on any old briefs that are lying around the agency. You guessed it – he got his foot in the door. Be creative. Think laterally. Remember, it's *advertising* and any creative stunts will be looked upon favorably. Most of the time.

8. Network:

It's no secret that advertising thrives on nepotism. Instead of complaining about it, use it. Find out where the agency types drink on a Friday night. Attend an industry function (find out about them through B and T and Ad News trade journals). Go to their Award Ceremonies. There are lots of ways to put yourself in front of them. Mostly they hire people they like so strike up a conversation and then ask for help. They know what it's like to break into the industry and most are very keen to help nurture the next wave of writers. The industry is very generous in that way, so don't be afraid to ask for help.

9. Work In An Allied Industry:

Magazines and television and radio stations employ hordes of sales representatives, so why not take on a role as a sales rep? You'll get to earn an income, learn how advertising works as well as meet the agency staff and build relationships. When the time is right, you can ask for a job and you'll be well placed to get it as they'll already know you and you'll already have had some experience in the industry.

Don't forget that you're in this for the long haul so if you have to bide your time in a not-so-ideal job, so be it! It won't last forever and it's a step in the right direction. Keep your focus on the long-range plan and do what you have to do to get your foot in the door because once you're in, you're in. People move between agencies regularly and there'll always be work for good writers no matter how dire the economy.

10. Exude Passion

When you do eventually meet up with a Creative Director either in the office, at the pub or at a function, don't be cool and blasé about your ambitions. Demonstrate to them how keen you are to start work and tell them directly how much you want it. You may feel silly being so overtly enthusiastic, but they've got lots of people to choose from and they want the people who aren't afraid to ask for what they want. So let them know how badly you want this.

Even in this day and age of hustle and bustle, employers are excited to see someone with genuine passion and enthusiasm. People with a lot of experience have still been beaten out of the job by someone with less experience but a lot of heart.

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Why Copywriting Is One Of The Top Ten Home-Based Businesses

By Bernadette Schwerdt

The Copywriting Coach

The Australian School of Copywriting

If you want to create the lifestyle that gives you freedom and control over your time and pay packet, there is no better way to make money from home than being a freelance copywriter.

But more than that, it's fun. And who doesn't want to have fun at work?

Beyond that, it offers you a challenge, and a real sense of satisfaction when you see your work published in magazines and newspapers.

1. You can work as much, or as little as you like.
2. It can be part-time or full-time.
3. It pays very well (experienced copywriters charge a minimum of \$80 per hour), it's creative, requires a high degree of focus, has variety, is intellectually demanding and you get to meet fascinating people.
4. You decide how much you earn.
5. You decide what clients you take on.
6. You decide what time of the day you work.
7. You can work from home (or the beach, or a café) and you can fit it in around your other commitments.
8. You'll never have to deal with the peak hour madness, idiotic bosses you neither respect nor like or work for pay rates that are an absolute joke.
9. You have the satisfaction of working for yourself. Even better, you don't need to invest in expensive equipment to get started – a computer and phone are all you need. You can start right away.
10. If you like variety, short term assignments and project-style work, you'll love being a copywriter.

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