

05

Chapter

How To Find Work As A Freelance Copywriter

- Strategies for finding new clients
- How to create your client database
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How To Find Work As A Freelance Copywriter

Let's recap.

You've decided to become a freelance copywriter. (If you want to work in an advertising agency, please turn to *How To Find Work In An Advertising Agency*.)

You've set up your home office and you have your business cards.

Aside from learning how to actually write the copy, the only thing missing at this stage... are the clients.

Why is there so much work?

Small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are crying out for good copywriters.

Why? Simply because they can't afford the full-service advertising agencies that charge an arm and a leg to pay for that extra level of service, as well as the marble reception desks, cream-centred biscuits and filtered coffee.

SMEs just want a local, reliable copywriter who'll write solid sales letters, effective brochures, targeted website copy and newsworthy newsletters. They don't need the bells and whistles that large agencies offer.

The secret occupation.

Believe it or not, millions of SMEs in Australia are not aware that copywriting as an occupation even exists! And of those that do, many don't know how to find a copywriter, which means they often end up writing the copy themselves.

But they don't want to write their own copy.

They have a business to run and are very, very happy to pay a copywriter good money to write the copy for them. And they would, if only they could find one!

Put yourself in their shoes for a moment.

How would *you* find a copywriter?

Yellow Pages? The Net?

Sure, any of those would bring up a listing. But most SMEs want to work with someone they know, like and trust, and are reticent to cold-call someone from a phonebook or website.

Where do you find new clients?

In a word: Everywhere.

Let me give you an example.

“I was flying from Melbourne to Sydney recently and the man sitting next to me asked me what I did for a living. I told him I was a copywriter. He asked me what that involved (he thought I drew the pictures). I told him I wrote the words, and we proceeded to have a discussion about copywriting and advertising in general.

As the plane landed, the man in the seat in front of me leaned over and whispered “I couldn't help eavesdropping, but did you say you were a copywriter?” I said yes, I was.

He said “Would you mind helping me with some work? I desperately need someone to write a brochure for a new liquid aphrodisiac I'm importing from China.”

Needless to say, we ended up having a very interesting conversation and by the time we'd alighted from the plane I had a brief for a brochure, a press ad and a media release! ”

— Bernadette Schwerdt

True story.

Clients are everywhere. But you need to shout it from the rooftops that you are a copywriter.

That's why it's imperative you spread the news that you are a copywriter to all and sundry via word of mouth. It's the best and cheapest form of advertising available.

Most times, clients won't even ask to see your portfolio. They'll assume that because you have a business card and you've presented yourself professionally, you'll be able to do the job.

There is ample work out there. You just need to know how to find it.

17 Strategies To Help You Find New Clients

1. Get your business cards printed.

When you meet new contacts at a networking or social function, you need to be able to exchange details quickly and elegantly. That's what business cards are for.

Get your business cards printed now so that the next time you attend a function and someone asks for your details, you have something to give them. This is THE main source of your new copywriting work and the sooner you get the cards printed, the more work you'll get.

2. Invest in a website.

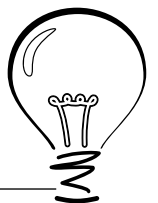
Get on board the information super-highway and invest in a basic website.

A website is invaluable because once you've made your initial contact with a prospect, you'll need to direct them somewhere that gives them more information about you.

Here's what should be on your website:

- Home page – explains who you are, what you do, what work you can create for clients and your contact details.
- Portfolio page – a sample of the work you've created, even if it's speculative.
- Resume – what work you've done before, even if it's not directly related to copywriting.
- Former clients – if you have any. If not, list what organisations you've ever written anything for. After all, writing is writing.
- Testimonials – ask a former boss or colleague to write something nice about the work you've created for them in the past, even if it was only remotely related to copywriting.
- A photo – people like to know who they're dealing with and it lends an air of credibility to your business as well.

Note: If you can't say much about your experience, don't say much. It doesn't even really matter if you don't say anything.



A former student of this course organised for a printer to print her business card. As she was finalizing the purchase, the owner of the print shop asked her if she was looking for work. She was, and the work flowed from there. He became her best source of new clients.

Remember, just like any other form of advertising copywriting, writing about yourself requires the art of subtlety. If you lack experience, but you're confident you can do the job, you can be very clever in what you don't say, and most people will read it the way you intended.

Most people just want to see that you have a presence on the web as it makes them feel more secure about hiring you.

3. Don't target advertising agencies.

You've already decided that you want to work as a freelancer, so don't bother targeting advertising agencies. They have their list of freelancers and wouldn't be overly interested in hiring an inexperienced freelancer, so save your energy, and focus on direct clients who really need the work done.

4. Create a database of prospects.

You're in this for the long haul so treat it like a business and start building your database. This will take time but you'd be surprised how quickly you can build up a list of names and addresses of potential clients.

Start recording these details now. Invest in a software programme like ACT or use the Microsoft Office package Access to record all your contacts. You can't assume that just because somebody doesn't need your services now, they won't need them next week. Keep in touch with them every month with newsletters, articles of interest, a referral or anything that keeps you uppermost in their mind.

5. Work to your strengths.

There's an old saying: 'do what you know'. What this means is, target industries in which you have an interest or those in which you have experience.

If you've been a lawyer in a former career, target law firms. You'll be looked upon more favorably than another copywriter with no legal background who has two years, or even five years, more copywriting experience than you.

If you love snow skiing, choose a ski manufacturer or a ski resort as your potential clients. If they need work done but can't afford it, you can be paid in kind. Tough, huh?

Work to your strengths and start targeting industries that interest you or those in which you have experience. It'll fast track your career and create momentum (and referrals) that'll lead to further work.

6. Fake it 'til you make it.

Like most things, you can't get work until you have experience and you can't get experience unless you can get work. The old chicken and the egg syndrome.

So what's the answer? It's very simple. You have to pretend that you can do it until you're proven otherwise. After all, what is the alternative? That you tell your prospective client that you don't think you can do it? That you think

it's a bit of a stretch so they may as well terminate the relationship now and give it to someone who knows for sure they can do it? It sounds ridiculous but that's what you'll be doing if you don't pretend, at least for a little while, that you can do the job.

Having confidence in your copywriting abilities is a must. If you're not adamant you can produce the results the client is after, you'll never be able to convince the client.

Remember that everyone feels daunted at the start of a new copywriting job. There's always a steep learning curve in copywriting, and generally quite a bit of time-consuming labour. Don't fall into the trap of focusing on what you don't know and what you haven't done. There is great power in saying 'yes' and working out how to do it later.

7. Target your existing networks.

You will get more business through your existing networks than you will by cold calling.

The easiest and quickest way to find new clients is to tell your friends, colleagues, relatives – anyone and everyone – that you are now a copywriter.

Once people start to think of you as a copywriter, they will contact you when they need copywriting work done.

Make it very clear to them that this is a new venture for you, that you're taking it seriously and that you are now open for business.

This means that if they need a brochure for their club trophy night, or a flyer for their café or shop, you can do it.

You may not seek payment up front as you are just starting out, but in a very short space of time, you'll find that they'll start passing around your business card to their colleagues. That's when you can start charging good money for your work.

How I Overcame My Fear of Being Labelled A Fraud to Become A Top Advertising Copywriter

The story of Paul Fishlock, one of Australia's most awarded and lauded copywriters.

“ For years I lived in fear of being found out. I'm not a proper writer, see. There's no novel in me struggling to get out (I only read a couple of books a year). I've never had a letter published in a quality paper. I didn't even win the school essay competition.

Every time I had more than the baseline of a poster to write I became paralysed with fear, wishing I was a 'concept' creator instead of a copywriter and could send headlines down to the copy department for men with leather elbow patches and pipes to fill in the grey lines.

I loved everything about being a copywriter except writing copy and knew that if I didn't find a way around it, the best job in the world (that I had somehow stumbled into) would collapse in an untidy heap.

So I studied award-winning copy until I thought I knew all the tricks backwards. Start with your second choice headline (never waste it). Write absurdly short paragraphs.

Like this.

Use quirky brackets about writing ads (Still reading? Good, then I'll continue). Never begin your penultimate paragraph with "So..." and always end with a joke (even if it takes half a column to set up, and isn't very funny).”

— Paul Fishlock

8. Join networking groups.

Most people cringe at the mere mention of the word 'networking'.

But really, all it involves is talking to people. If you have a clear objective about what you want to achieve from the event and a script to follow, you can breeze in and out and walk away with a stack of new contacts.

Here are some ideas on how you can increase your network:

- a) Join a formal networking group.
- b) Attend a breakfast function.
- c) Enrol in a seminar.
- d) Do a short course.
- e) Join a club or association.
- f) Attend business luncheons.

There are thousands of opportunities to network. Even in rural areas, there are local groups getting together every week. You don't have to become best friends with these people. You just need to turn up and let people know what you do and how you can help them improve their business. The rest will follow.

There are some very well-known networking groups that exist to help small business people build their networks.

Here are a few of them.

Google them and see which ones are in your area:

- Business Networking International (BNI)
- Nationwide Networking
- SWAP (Salespeople With A Purpose)
- Probus

Try Googling random words associated with small business and see what comes up. Use the following words to get started:

- Small Business Groups
- Small Business Advisory Service
- Home Business Groups
- Home Based Businesses

Here are some other sites dedicated to helping small business build their networks:

www.womensnetwork.com.au

Women's Network Australia is a membership-based organisation that empowers and encourages women to reach their full potential in business.

www.abn.org.au

Australian Business Women's Network. Their mission is to provide women with business education and networking opportunities through programmes, publications and exclusive initiatives.

www.breakthroughforbreakfast.com.au

With its supportive networks and inspirational business speakers, Breakthrough for Breakfast has fostered a seachange for many business leaders that has resulted in substantial improvement in the success of their businesses.

www.networkcentral.com.au

Network Central brings valuable life-links together in one place. Each area of the site provides tools, resources, links, news about events, web forums, products, services and more.

www.aimvic.com.au

The Australian Institute of Management holds excellent breakfasts, luncheons and seminars and they are the perfect place to network.

Local Councils

Most local councils run small business workshops and seminars so go online or ring them up and find out what they have to offer. You'd be surprised at the depth and breadth of services they offer small business operators.

9. Tell prospects that you are a copywriter.**And then shut up.**

When people ask you what you do for a living, say to them, with confidence and congruence, 'I'm a copywriter'. They'll say one of two things.

'What's that?'

or

'And what are you working on right now?'

Seven out of ten people will opt for the former. Remember, this is a secret occupation that most ordinary folks have never heard about.

That's when you launch into your pre-rehearsed 'Personal Infomercial.'

10. Prepare your Personal Infomercial.

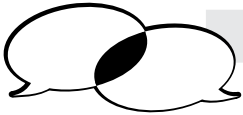
You've heard of the elevator speech? Well, this is similar.

The Personal Infomercial is a 60-second 'spiel' about who you are and what you do.

It's designed to pique your prospect's interest so that you get the chance to extend the conversation with them.

When people ask you what you do for a living, you'll know it's time to break out your Personal Infomercial.

You can use this script at networking functions, seminars, parties, anything. It works like a treat:



SCRIPT

Them: And what do you do for a living?

You: I'm a copywriter.

Them: (pause). Oh... What's that?

You: I write brochures, ads, websites – things like that.
What do you do?

Them: I run _____ business / I work for _____.

You: Oh, that's interesting. (Chitchat chitchat). Tell me, how do you normally promote your business?

Them: Well, it's a family business...

...and the conversation will go from there.

You'll discover what advertising material they have (or don't have) and that's where you come back in.

You: Here's my card. If you ever need a new brochure or you'd like a free audit of your website*, just let me know. I'd be happy to have a cup of coffee with you and discuss how I may be able to help.

*This is a killer phrase. Very few people are happy with their website and most would jump at the chance to have a professional look at it. This gets your foot in the door and enables you to build rapport and sell your services.

That's all you have to do. Once you've swapped cards, you can move onto your next prospect.

This technique works, every time. But there are a few key things you need to remember:

- a) Don't be desperate. People can smell desperation at ten paces so act cool, calm and collected, even if your child is starving and the landlord is tossing your belongings into the street. Just be cool.
- b) Don't labour the point. If they already have an advertising agency or an existing copywriter, gently extract yourself, hand them your business card and move on. There are plenty of other fish in the sea and you only have so much time to catch them. Keep circulating until you find a better catch.
- c) Don't rush. It's a conversation, not a presentation. Let them speak more than you talk. We have two ears and one mouth and we should use them in those proportions. Ask lots of questions about them and their business. People love to talk about themselves and you should love listening.

When you show genuine interest in people, they often walk away thinking what an interesting person *you* were. You may have been dead boring but because you showed interest in them, they feel like *they're* interesting.

- d) Don't oversell. In fact, don't sell yourself at all. Just let them know what service you provide, that you're happy to have a coffee and a chat, and that you're there to 'help' them should a copywriting job arise. They either need your services or they don't. No amount of talking is going to convince them they need a brochure when they already have 2,000 dusty, unused brochures stacked in the warehouse.

11. Send a media release and photo about your new services to the local papers.

Why not use the media to promote your business? It won't cost you a cent and you'll receive the editorial imprimata of the newspaper which immediately sets you up as an expert. When promoting your services, PR can be much more powerful than placing an ad. Ironic, but often true.

12. Offer to write an article for your local newspaper on 'How to write direct marketing letters for small business.'

Local papers are always struggling to find content so help them out and offer to submit a column every month about how to write copy for small businesses.

13. Offer to speak at a meeting of your local Rotary Club, business club or Chamber of Commerce.

Speaking at events will position you as an 'expert' so take every opportunity to get up and tell people a little bit about what you do and what tips or hints they can implement to improve their copywriting.

14. Offer your local business magazine a competition, for which the prize will be a professionally-written direct mail letter.

This is a great way to build your contacts database as you'll receive entries from potentially dozens of businesses, all seeking assistance with their copywriting. You can write a free letter for the winner but you could offer a 'special offer' to the rest which could turn into a very lucrative stream of clients for you.

15. Write a brief critique of a company's mailer or ad, stressing its positive aspects.

Send it to them or present it in person, offering to improve the ad. Reassure them that it won't cost them a thing unless they choose to use it. Be careful not to criticize it too heavily as they may have written it themselves. But who could resist such a risk-free offer?

16. Link up with graphic designers, photographers, printers and other allied suppliers.

These suppliers are complementary to your business. They have clients that could use your services. You'll need to develop a relationship with them anyway so you may as well let them know you're looking for business, and that you'll refer them to your clients as well.

17. Give out referral cards.

If your current client is happy with your services, ask them to refer you to their list of contacts. You could even reward them for doing so by giving them a gift or just a thankyou note. Print up some referral cards, hand them out to your clients and watch the work come in. There's a sample referral card enclosed here.

This accountant gives the cards to his clients and he gives the referrer a \$50 credit against their next bill for every new client they bring in. It's like having a team of low-cost, low-maintenance sales reps promoting your business.



Page, Harrison & Co
CHARTERED • ACCOUNTANTS

17 NORTHCLIFF STREET, MILSONS POINT, NSW 2061, AUSTRALIA
TEL: 922-7144 FAX: 929-0977

Referral Card

This certifies that (proposed new client)
qualifies for a **10% Discount** on this year's Fees
and (existing client)
will receive a **minimum \$50 credit** against our next Fees Account
upon your referral becoming a client.

We appreciate your business.

◦ Complete & hand to proposed new client.
◦ Existing client will be notified when referrals become clients.



The Institute of
Chartered Accountants
in Australia

Assignment 05

Chapter Five:
How To Find Work As
A Freelance Copywriter

**Task: Attend A Networking Event
in Your Area in the Next
Four Weeks.**

Step 1:

Find out which business networking groups are operating in your area.

Step 2:

How?

Open a web browser on your computer. Type in one of the networking group's web addresses listed earlier. Try BNI first as they are dotted throughout Australia and the world.

Type in www.bni.com.au. This site will come up.



Click through and find your local chapter.

If there's no BNI near you, try the website of your local council.

Step 4:

Ring up the BNI convenor and ask if you can attend their next breakfast as a visitor.*

It won't cost you to attend, other than the cost of the breakfast meal.

* You may be asked to become a member. Only join if you feel it will be of value to you. There is no obligation to join.

Step 5:

Rehearse and prepare your Personal Infomercial.

Step 6:

Get your business cards ready. You'll need at least 20-30 depending on how many people are at the breakfast.

Step 7:

Attend the breakfast. Collect as many business cards from others as you can.

Step 8:

When you get home, update your contacts database with the new contacts you just made.

Step 9:

Write a short email newsletter (maximum 400 words) on a topic related to small business and copywriting.

Step 10:

Send the email newsletter to your database.

Step 11:

Ring them up one week later and ask if they'd like to meet you for coffee and to take you up on your offer to provide a free website audit.

Step 12:

Meet with them.

Step 13:

Provide the free website audit. See the chapter on *Writing for the Web* for further reference.

Step 14:

Wait and see what happens. Be patient. They may not need any copy written right now, but be assured, the minute they do, you'll be the first person they call.

Step 15:

Send another email newsletter to your database one month later.

Step 16:

Repeat the steps 1-15 for the next networking function you attend.

If you fully commit to this marketing process for at least three months and attend at least two events per week, you will have a steady flow of copywriting work. It's not difficult and it only takes a few hours a week.

Creating a turn-key system to getting new leads is the key to a successful freelance copywriting business.

ASSIGNMENT 5