

Well-Fed Success Stories

I dearly love to hear about writers succeeding. Does my heart good. That's what this *Side Dishes* section is all about: writers across the country (and the world), with vastly different circumstances and backgrounds, all making it happen – and on their terms.

And virtually all of them started their journey with a copy of *The Well-Fed Writer*. Love that.

In the pages that follow, you'll hear from both general and niche practitioners (including a few nonprofit folks). Any ex-journalists out there? Your erstwhile brethren are well-represented in these stories.

Also note how many 50-somethings you'll find. Commercial freelancing is a great next career for those who've voluntarily (and *involuntarily*) retired. 55+? Check out the "Attention!" link at www.wellfedwriter.com.

The collection is divided into two parts – new stories (the first eight), and ones that appeared in the 2010 edition of *TWFW*. I moved them here to *Side Dishes*, to allow me to cover more ground in the new edition of the book.

So, dig in. I'm guessing you'll find a few folks whose stories will resonate with you – people who perhaps started where you are now and made their writing dreams come true. Enjoy!

Angie Colee – Houston, Texas: <https://angiecolee.com>

Ex-TV Development Pro Loses “Dream Job” – Evolves into Dream Life!

Back in 2010, I suddenly found myself without a job. I took it pretty hard, because up until that point I’d been working in what I thought was my dream field – TV development. I was living in LA and let’s just say the living wasn’t cheap.

Somehow amidst interviews and applying and general stress, I remembered hearing about *The Well-Fed Writer* in one of my screenwriting classes. So, I bought it and immediately jumped into the deep end.

It’s been almost ten years since I spent \$20 I couldn’t really afford on buying a book that wound up changing my whole career trajectory. But *TWFW* was the first book on writing that I read and immediately thought, “Hey, I could do this!”

I started out taking any project I could find on freelance sites – editing people’s screenplays, writing business plans. Over the next several years, I managed to leverage that experience into a part-time, in-house job as a copywriter in San Francisco, and leveraged that into a full-time role and then a promotion to senior copywriter.

In 2016, I left corporate copywriting to start my freelance business and never looked back. Now I run a copywriting team for one of the biggest names in internet marketing, and coach aspiring copywriters on how to build a thriving business.

All this to say – everyone’s journey to freelance writing success looks different. I’ve made every mistake you could possibly make and still managed to build a thriving business. And none of it would’ve been possible without *TWFW*!

Anne Nielsen - Askeby, Denmark

Journalist's Sabbatical Expands Her Writing Horizons (& Her Nest Egg!)

My career as a FLCW began with a maternity cover job at the corporate communications headquarters of a large, international company based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Their corporate language was English.

I was 52 years old, and as a Danish-English bilingual, I had for the past ten years been working as a reporter at a smallish Danish-language newspaper with a pay scale and retirement plan to match (i.e., poor). But the paper did have one good perk: the chance to take a longish leave of absence.

During my temporary job in the corporate world, I got to know a lot of people and learned a lot about the company. And a lot of people got to know my skills. So, when I returned to the newspaper, I started getting sideline assignments from my ex-colleagues, all chronically overworked.

Finally, I could see that the sideline had "headline" potential, and in 2006 I quit the newspaper altogether and started my freelance business with a ready-made base of customers. By then I was 56.

Since then, I've had a steady flow of work with virtually no marketing. Some of the people I worked with ultimately left the company that was the original basis for my business – but many of them continued to call on me for help in their new jobs, thus providing me with new customers who also needed English-language writers.

I am now 68 and beginning to consider retirement. I've been able to significantly grow my retirement plan, and have a nice, additional nest egg resting in my business bank account. All in all, it looks like my retirement is going to be much more comfortable than I could ever have hoped for back when I was working my "steady job" as a journalist.

Don Sadler – Suwanee, Georgia: www.donsadlerwriter.com

In-House Writer Loses Job in Downturn, Wins Big as Niche Freelancer

In 2009 I was laid off from my editor/writer job with a major publishing company due to the financial crisis. I quickly decided to try full-time freelancing before looking for another job, and I knew within a few months it was the right decision.

During my first year of full-time freelancing, I earned about 80 percent of my former salary. During my second year I hit six figures and topped my former salary – and I've never looked back.

Here are a few success tips based on my experience over the past decade:

1. Carve out a profitable niche. I spent my writing career mastering the business and financial services industries so it made sense to stay focused on this niche. Fortunately, there's high demand for writers with this kind of knowledge and experience, which enables me to charge high rates.

There also aren't a whole lot of other freelancers focusing on this niche, so I'm kind of the big fish in the little pond.

2. Start freelancing on the side before you go full-time freelance. I started doing freelance work on the side a decade before I went full-time freelance.

So, when it was time to take the plunge, I already had a handful of clients and knew how the freelance game worked. This gave me a big head start right out of the gate.

3. Treat your freelance business like the business it is. Self-employment takes discipline. Create a daily work routine that works for you and stick to it every day. Don't let yourself be distracted by the countless "shiny" things that can lure you away from your business and your work.

Neil Moran - Sault St. Marie, Michigan: www.greenindustrywriter.com

Ex-Prison Teacher "Grows" into His Lucrative "Green" Niche

For 25 years I worked in a correctional facility (yes, a prison). The last 12 years were spent as a horticulture instructor in a vocational center where I learned a great deal about horticulture and gardening.

Towards the end of my tenure, I began thinking of writing full-time when I got out. For years I'd written magazine features, press releases and a prison newsletter.

I figured there'd be more opportunities in copywriting than magazines. I prepared by reading *TWWF*, and after reading the discussion about generalist vs. niche writer, I decided I'd be limiting myself if I focused solely on gardening and horticulture.

So I set up my website as a generalist, and struggled for several years. Gradually, almost by instinct, I started marketing more to my niche, and doors started to open. I discovered a company that published four horticulture trade magazines (I "discovered it" because I was now looking in the right places).

I sent a query to one of them on a subject I was comfortable writing about, landed the assignment, and began querying their other publications. Soon, they were asking *me* for ideas, paying me well, and keeping me busy (and are *still* keeping me busy).

In one of these "hort" trades, they compiled an annual "Top 100" lists of green-industry firms (i.e., nurseries, greenhouse operations and landscape companies). I also stumbled upon a list of all the major horticulture and garden suppliers known to man.

From these sources, I picked up work writing newsletters for a fertilizer company; ads for a garden-tool company; a press release for an irrigation company; sales letters and other marketing materials.

And to imagine that I once thought there weren't enough companies in my niche?? There are literally more than I could ever tap into in this lifetime!

Now, I market myself strictly as a "copywriter for the green industry," on my website, LinkedIn, and with my marketing materials. It's pretty much an exhaustive list of people I can tap for work. Oh, here's a nice perk I get from this writing niche: people often send me free plants and gardening tools!

Liz Farr - Los Lunas, New Mexico: www.farrcommunications.com

Fed-Up CPA Starts Writing About Accounting, Now Loves Her Life!

After working as a CPA for 13 years, I was burned out. I needed something that I could step into easily without a big cut in pay. I always got kudos at work for my writing, so when a copywriting course fell into my lap, I knew I had found the key.

Freelance commercial writing appealed to my very logical brain, and I had seen enough whitepapers aimed at accountants to know there was a demand. I was still working full-time when I found my first client, who realized that an accountant who could write was a rare find.

On a whim, I reached out to an editor at the Journal of Accountancy, who happened to be looking for writers who were also CPAs. By following up with connections I made from my first Journal of Accountancy article, I landed a retainer deal writing content under my byline for Intuit.

That gave me the confidence to quit my job as a CPA in December, 2017. I made more in my first year as a full-time writer than I was ever paid as an accountant.

Besides ghostwriting for accountants, I also write paid articles under my name for several accounting news sites. Those articles form the bulk of my marketing. One of those articles landed me work with a software company that needs more content than their two in-house writers can produce.

Besides better pay and less stress, I get to work with thought leaders around the world. Sure beats tax-season hell!

Tom Bentley - Santa Cruz County (Central California)

www.tombentley.com

Multi-Disciplinary Writer Touches Every Writing Base Thrice

My writing career has rambled, and in those travels, I've set up some outposts I return to regularly. After graduating with an English degree, my first real job was as a copywriter for an outdoor equipment firm that produced a series of product catalogs.

I learned the power of a provocative blurb, and the necessity of brevity. (Though in subsequent writing, it's clear I didn't learn that necessity well.) I moved on to the software world, working as a tech writer and editor for programming products.

But I sought my own entertainment in fiction writing, so I returned to school and got a Master's in creative writing to indulge those whims. I then spent years on staff of an educational gaming software company, where they gave us manual writers a good deal of latitude in writing entertainingly.

Good as that job was, I wanted to get into magazine and newspaper writing, so I quit to freelance. That was 25 years ago. Excepting a couple of years as a senior writer at a travel consolidator, where I wrote marketing copy of all kinds about lavish properties and vacation activities, I've freelanced ever since.

That work has included lots of content marketing writing, often for businesses in tech. Mixed in with those efforts has been lots of journalistic writing, travel writing and personal essay pieces. Plus many book-editing projects, both fiction and non.

And three novels and a book of short stories of my own. Writing variety is sustenance to me, but all of it is storytelling – always trying to make the audience lean in. Words, can't get enough of them.

Debbie Curtis - Ithaca, NY

<https://palominohillwritingservices.com/>

Bus Driver/Animal Scientist Turns Eclectic Life into Fulfilling Career

I've always wanted to work from home, and tried out many things over the years, including selling Avon and running a livestock feed business out of my garage. Then, I became a school bus driver because I hated the daily grind of secretarial work.

Driving a school bus had several pluses: health insurance for my family; I got to work while my kids were in school and I had summers off. I wore jeans, ate lunch at home, and had all the time in-between to handle errands others relegated to Saturdays!

Who knew that cruising around in the big yellow Velveeta box would be the basis for a freelance writing niche years later.

I switched gears, and investigated magazine writing; then worked for six years to earn a bachelor's degree in Animal Science from Cornell (when I was 42); and was a pharmaceutical rep for a few months until they wanted me to move. Back to the bus garage!

Then, I found Carol Tice's Writer's Den, and just about wore out *TWFW* reading it on the bus during down time. But the jostling of the bus (which gave me debilitating back pain) became too much, and I decided it was time to find a different lifestyle.

Now, I write for school bus and motorcoach trade pubs, horse magazines, and want to expand into a medical niche of some sort, given my Cornell degree in Animal Science. I've been a Firefighter/EMT, a pharmaceutical rep, and worked in the vet school pharmacy during college.

Being a farmer at heart, I arrange my schedule each day according to the weather. My gardens, horses, and dogs are happy!

Rose Newell - Berlin, Germany

<https://englishroseberlin.com>

Berlin-Based Brit Copywriter Learns the True Value of Specializing

PB Note: Rose Newell, a mid-30s British copywriter and translator, based in Berlin, is one impressive woman. She's been working with words since 2006, and copywriting since 2012.

She's enjoyed a consistent six-figure income (and a four-figure day rate) for the last six years, along with high demand, and consistent rate increases (10-20% every 12-18 months, accepted even by existing clients). She's fluent in German, specialises in IT (has a Masters) and high-end real estate (through extensive reading, visiting events/exhibitions, networking). Her advice gems:

- Specialize so deeply that the client will find a way to bend the budget to get the most targeted and all-round best writer for the job.
- Keep working on your writing skills throughout your career, every day. Find an excellent, compatible editor to work with. Vary it up with other talented people to get fresh ideas.
- Ignore all rate surveys, recommended fees, etc. What matters is what YOUR time is worth. Have the confidence to simply ask for what you're worth and call their bluff. Don't negotiate when you know there are others who will pay what you ask for.
- Pursue training in adjacent areas to better understand the nature of copywriting, both in general and in your particular niche. It'll make all conversations with clients go more smoothly and they'll feel (and genuinely be) better understood.
- Enjoy the freedom that freelancing offers. Say no to work you won't enjoy. Share your strategic thoughts with clients and find the ones who appreciate and reward that.

PB Note: All the following stories appeared in the 2010 edition of TWWF. As such, and not unexpectedly, some of the folks profiled here have moved on to other passions. But you'll be pleasantly surprised to see how many are still active practitioners (those with URLs noted). Enjoy!

Nancy Adams - Higgins Lake, Michigan

Can't Be a Successful FLCW in the Middle of a Forest? Think Again.

I spent 25 years in full-time employment (administrative/management professional in an interesting mix of public, private, and nonprofit environments). "Writer" was never a part of my job description, and yet in each position, I was the go-to person for effective writing/writing critique.

I "retired" at 53 to begin a career as a freelance copywriter. With no commercial-writing experience, no portfolio/clients/academic degree, and newly relocated to my more affordable native Michigan (from California), I set out to pursue my dream of making a living doing what I love.

My business capital was the inspiration I'd gleaned from *TWWF*, confidence in my skill as an effective writer, determination...and little else.

While I'm sure it would help to have a journalism degree or years of experience in marketing or PR, I'm living proof that those things aren't absolutely necessary.

At first, marketing was a problem. I live in a sparsely populated, seasonal resort area, and I was wary of making face-to-face sales calls, so I planned to conduct virtually all of my business via the Internet.

Initially I found work on bidding sites like Elance and Guru. I accepted lower rates for the opportunity to gain experience and build a portfolio, a compromise that paid off when several of those early projects led to ongoing client relationships.

Today I have a growing client list and plenty of work. I'm more selective in the projects I pursue, and my fees are based on market rates. I've never looked back, not for a moment, and I'm living my dream each day.

Kent Austin – Lewes, East Sussex, England: www.copy-doctor.co.uk

A Portable Well-Fed Feast for FLCW in the UK

These days I have as much work as I can handle at £40 (\$80+) an hour. My assignments span the copywriting gamut: hard-nosed sales letters, web sites, brochures, brochures for dentists and patent attorneys, joint ventures with creative agencies, and most recently, a ghostwritten book on political corruption for a Nigerian politician.

Am I some kind of super-achiever? Far from it. Has it always been this good? No. Did I ever feel like giving up along the way? More than once. Would I trade this lifestyle for any other? Read on.

I bought *TWWF*. Starting from scratch and with virtually no money, I followed Peter's advice. I was self-sufficient as a freelance commercial writer within six months. You don't have to take Peter's word for it. This deal works – on both sides of the Atlantic.

I spent my very first day as a freelancer researching the web sites of established copywriters – eight depressing hours of coming to terms with my own inadequacy. Most seemed to have it all: big agency experience, solid CVs, expensive web sites, great samples – everything I lacked.

So, I started with what I had: a brochure, a few sales letters, a press release, and a web site. I invested what little capital I had into mailing a thousand postcards to a list of CEOs of small- to medium-sized businesses.

Eventually the phone rang. It was the PA of a CEO of a small but successful London-based company who'd received my postcard and liked it. Could I come in and discuss their new web site? And could I bring some examples of my work?

I sat in reception, sweating, dry-mouthed. I thought of all the other copywriters – with stunning portfolios and track records – the CEO had doubtless interviewed that day. I was on the brink of a spectacular humiliation. The CEO's door swung open, and instead of asking to see my samples, the CEO launched into talking about her business and how she felt I could help her.

Could I start immediately? When could I finish? I left her office an hour later with a \$3,000 job in the can. My portfolio remained unopened. The CEO wasn't seeing any other copywriters. She was too busy. Her problem was solved. Over time, I came to realize my CEO wasn't just an isolated case. Far from it. There are plenty like her who'll be happy to give you your first break!

Marian Calabro - Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey (NYC area):
www.CorporateHistory.net

Discovering Your Niche: An “AHA!” Moment

CorporateHistory.net produces histories that help organizations profit from their past – visual, reader-friendly, marketing-savvy books, and other history-oriented materials. Our clients include Fortune 500s, nonprofits, and family businesses.

I started in this niche as a subcontracted author. The field was a natural because I had publishing and corporate communications experience; I was also a proven writer of highly readable history books.

My business partner is a former ad agency creative director. This work calls for very strong skills in research and interviewing, as well as the ability to extract and shape a compelling narrative from masses of raw material – and to put it all together with sophisticated design.

Most of our business comes from referrals and web site inquiries. The pitching process often requires detailed proposals, careful estimating, teleconferences, or meetings. And clients rarely make decisions overnight!

Some clients inquired only about writing, but others asked, “Can you handle the art and printing, too?” It dawned on me that I’d worked in publishing all my adult life, either as a staffer or freelancer. We offer one-stop shopping, but we unbundle services if that suits the client’s needs. Being flexible increases our marketability.

Projects are fascinating, long-lasting, and lucrative. Looking just at the writing side, a history book specialist can earn a nice five-figure annual income. Experienced writers can make more.

To get started, try to interest current clients in history-themed marketing.

Mary Cvetan - Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: www.cvetan.com

One-On-One Training and Networking Help Build Writer's Business

I worked for 11 years as a marketing communications and public relations writer for a large hospital system. Some friends started freelance graphic design businesses and did very well, so I decided to follow suit.

I prepared for a year (researching, taking classes, saving money) prior to launching my FLCW business.

Shortly after leaving my job, I learned that the hospital had laid off 250 people. Within two years, most of my former department had been laid off or reassigned. I learned an important lesson about security and was so grateful I'd chosen to leave my job instead of being forced.

Today, I write marketing and sales collateral, from web site content to sales letters to brochures to white papers; I edit technical documents (300-1,000 pages), such as government reports and proposals; and I write press releases and pitch story ideas to the media to obtain publicity for clients.

The workflow can be very unpredictable, but the potential is \$3,000 to \$10,000 a month. Sales/marketing and admin can eat up a lot of time.

I built the business with networking, including joining a small business networking group and a chamber in my first year, and later becoming a leader in the local International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) chapter.

A big challenge has been sales – getting in front of the right qualified buyers, and, once there, pricing my services correctly. I took Sandler sales training in my third year of business, and it helped immensely.

I have never made a cold call and have done just two mailings in six years. Two things that helped me immensely were taking sales training and finding good mentors – and, of course, reading Peter's books!

Marci Diehl - Canandaigua, New York

Veteran Freelancer Transitions from Magazines to Commercial Writing

I started writing professionally as a very young woman, 10 years into marriage to my college sweetheart, a professional golfer on the PGA Tour.

Media and businesses surround the Tour, and I learned how diverse corporations use media and sports to connect and market. I began my writing career in magazines and spent 15 years writing freelance for local, regional, and national publications.

But divorce “detoured” me into working for a staffing company that asked me for help with their advertising because I was “the creative one.” When hard times eliminated my position, I took my portfolio on the road, networked, and set up shop in a corner of my dining room as a FLCW.

Eleven years later, I still have a home office and head up projects as a FLCW and creative director, collaborating with other professionals in broadcast, print, trade, digital, and on the web.

I have positioned myself as a high-level writer and versatile creative professional with an unusual background. In addition to writing, I can act as the producer/creative director for many businesses that have no marketing department.

My experience in magazines is now being put to use by a new magazine launch. They’ve asked me to write (freelance, of course), edit, and help to shape the direction. Last year I finally grossed six figures, but other years have been lean.

Very low overhead helps, and in the tough times, I remember how much I love working from home and having the freedom, variety, and client relationships I experience. Priceless.

Cheryl Dunkerton - Toronto, Canada

Nonprofit Niche = Success & Personal Satisfaction for Canadian FLCW

A seminar given by Peter Bowerman in Toronto first opened up my eyes to the possibilities that awaited in commercial writing. However, I spent the next two years pursuing other goals by working in international development in Outer Mongolia.

Upon my return to Canada, I pitched articles about my time in Mongolia to various publications, and all articles were accepted and published within months. I began to see that I could create a job for myself that combined my belief in working for social change and my passion for writing.

Before setting up my company to serve non-profit organizations, I spent several months studying copywriting and doing my own extensive market research while continuing to teach full time.

My first copywriting assignment was working on a planned-giving campaign for a major Canadian museum. The project went very well, and since then 80 percent of my work has been working on similar campaigns in the Canadian health sector.

Although I'm still teaching part-time at the local university, my income potential is around \$500 to \$1,500 per project.

I am very proud of the fact that my writing contributes towards raising thousands of dollars for organizations whose reason for being is to improve the lives of others.

Be professional, reliable, and easy to work with. Do what you say you'll do. It's amazing how rare this is, and it'll help develop relationships with clients you work with. No one will make your venture a success for you. Be prepared to put in more effort than you've ever put into anything before.

Jeffrey Durosko – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: www.duroskoPR.com

From Journalist to VP to Better (FLCW) Life

After many years of planning, I made the leap into the commercial writing business by walking into my boss's office (the CEO of a billion-dollar public company) and telling him I was resigning to pursue my dream.

In one hand I had a letter of resignation and in the other a proposal to continue working with the organization. I had lined up one other client prior to that event, and my CEO bought the proposal on the spot.

Today I'm so busy that I subcontract work to three other professionals in my area and am billing at \$150 per hour. I'm earning much more than I was when gainfully employed and have carved out a lifestyle with more family time and happiness all around. I have spent very little time marketing myself as the word of mouth has spread.

My initial thrust to contact all the folks with whom I had a relationship at my last position yielded clients across the US. Most of my clients are retainer clients, and my assignments range from writing projects to strategic communications consulting.

My advice is to do all the research and preparation you can and then just let go of your old life and pursue the life of a FLCW with everything you have. There is so much work out there for people who know what they're doing. If you've been successful in a related field, don't even think twice.

There truly is no secret formula to this, but read about other people who've done it, and pick up all the tips you can. I read both of Peter's books before diving in, and I went in with more confidence than I could imagine.

People tell me all the time how amazed they are that I took such a huge risk, leaving a great corporate job to pursue this career. But I say they're the ones taking a risk, since you never know when your company might be sold or when a downsizing or restructuring could leave you without a job.

Meryl K. Evans - Plano, Texas: www.meryl.net

Diversifying Rather Than Specializing Suits Texas FLCW Just Fine

I never wanted to go into business, knowing it involved things like accounting. Furthermore, as a profoundly deaf person, how was I going to sell myself if I had to rely on relay services to make phone calls? After my second child arrived, I convinced my company to let me go to part-time.

While on maternity leave, I began work on a certificate in Internet Technologies from NYU to support my goal to become a web designer. After doing several web design projects, I decided it was more frustrating than enjoyable.

Accidentally, I discovered that I liked writing about web design. Slowly, I earned more paid writing assignments.

The corporate part-time job let me build the writing business. I continued part-time until the company forced me to return full-time. By then, I had plenty of business writing experience and a healthy portfolio. Only I couldn't quit my job because my husband didn't have health benefits. We had three kids, so it was an important issue.

When my husband landed a job with decent benefits, I retired from corporate America for the freelance life full-time. The business has thrived since, and I made as much in my first full year as a freelancer as I did in the corporate world full-time.

Thanks to online networking, my web site and accompanying blog, my many online articles, and references, I managed to land enough clients to go full time. Not one client comes from the state of Texas where I live. Clients come from around the United States and other countries, including Austria, Australia, Italy, Japan, and Sweden.

Casey Hibbard - Boulder, Colorado: www.compelling-cases.com

Case Studies "Love at First Write" for Former Journalist

With a background in marcom writing and journalism, I jumped into career as a FLCW. At first, I wrote anything and everything for anyone for not very much money. But I soon leveraged my experience in writing about technology for brochures, web site copy, press releases, and case studies for tech companies while increasing my rates.

I discovered I LOVE case studies! Soon I chose to focus exclusively on them with the idea that my specialization would separate me from the crowd and help those needing case studies remember to call me. As I began educating my clients and the marketing community about my business, the response was tremendous.

Renamed and branded, I've built steady work creating success stories and case studies for companies around the world, all from my home. I even wrote a book on the topic of customer stories, *"Stories That Sell: Turn Satisfied Customers into Your Most Powerful Sales & Marketing Asset."*

My clients hire me to interview their satisfied customers, write a compelling story, and manage the process until the featured customer approves it. New business comes in via referrals, targeted cold calling, my web site, or articles I write.

To be a successful case-study writer, you can't be afraid to write about technology, since the majority of case study work is with technology companies. But know that you don't have to understand the bits and bytes behind technology; you just need to understand what it does and how it benefits end customers.

My income potential ranges from \$85 to \$105 an hour depending on the industry and complexity. I'm now moving for the second time and, thanks to the virtual nature of my business, I'm taking all my business with me!

Andrew Hindes - Los Angeles, California

Ex-Journalist Builds Thriving FLCW Business with Hollywood Roots

Before starting *The In-House Writer*, I spent eight years as a Los Angeles-based full-time entertainment journalist, including a stint at Hollywood trade paper *Variety*.

While I enjoyed the work, the pay wasn't enough to support my family, and the long hours meant I didn't spend much time with my kids.

As my last full-time job wound down, I read *TWFW* and decided to give freelance copywriting a shot. I called all the contacts I had made as a journalist (no cold calls!) and slowly started landing a few assignments.

Four years later, business is booming. I've provided PR and corporate communications copy for all the major Hollywood film studios as well as numerous networks, production companies, talent agencies, and PR firms.

More recently, I've expanded beyond entertainment into other business sectors, including technology, travel, financial services, and nonprofits.

I've never had the guts to make cold calls, so I focus on making sure my existing clients are so happy with the quality of writing and service I provide they keep coming back and referring their friends and associates.

Most of my marketing consists of cards, emails, and holiday gifts to remind my clients that I'm here and that I appreciate their business.

I continually try different marketing techniques, from networking events to direct mail, but the vast majority of my assignments still comes through word of mouth from satisfied clients.

It works: I make a living writing and get to work at home and spend time with my family.

Doug Jenner - Hitchin, Herts, England: www.bestwords.co.uk

Former English Teacher in UK Turns Writing Dreams into Reality

“So Doug, let’s get this right: You’re NOT actually a high school English teacher anymore? Now you’re a...what is it? A *copywriter*?” (Cue next question.)

I was holidaying in Australia visiting family and friends, having lived in the UK for over 10 years. They’d all known me as a teacher, and with over 20 years in the job, that was a big part of how they identified me.

So now they were full of questions, like how had I made such a fundamental career shift in just one year. Answering their questions helped me answer my own. How HAD I made it?

Writing for a living was something I’d dreamt of for a long time. I suspected I had the ability. But I didn’t fully believe it. Something that helped me develop that belief was the process of self-marketing.

Standing up at networking meetings, calling hundreds of prospective clients, and saying “I am a good writer who can meet your needs” got me a long way up that mountain of self-belief.

My writing career actually started 15 years earlier, while still a teacher, when I picked up my first writing paycheck and whooped a celebratory war dance round my kitchen.

It had been a “one-off” job – summarizing several business books. When I got the check, I was overcome with joy. My teaching career continued apace, but I never forgot that feeling. I enjoyed teaching, but I knew that I wanted to write for a living.

Now, a couple of years into a very successful career, it still helps me to get through those moments of self-doubt.

Donna Kaluzniak - Jacksonville Beach, Florida:
<http://www.h2owriting.com>

Building a Part-Time FLCW Business with Retirement in Mind

I love my job as a utility director for a small city – I really do!

But after 28 years of being on call 24/7, attending night meetings, and working mega-hours, it was time for a change. So, I started my writing practice as a part-time business.

At age 53, my plan is to build my business to the point where I can take the early retirement program in a few years and have the time and location flexibility that goes with a writing career.

Cold calling on nights and weekends was a challenge for me. I got most of my business through chamber of commerce functions and joining BNI (Business Network International).

I worked on a wide variety of assignments my first year – from online technical courses and training manuals to web copy, press releases, and brochures. I wanted a boost, so I worked with a business coach to develop a marketing plan that keeps me on track.

If you're not ready to give up your day job, it's easy to start a part-time writing business that can supplement your income or transition to a full-time copywriting career.

All it takes is determination, organization, and some time management. I expect to make about \$10,000 to \$12,000 this year, part-time, but it could be more if I boost my marketing efforts.

PB Note: See Donna's web site above for her new copywriting direction.

Janice King - Seattle, Washington: www.writespark.com

Narrowing in on a Specialty Can Produce Global Results

I became a freelance writer when I was laid off from a corporate job. Since then, I have also become an author; my most recent book is *Copywriting That Sells High Tech*. All of my clients are large technology companies.

It's an arena where writers with technical experience and knowledge can command high rates. Clients value writers who can work with technical experts and translate their explanations into clear, compelling marketing messages.

I work on a broad range of sales and PR materials: brochures and data sheets, press releases, magazine articles, web content, and especially case studies and white papers.

One advantage of working with large companies is internal referrals. I've had relationships with some companies for five, ten, or even more years simply by working in different divisions.

My industry focus has always made it necessary – and rewarding – for me to pursue clients in other states, even other countries. I believe that clients of all types are now more willing to work with remote writers, especially for projects that require special expertise.

"Good writers are hard to find" is a lament that I continue to hear from clients, and I use that message in my promotional materials and web site. All of my marketing materials consistently emphasize the client's perspective and the benefits of working with me.

Writing for technology companies continues to bring me the satisfaction of intellectual challenge, terrific clients, and ongoing company relationships that have brought me freelance success for nearly 20 years.

Heidi LaFleche – Watertown, Massachusetts

Feel-Good FLCW Success for Former Massachusetts Journalist

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, my dream of becoming a full-time freelance writer could no longer be put on hold.

I'd worked as a staff writer/editor for magazines, newspapers, a nonprofit, and dot-coms. I'd enjoyed a stint as a Boston correspondent for *People* magazine. I had the skills, the experience, and contacts to make a go of it.

After reading *TWFW*, I knew the earning potential was not in journalism, but in commercial writing. I viewed my journalism experience as an asset.

I could tell a good story. I liked interviewing people. My writing was readable and factual. I did not expect to hit roadblocks *because of* my journalism background.

I had marketing professionals tell me I was too inexperienced to compete in an urban market, including an agency person who flat-out spat out, "*We don't hire journalists.*" Despite the naysayers, I knew I could be successful; I just needed to figure out how to differentiate myself in a crowded market.

In a one-on-one coaching session, Peter Bowerman helped me realize the thing of value I could offer to business was the thing I did best: human-interest writing.

I repackaged my services with a new brochure and web site, and now the work for employee profiles, success stories, etc., is plentiful and well paying. And I've been able to fill my schedule by networking with just my existing contacts.

The amazing thing is I printed up 200 brochures, but I really only needed a few to network with my existing contacts, and that effort was enough. I have a half-dozen regular clients in education, high tech, industry, and nonprofit, and I'm actually turning work away for the first time in years.

Kristen King - Ruther Glen, Virginia

Freelancing Fresh from College, FLCW Drives, Thrives and Diversifies

I started freelancing just out of college with great skills but limited professional experience. I ended up getting a full-time medical editing job to expand my résumé, still freelancing on the side, and at \$50/hour.

Before long, I was turning down so much work that I realized I could freelance full time if I didn't have my day job. I quit my job and raised my freelance rates to \$100/hour, and I haven't regretted it for a second.

I live in a rural area 30+ miles from the nearest city, but through my online presence, I've built an international client base with customers across the US and Canada, Europe, and as far away as New Zealand.

My first website was my 24/7 marketing department during the 20 months I was moonlighting, snagging me clients even though I was unavailable during regular business hours, and it was named a finalist in the 2006 Writer's Digest Best Writer's Website Contest.

Since then, my work has grown to include not just writing and editing, but also consulting and speaking. I still maintain my award-winning blog for writers, www.inkthinkerblog.com.

I'm not sure exactly what the future holds for me as a freelancer (Different work? A book? Who knows?), but I'm confident I'll keep freelancing.

Despite economic ups and downs, I've managed to pay the bills as a freelance commercial writer for three years now – and I can't think of anything I'd rather be doing than working on projects I love while staying home with my three dogs. It's not always easy, but I'm living the dream.

Darcy Maulsby - Lake City, Iowa: www.darcymaulsby.com

FLCW Success in the Land of Drive-By Tractors

When I was laid off from my job as a content editor at a dot-com, I was inspired by *The Well-Fed Writer* to hang out my own shingle rather than go through the demoralizing process of hunting for a job.

From my home in the country near the small town of Granger, Iowa, I began building my commercial writing business. I've never regretted my decision.

I was able to build my client base in under a year to include marketing companies and advertising agencies from Des Moines, Iowa, to Sioux Falls, SD. Along the way I also landed some national clients, including the National Pork Board (I write their web features, magazine articles, and newsletters).

Through the years, I've written for real estate firms, cooperatives, retirement communities, and insurance companies. For someone who loves to learn and enjoys plenty of variety, this arrangement suits me well and keeps the creative juices flowing, which benefits my clients.

When my husband and I decided to move back to my hometown of Lake City, Iowa (population 1,800), it was such a relief to have a lucrative job that was also portable.

Today my client base extends from South Dakota to North Carolina, and I continue to grow the business, even from an area that's so rural that tractors regularly drive by my home office window!

Be willing to work hard. This is no get-rich-quick scheme. Many days I put in more hours than I ever did in corporate America, but I love being my own boss. Deliver only your best work—every time. Quality counts in this business, and it will be remembered, long after the price is forgotten.

Jacque Riley - Columbia, South Carolina

Giving Up the Director-Level Job for New Career as a FLCW

I can vouch for the fact that corporate communications directors regularly hire freelancers because I used to be one. Groomed for the marketing management track since college, I nonchalantly distributed \$15,000 brochure budgets and scrambled to find content for pamphlets, magazines, and annual reports.

Despite my interactions with the freelance community, I never considered freelance commercial writing as a career option until I became increasingly frustrated with my job. Would I always have to hire people to do the fun, creative things while I went to budget meetings?

Thank goodness for *TWFW*! I read it about three times in one week, and I decided to take those basic corporate writing principles and apply them to the dire needs of the small business community.

With \$1,000 and a three-month timeline, I decided to venture out on my own. In addition to writing, I capitalized on my design training to offer a complete suite of marketing services to the small business community.

Almost all of my small clients return for additional projects or send new referrals. I have found a place in the close-knit entrepreneurial community, and my clients are fiercely loyal. And, in the end, I really am helping some great local businesses compete with "the big boys."

As I approach my one-year anniversary in business, I have more work than I can handle and have decided to raise my rates to \$125 an hour. By viewing my start-up as a career rather than a hobby, I've been able to pursue what I love and help other South Carolina business owners thrive.

Dave Tandet – Santa Monica, California: www.davidtandet.com

Why You Should Always Listen to Your Parents

After my dad gave Peter Bowerman's seminar two thumbs up, I decided I'd have to see "The Well-Fed Writer" myself. Four years later, I'm a full-time freelance commercial writer.

(PB Note: Dave's Dad caught my seminar in Jacksonville, FL. After the workshop, Dad told me how much he enjoyed it (but wasn't going to build a business; he just attended as something to do!), and said he'd tell his LA-based son, Dave, that he needed to attend my upcoming workshop in Atlanta. "Riiiiight," I'm thinking, "He's going to come all the way to ATL from LA." But, he did!)

My work as a paralegal at a Los Angeles litigation firm gave me plenty of practice writing on schedule. And some of my most satisfying paralegal stuff was persuasive writing (discovery motions) done for demanding bosses (attorneys) on a very strict schedule (the court).

But the vision of making a living writing for my own clients? Too cool to let slip away. So I cold-called, met with fellow "Well-Fed" readers, and read "The Well-Fed E-PUB" ezine religiously.

When I saw the item in E-PUB about a fellow FLCW exhibiting at a Staples, it inspired me to do likewise. I dropped Peter a note about it. A mention in a later E-PUB led an L.A. reader to call and meet me for coffee.

A year later? That acquaintance was the editor of well-respected L.A. publication. Her recommendation got me a gig doing freelance PR for a large medical institution. It's opened the way to other healthcare writing and marketing communications in all areas.

One of my clients is a Los Angeles City Council member. The point of all this? Not that you'll get a break because you read the Well-Fed E-PUB. It's that you might. Because that "lucky" break can come from anywhere. Even when you're not looking.

Name: Lisa Manyon – Lewiston, Idaho: www.writeoncreative.com

Writing Career No Longer Just a Dream for This Idahoan

When my career peaked in the local advertising agency arena (population less than 100,000), I revisited my dream of writing for a living, and *The Well-Fed Writer* gelled that direction. I left my job, created a strong Internet presence, and started doing freelance gigs for clients across the nation.

A standard three-year non-compete clause with my former employer forced me to seek work outside my immediate market and temporarily get a completely un-writing-related part-time job (when you have a dream, you do what you have to do!).

While positioning/marketing myself to begin work locally once the non-compete lifted, I started doing freelance gigs for a design group in Seattle and for other clients across the nation. This was hastened by a strong web site and general Internet presence.

It takes money to make money. So, I joined some associations, and invested in mentorship with industry experts like Lorrie Morgan-Ferrero, for whom I crafted a press release for her mentorship program, and with whom I conducted a teleconference about my POWER Planning Process.

My national connections increased credibility locally. I created and implemented a training series, which is included in my ebook for the Idaho Small Business Development Center.

Plus, I don't forget those who have helped along the way and send thank-you cards for any occasion (Peter doesn't call me the "Thank-You Card Queen" for no reason!).

With these tactics and more, I've doubled my hourly rate, bid copywriting jobs on a per-project basis, and regularly land new writing gigs locally and nationally.

Name: Anne Deeter Gallaher - Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania:
www.deetergallahergroup.com

No Limits for this Pennsylvania Freelancer-turned-Enterprise

I began as a freelance writer doing a quarterly newsletter for a nonprofit youth ministry. They were great, but funds were always limited and \$25 an hour seemed like a lot of money to charge. Now with two of my three sons in college, I am focused on producing excellent marketing materials for superior clients for above-average fees.

I tell my clients I'm the Jaguar of marketing – not for everyone, but for those who appreciate sophisticated and highly valued communications, I'm your firm. I have won some great awards for my pieces and am proud of all my work.

There is no magic bullet for success and no guarantees in business, but the business world needs passionate people who write well.

I finally realized I was a success when people kept saying, "Anne, I see your name everywhere!" My reply: "If you've never heard of your marketing firm, don't hire them. They should be able to do for themselves what you're paying them to do for you!"

I am very active with businesswomen, especially On-Rampers (i.e., women returning to the workforce), and serve on several regional boards. I have been honored as one of the Best 50 Women in Business in Pennsylvania by the Department of Community and Economic Development and the state's five business journal publications.

Not bad for someone who started by reading *TWFW* and who only had one business course in college. I was surprised to learn that central Pennsylvania readers of *Harrisburg Magazine* recently voted me Reader's Choice Role Model.

I was humbled and privileged to be thought of so highly. I tell young people: Only in America! There are no limits that you can't overcome.
