Introduction

Consider the "go-to" service providers you keep coming back to, year after year. Plumber, hair stylist, accountant, auto mechanic, HVAC guy, realtor, dentist—and so on. Why do you keep doing business with them? Because they always deliver outstanding results, *and* they're honest, trustworthy, reliable and easy to work with. And when they stop doing even a few of those things, you'll replace them.

It's one of the *least* mysterious dynamics out there: **Outstanding performance leads to loyalty.**

That's what this ebook is all about. What it takes to become the obvious "go-to" copywriter for one or more graphic designers. Someone who makes their life easier, makes their clients happier and most importantly, makes them look good on multiple levels. Do all that, and they'll have no reason to go anywhere else.

And it's funny how fortuitously such partnerships can unfold…

Case in point… One serendipitous "path-crossing" happened in the first few years of my copywriting practice. I was writing—get this—a "Man's Point of View" column for a local homegrown Atlanta women's tabloid, and getting paid grocery money (PS. It was a hoot, and I'd have done it for free).

The editor of the pub connected me with the graphic designer who was laying out the publication in her off hours, to make sure my piece would fit okay, and to trim it if necessary.
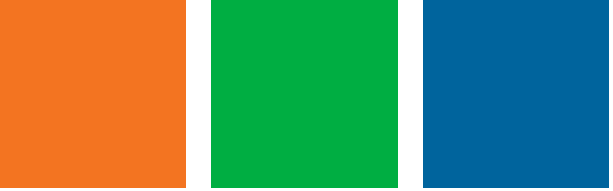
Long story short, she and I got to talking, and the next thing I know, she invites me to meet with the folks who run the design firm where she works 9-5, and they start throwing me work. A few years later, she goes off on her own—as the good ones always do (more on that later).

That one designer, over the following nearly-20 years, ends up putting *far* more money in my pocket than ANY other client in my entire career. In those two decades, few months went by without getting at least one (and occasionally two or more) gigs from her.

And when one of my clients needed a turnkey (start-to-finish) solution, I was ready to go with a referral to my designer buddy. Often, I'd suggest it to a new client before they did, if I suspect they'd be open to it (usually smaller companies are candidates for the whole kit-and-caboodle).

And I've similarly benefitted from several other design partnerships over the years as well. In this ebook, I'll be diving into the details of this strategy:

- What to look for in a creative partner

- How to find and contact the right design partners

- How to become a designer's "go-to" writer (straight from four horses' mouths!)

- How such partnerships can yield steady business with minimal effort

- The nuts-and-bolts details of working with creative partners

- Actual examples of projects I did that designers—and their clients—loved

- And much, much more…

This proven strategy, once in place, works whether you're heavily marketing or not. Talk about a copywriter's dream. Yes, but don't hear that and decide, "Oh, goody! I don't have to market anymore!" Not quite. You'll always have to market, but find the right partner, and you'll definitely be doing less of it (this is a classic "working-smarter-not-harder" scenario).

Understand This First…

While it's important to find the right creative partners (and usually that means graphic designers), it's far more important *to be the right writer*. That's the most crucial *and* most difficult part. It's also good news in the sense that you're in control of that outcome: it's not just about hoping a given designer likes you; rather, we'll explore what it takes to be the kind of writer a designer comes back to over and over and over again.

In addition, we'll hear from four graphic-design veterans (with a combined 110+ years of experience)—folks I've worked with or have known for a long time. You get it straight from them—what it takes to be the kind of writer with whom folks like these choose to partner—for the long term, and with big bucks on the line.

A quick add-on note to the discussion above about becoming **the right writer…** It's an idea I originally fleshed out in the February 2017 of my monthly ezine, *The Well-Fed E-PUB.*

It all started with a pithy quote (source unknown) that a friend of mine sent around a few years back. It struck me as a truism that gets at the heart of what we should always aspire to (and *especially* in the realm of building alliances with designers), but don't always. It read…

"The goal is not to be successful. The goal is to be valuable. Once you're valuable, instead of chasing success, you'll attract it."

I loved its clarity. If you say, "I want to be successful," not only is success an exceptionally nebulous concept that means different things to different people; just as importantly, *how* you get there isn't at all clear. It's this vague state of *being*, akin, in many ways, to saying, "I want to be happy." Also a nebulous state, with an unclear path to realization.

But say, "I want to be valuable," and that's a LOT clearer, no? And if you know you want to be valuable as a commercial freelancer, then it's just a matter of figuring out which skills and expertise you need to gather and develop in order to be valuable—to be someone that high-caliber, well-paying clients want and need to hire.

Once you've developed those skills—skills that make you *more* valuable than the average writer—assuming you do a decent job of letting the world know about you and your abilities, you'll indeed attract success.

I can tell you this from plenty of firsthand experience: being valuable is a LOT more fun than fighting it out with a bunch of other writers, when all of you have equal (low) value.

Forgive me an editorial aside…

"What Can I Do for You?" NOT, "What Can You Do for Me?"

More and more articles in the past few years have highlighted the lengths to which companies are going (e.g., higher salaries, benefits, company perks, etc.) to attract and retain employees, given the incredible turnover plaguing the business world (i.e., *The Great Resignation*). As a result of this changing reality, not surprisingly, many workers have a "what-are-you-going-to-do-for-me?" attitude.

But rest assured, in those entitled ranks, there are those that do end up becoming even more valuable to their employers—by virtue of a potent combination of a curious nature, strong work ethic and a proactive spirit. By ratcheting up what they offer those employers, they *will* advance faster and further than those who view the whole enterprise as a one-way road coming in their direction.

As freelancers, we don't have the luxury of feeling entitled. Rather, by proactively choosing to "up our game" (vs. what our competitors are doing), and deliver unparalleled value to our clients, we ensure that equivalent benefits will accrue to us.

Throughout this ebook, I'll be emphasizing the empirical truth that *becoming the right writer* (and yes, we'll be talking about all the ways to do just that) is THE best way to maximize the promise and potential of the writer/designer-partnership model.

And at its heart, "becoming the right writer" means becoming valuable to your designer partners, and by extension, to their clients.

No newsflash there. It's how the world works. The top achievers in any arena—business, law, medicine, sports, entertainment—by virtue of their unique gifts and drive—provide enormous value to those who hire people like them.

Steve Martin nicely boiled this down to its essence when he said, **"Be so good they can't ignore you."** Indeed.

Truly, the Gift that Keeps on Giving

I originally created this content as part of a conference on white papers, and, when asked how it related to white papers, here was my answer: *you'll be teaming with partners for turnkey white papers—delivering a final finished result to clients.*

But the subject of leveraging creative partnerships could apply to any project you might take on: marketing brochures, ad copy, newsletters, case studies, white papers, Web content, etc.

None of this is theoretical. It's been my reality for a very long time. While I'm off doing something else, it's a beautiful thing to answer a ringing phone, and hear, "I have another project that I need your help on." And those people on the other end of the line pay me my going rate every time, with few exceptions.

"How Does this Edition Differ from the Previous One?"

Here's the reality: the fundamental nature of the writer/designer partnership, along with the reasons why a designer would partner with a particular writer and vice versa, *and* the steps you'd take to forge your own partnerships, really haven't changed much at all since the first edition of *PBD*. As such, you'll see a lot of familiar content in this edition from the first. That said…

I'm not the same writer I was when I wrote the first edition in 2011. 12+ more years of experience—both as a commercial writer, and as one partnering with designers, have yielded a ton of new knowledge, insights, stories, strategies and experiences—all of which I've added to this edition.

As I went through the original edition, more often than not, as I read a particular point I made, I'd think of something else I'd learned in the years since, or some additional real-world experience I could add to the existing point. The result is a richer and more substantive, seasoned and nuanced discussion.

It also adds up to a full **50% more content** than the first edition (by word count, not page count; you'll find the pages in this edition are meatier and with less white space than the first edition).

Finally, the original edition included input from three experienced graphic designers. Since the ebook's release, I met another designer who hired me steadily for eight+ years, yielding a lot more experience and countless new *experiences*, so this edition features key contributions from four valued design partners.

Note: Throughout the ebook, when I reference "The Well-Fed Writer" or a specific page number in the book, in all cases, I'm referring to the newest edition of the book (2021).

Okay, let's kick this off by taking a look at the possible strategic partners with whom you could join forces…