

# Making Money



# Your Writing

I asked my readers — my fellow writers — what the biggest problems standing in the way of earning more money were for them. I got a lot of questions back about **how to earn money off of writing**, through all sorts of different approaches. I pulled them all into one ebook.

If you have a question about one type of writing, I hope this ebook may spark a couple of ideas about other types of writing that could help you earn some money as well.



Image — Flickr user Drew Coffman (<http://rocktreesky.com/>)

## Your Writing As Service

For many writers, **the simplest approach to make money off of your writing is to offer the service of writing.** More often than not, writers earn their main incomes from offering freelance services related to writing. It's not a bad gig, all things considered. The growing number of websites online need an ever increasing amount of written material to improve sites making now **one of the best times in history to be a freelance writer** — at least in terms of work available.

It's also become fairly easy to reach out and make yourself known as a freelance writer — writing a blog post once a week that would be of interest to the sorts of clients that you'd like to work with can bring you in plenty of without much more marketing. But there are some subtleties to offering your writing as a service, beyond this surface overview.

### *What Service are You Offering, Exactly?*

The variety of writing work out there is incredible. You can get projects writing copy for websites, writing annual reports for companies, writing blog posts and just about anything else out there that involves lining up words in a row.

You can also earn a living offering services related to writing. You can provide coaching for other writers, offer editing or research, offer project management for big writing projects or even offer consulting to help someone figure out the details of a writing project without actually doing the writing. There really is an incredible amount of opportunities out there for service providers.

That does mean, though, at some point, every writer offering services has to sit down and decide exactly what sort of services she's interested in offering. You simply can't offer generic writing services. First and foremost, there are specialized skills that go along with different types of writing: the techniques you need to write successful greeting cards are very different than the techniques you need to write successful articles optimized for search engines.

Furthermore, **it's a lot harder to attract clients if you're a jack-of-all-trades because they'll assume that you're a master of none.** Even if you can handle the requirements of a variety of different types of writing, it can be a better bet to make it very clear that you've mastered a particular type and promote yourself as a specialist.

## Developing Your Service

Even if you've been in business as a freelancer for a while, don't be afraid to keep developing your services and how you run your business. The questions below can provide you some direction on developing your services and earning more money from them.

1. Who is the typical buyer for your service? Do you like working with this type of buyer?
2. Does your typical buyer have a significant budget to spend on writing? If not, how can you help him complete his projects, without working for low rates?
3. At what point in the project process does your typical client come to you?
4. Are there other services, beyond writing, that your client would benefit from? Does he know he needs these services?
5. Are there differences between your typical client and your ideal client? If so, what's keeping you from working with your ideal client?



## *How Will Your Writing Business Grow?*

One of the considerations when it comes to offering writing services is that, without some careful planning, there isn't a clear career path. You start writing, you raise your rates on a regular basis and — ten years down the road — **you're still writing and you may not be able to increase your rates further** because there just aren't any clients available to pay higher prices.

That doesn't mean that being some sort of writing service provider is a dead-end path. It just means that a little thought is necessary to make sure that you're building up a career, rather than just earning money in the short-term.

Like many careers, **a lot of future opportunities focus on going into management**: creating an agency, for instance, where you manage projects (and do some writing) and have a team of writers who do the lion's share of the work. There are plenty of other options, but most will require you to give up a purely service-based approach. The key, though, is to refrain from thinking of yourself as just a freelancer. Think of yourself as a business owner — **someone with an enterprise that needs to grow** — rather than someone who just happens to earn money by writing.

It's tempting to tell yourself that you'll just look for higher-paying clients, but the market tops out: big corporations (the guys with the biggest budgets) have set amounts that they typically expect to pay for freelancers. Their most valuable projects are high-paying, not just because of higher rates, but because of the sheer amount of work involved, making it harder for an individual writers to take on.

## *Building a Successful Service Business*

A lot of what we think of as rules of how a writing service business works comes from writers who work full time for one client — or as they should be known — a boss. That's not necessarily a great mindset for writers. It's easy to focus on the project in front of you and work just on your writing, while ignoring bringing in new clients or handling the administrative side of the business. And if you can't handle those two requirements on a regular basis (more often than you have time between projects), you can wind up feeling like you're just treading water.

A lot of balance is necessary to run a successful service-based business. If you aren't able to take yourself away from your writing to send out invoices or make sure that you have future projects lined up, the simple truth is that you'd really be better off working for an employer. I'm certainly not saying that as an insult, either: there are many writers who do better when they can just focus in on the writing. There's no harm in taking a job that allows you to do just that. You may even be able to say that many freelancers do better when they can't truly focus in on their writing as well — at the very least, a freelancer has to have at least some interest in running a business and marketing it.

## *How High Can You Raise Your Rates?*

Rates can be a big problem for a lot of writers. It's difficult to tell how much is a fair rates, considering that the work we do can be fairly subjective. In fact, most of us are in perpetual danger of charging too little. If you're not sure how much you should be charging right now, check Freelance Switch's rate calculator (<http://freelanceswitch.com/rates/>).

While there's no official upper limit to how much you can charge for a writing project, you may find that you encounter more resistance to higher rates. Depending on your clients, the point at which you encounter resistance varies incredibly. Other freelancers will complain at a fairly low rate, while the pain point for a large company may include quite a lot of zeros. You have to learn as much about your target market as you can to find the point at which they'll stop hiring you for writing projects.

## Your Writing As Publication

There's a certain eco-system that goes along with writing for a living. **When you offer your writing as a service, you have to make sure that someone buys that service** — more often than not, a publication. There are other clients, of course, who are not strictly publishers, such as websites in need of copy. But the most continuous buyers of writing are publishers: magazines, newspapers, blogs, publishing houses and so on.

And those companies and clients are certainly earning money from the writing they buy. A publication may effectively turnaround and sell what they bought from you on the newsstand, packaged with a dozen other articles for \$3.99. Just think about how few copies the publisher has to sell to cover the amount he paid you for your article and you'll want to start your own publication immediately. Of course, there are other expenses involved, but there's also money to be made.

As a writer, you can become a larger part of the eco-system — you can think of selling your writing in terms of a publication, rather than as a service. There are a lot of trite quotes about the internet celebrating that online tools have made publishing a painless and simple process. But there is some truth in those claims. It has never been easier to start a new publication, whether in print or online. Where once printing was expensive and online publications were unheard of, you can now set up a new website — with a professional design — for under \$200. You can use print-on-demand magazine services (such as MagCloud — <http://www.magcloud.com>) to create a magazine with no upfront printing costs. No matter what sort of publication you want to run, technology has made it easier and cheaper.

### *Thinking Like a Publisher*

In order to sell your writing as a publisher, rather than a service provider, you do need to change your mindset. You need to think long-term about a given topic, as well as consider a very different audience for your writing. **Where once you sold your work to editors, you now need to sell it to readers.** Publications require you to put together smaller pieces of work into a cohesive whole; even if the publication you have in mind is a book, it's more practical to think of yourself in terms of an independent publishing house, rather than someone who's just self-publishing one manuscript (assuming that your goal is to build a lasting income).

## Different Types of Publications

Just to give you an idea of your options, here are a few different types of publications out there:

- Magazine
- Newspaper
- Newsletter
- Blog
- Ezine
- Email Newsletter
- Membership site
- Journal
- Pamphlet
- Book
- Ebook

A publication can take virtually any form you wish, online or off.

You also have to think a little more about money. You'll have more expenses in the long-term — you'll need to do a very different sort of marketing than you would to sell your writing as a service. You need to reach more people, making the one-on-one pitches you might use on a new client less practical. You also need to consider how you're going to bring in money. The two fallback plans available to the average publication are selling advertising and selling subscriptions, although both approaches face challenges right now. It's useful to explore as many options as you can, from selling merchandise to organizing events.

However, with work, it is possible to make both subscriptions and advertising lucrative sources of income, despite difficulties like declining advertising revenues. The key is to focus your publication narrowly, so that people can quickly grasp that you're offering something they'll never get anywhere else. With broader publications, you simply have more competition.

### *Starting a New Publication*

One of the simplest approaches to building a new publication right now is to create a blog. The start up costs are minimal, you don't need a staff to maintain the publishing cycle (it's a lot harder to write an entire monthly magazine on your own than to keep up a regular posting schedule on a blog) and there are tools already out there to help you earn money from your work.

Even if you're thinking about a bigger publication, **it can be worthwhile to start as a blog or an online publication because of ease of entry.** You can quickly gauge the interest in the topic you want to write about, without having to invest a lot of money. There are also a variety of tools that allow you to set up methods of monetizing a blog quickly. While most people think of a blog as something available for free, there are ways to make premium content available, as well as to add advertising that is more lucrative than simply slapping Google AdSense onto a site. It's even possible to ramp up an online publication quickly: it's likely that you'll have to make the largest portion of your content available for free, but with lower levels of expenses than printed media, you can at least get a blog to the point where it pays its own way much faster.

There is a certain sense that a new publication, like a blog or a self-published book, is an amateur's project. There are plenty of writers out there who have created a bad name for those of us interested in starting our own publications. As a rule, they don't take their publications seriously. They don't treat their projects like businesses — trying to skimp by using a free host, for instance — and wind up looking entirely unprofessional. If you want to earn a reliable income from a publication, though, you have to take it seriously: you have to be willing to invest both time and money in the project. You have to present yourself as a professional. You have to be willing to bring in help (remember that editing a publication is a different skill set than writing copy). You even have to pay your taxes on time. It's not the easiest project you could take on.

### ***Blogging: The Fastest Route to a Publication***

For someone coming from a more traditional writing background, it's hard to drive home how a blog can function as a legitimate publication. After all, there are literally millions of blogs thrown up on free platforms, such as Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>) or WordPress.com (<http://www.wordpress.com>), with AdSense as their only approach to monetization.

Successful blogs, however, can pull in literally millions of dollars a year. It takes hard work to grow a blog to that point, but it takes hard work to grow any sort of publications.

The best blogs have their own voice, as well as a professional (and unique) design. It takes less than a hundred dollars to set up a blog, between hosting and a domain name. But the best blogs put thousands of dollars into a design, usually after they've grown a bit and have some income coming in.

Advertising is the most common way to make money on a blog, but it's only lucrative when you've built up traffic — hundreds of thousands of visitors each month are necessary to really make great money from a blog. But tactics such as affiliate marketing, selling your own informational products or using a blog to promote your own services can put thousands of dollars in your pocket every month — even without more than a few thousand visitors to your site.

Don't let yourself be tied down to a narrow view of what a publication is and how it earns its money, either. The greatest publishers have universally been willing to take risks and try new things, from selling their own products in their publications to hosting conferences. Running a publication isn't as easy as selling your services as a writer — an important factor to consider before jumping into that realm — but there's more money to be made as a publication.

## Your Writing As Product

While writing can easily be packaged into a publication, paired with other pieces of writing for sale to people who are just generally interested in reading about a given topic, **it can also be packaged into a product**. Information products sell very well — a customer will pay quite a bit for just the right piece of information at the right time, provided that it's written in an easy-to-use fashion. Information products can be paired with other types of writing, as well: selling an information product can be a way to make money from a publication and an information product can be a way to sell your expertise to clients who aren't ready or able to pay for your services.

It can be difficult to see products as separate from publications: after all, it's arguable that an ebook is little more than a long form article, published a little differently. But products are different in how they're sold and what they do. A good information product typically solves a specific problem that the buyer has, as opposed to a publication, which simply keeps a reader informed about a particular topic or serves to entertain. Furthermore, while you may make money off a publication by selling a subscription or through advertising, an information product is more likely to simply be sold once.

Thinking about products can be tough for writers, especially for writers who come from a freelance background. Most of us think in terms of selling one piece of writing once — maybe a couple of times if we're willing to work markets that accept reprints. We don't immediately jump to the idea that, with the right wrapper, we can sell one piece of writing over and over again. But it can be a lucrative approach. You may be able to sell an article for a few hundred dollars, but if you package it into an ebook, you may very well be able to sell that same piece of writing over and over again for \$20 a pop. Just by selling 100 copies at that rate you can bring in \$2,000. It's a better deal.

### *Packaging Written Projects*

You can take a stack of written material and package it in a variety of ways. You can put it together into an ebook or a printed booklet. You can record it as an audio file. You can even turn it into a script and record a video. The sky is effectively the limit.

But the simple fact is that **you have to figure out what people will buy**. Who is interested in buying a product on a topic that you're interested in writing about? Once you know the who, you can consider what formats your customers will be most interested in, as well as the specifics of the information they'll want to buy. It takes some careful consideration and the more you can learn about your audiences, the better.

## Types of Information Products

There are a wide variety of information products that can be sold — and, if you're willing to write material for audio or video recordings, the list gets even longer.

- Book
- Ebook
- Report
- Membership site
- Audio book
- Video download
- Tutorial
- Worksheets or workbook
- CDs
- DVDs
- Screencast
- Mobile application
- Software

Choosing an appropriate information product format comes down to what you have available to work with and how your audience prefers to receive information.



Most methods of packaging your writing may also require some outside expertise. Laying out an ebook, recording a video and other approaches are not always the simplest matter in the world. Depending on your background, it's likely that bringing in a pro would be a good idea. There have been a lot of technological advances in the last few years that make it easy for relative amateurs to take on such projects, but I do encourage you to go ahead and get help: there's a world of difference in the products you can likely create on your own and those that other people can help you create, and a professional looking product is practically guaranteed to sell better.

### *Marketing an Information Product*

It's not just enough to create an information product, unfortunately. If you build it, they will not come. **You have to promote and market what you want to sell.** Luckily, we writers are ahead of the game. You can write and give away information that relates to your product and build interest. You can start a blog on the topic. You can submit articles to publications on the topic. You can submit pieces to article distributors who will get your articles into hundreds of websites and online newsletters. It's just a matter of being willing to sit down and write about your product.

In particular, I'd recommend strategies that build up your following as a whole — not just interest in your information product. Creating a blog or an email newsletter that allows you to continue marketing to your audience even after they've bought your product means that you'll have a much better starting point when you're ready to create your second product. And, yes, you'll want to do more than just one product in order to build up multiple sources of income. There's also something of a bug that goes with creating your first product. Once you see how the process goes, it's very tempting to get started on your next product practically immediately.

### *The Fiction Problem*

I hate to be the bearer of bad news to writers who really want to sell fiction and creative writing — **information products that sell well are almost exclusively non-fiction**, typically in areas like health, money or relationships. There are plenty of exceptions: it is not impossible to sell different versions of stories or poetry you may have written. But it is harder and it is less lucrative.

That may not matter to you. You may not be so focused on just how much you can get for a given piece of writing. It is a factor you need to consider, however, if your writing is your main source of income.

## ***Selling Information Products through Marketplaces***

There are a variety of online marketplaces that allow you to sell your information products without setting up a website of your own. They range from big sites like Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>) that receive millions of visitors, to small sites with very targeted audiences, like the Tuts+ Marketplace (<http://marketplace.tutsplus.com>).

You can make the sales and marketing process a little easier by going through these sites — but they do take a cut of the money. They also don't do any individual promotions for a product (although you can occasionally buy advertising through such sites). Just because you put up an information product on one of these sites doesn't mean that you'll actually make any money. You have to put forth just as much effort in marketing your product through these sites as you do on your own site.

## *The Question of Risk*

Some writers simply don't feel comfortable offering products, or even starting their own publications. There is a higher level of risk and less immediate return than if you hang out your shingle as a freelancer. If you aren't comfortable with the idea, don't do it. There's plenty of hard work that goes into making a successful product and if that's not the right fit for you, that work could be wasted.

But with an increased level of risk comes increased rewards. Writers can earn a lot of money by stepping beyond the most simple service offerings and if you are comfortable, go for it!

## **Making Your Decision**

In order to decide which direction you want to take your writing business in, you need to think long and hard about your prospects. Not everyone is as comfortable with different ways of making money from their writing as others are. There is no set checklist that can be used to tell you that you should create a product or expand your services, but the questions below will give you some direction as you think about where to go next.

1. What part of your writing are you most passionate about? Will a new approach let you focus more on that part of your passion?
2. What part of the way that you currently earn money from your writing do you like the least? Can you eliminate that part with change of approach?
3. What sort of risks are you both willing and able to take? What sort of risks would be too high for your family and yourself?
4. If you have focused your writing on a particular niche or topic, are the other people interested in that niche more likely to buy a service, a publication or a product?
5. Can you combine elements of these different methods of selling writing to come up with a plan that works better for you than just sticking with one approach?

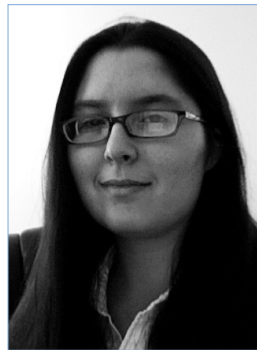
## Your Ideas Are Just the Starting Point

Hopefully, this ebook has given you ideas on how to make more money from your writing business. I would encourage you to try to incorporate just one of these activities into your routine. If you're feeling overwhelmed, just try one. See how it goes — you may be surprised!

I've made a personal commitment to helping build resources that make running a writing business easier and I hope you'll sign up for my email list so that I can keep you updated on what new resources I'm coming up with. You can sign up for the newsletter here (<http://www.thursdaybram.com/ebooknewsletter>).

## Thursday Bram is ...

I am a full-time writer, and have been (with a two-week exception) since graduating from college. I've written for CNET, GigaOm and quite a few other websites. One of my passions is writing about writing, mostly because I like knowing why what I do works. I've even managed to write articles about writing for publications as diverse as the *Novel and Short Story Writers' Market* and *Home Education Magazine*. You can hear all about my writing experiences on my site (<http://www.thursdaybram.com>).



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