

A Savory “Well-Fed Writing” Scenario

Middleman Client’s Client (+1) Provides Freelancer with \$16K in Work in Six Weeks

With hourly rates of \$50 to \$125 and above, the commercial freelancing field offers lucrative opportunities for writers with solid writing skills. And once you’re in the door of a company, the potential exists to land a boatload of work. Here’s an actual example from a few years back. A middleman client (MM) I was working with – an internal marketing communications company – had as a client a staffing company who needed to execute some major new initiatives.

(NOTE: An “internal marketing communications company” helps companies with their *internal* – for employees only – communications needs. The fact that agencies like these exist just shows how vast a universe of work internal communications actually is. As consumers, we see “external” B2C (business-to-consumer) communications – ads, direct mail postcards, mini-newsletters in our gas bill, brochures from car dealerships, etc. What we don’t see, and which is far bigger, are B2B (business-to-business) and internal. Simply put, there’s plenty of work.)

This scenario offers up a wonderfully instructive opportunity. The point of it isn’t to say you’ll commonly run into situations like this, but rather to get you to start thinking like a commercial writer, and in terms of multi-component campaigns. *And* wallow a bit in the financial potential of this direction. At the time, I was billing \$85 an hour. I’m now at \$125, which, because I work fast, and because I quote flat project fees, often works out to be much higher: \$200-250+. This business can be fun.

So, the internal “marcom” (marketing communications) agency had been hired by the huge global staffing giant to do a pile of complementary projects. The company was totally revamping their benefits packages to both their internal employees and external contractors. In addition to launching two new web sites outlining the new programs, the initiative spawned a whole host of other projects.

The Web Sites Portion

Let’s start with the new web sites – both an Internet site (for contractors) and an Intranet site (internal site for employees). Now this company had a newsletter (several, actually), so what better way to kick things off prior to the launch than with some...

1) Newsletter Articles

Three articles of 850 words each: one overview piece about both sites, and one each for the two sites. For the first one, they called me, in a bind. It was Thursday and they needed it back by Monday. So, what should we charge for these pieces, each involving one 45-minute interview? (think about these questions for a moment before reading on...).

The first one, being a rush job, was a bit more: \$1000. For the other two, I charged \$850 each (\$1 a word), and they took me probably six to seven hours to do.

Next piece. Since they were launching two new (unfamiliar) sites, full of interactive resources for visitors, they decided on a few...

2) Sales Sheets

These outlined the “how-to” details of the two sites, one for each. They took screen captures of the web pages, and my job was to write a short paragraph-long copy blurb for each capture – 10 in all for each page. It came out to 5 hours for each sheet (\$425) or \$850 for both.

The Benefits Package Portion

If you’re rolling out newly revamped benefits offerings, it’s not enough to just have a few web sites. You need a hold-in-your-hand resource as well – a pair of actual...

1) Benefits Guides

One for each program, outlining all the benefits: medical, dental, 401(k), and all other trimmings – in roughly 24-30 page guides (8 ½ x 11 size). For each program, I was asked to concept a name and craft a snappy opening page, intro copy to each section, and final page wrap-up copy. The actual benefits descriptions were largely boilerplate copy, already written, approved by scary legal departments, and not to be touched. The fees for these? One came to \$2720 (32 hours), the other was 45 hours (several direction changes = more hours) or \$3825.

Then to announce these new programs, again, they returned for another round of...

2) Newsletter Articles

One for each program, and one a bit longer (\$935) than the other (\$850).

Now, this company had hundreds of offices nationwide, with prospective contractors marching in every day. So in advance of this new benefits unveiling, what might they create to start building the buzz? While I’m sure they had a few press releases for industry pubs (yet *another* piece of the puzzle), what they had me work on was...

3) Posters and Flyers

I created the flyer first, with punchy headline and subhead, along with 5-6 paragraphs of copy covering each of the major program highlights. That was for handouts, and then I simply pared down the flyer copy to a skeleton outline. Voila! Copy for posters to slap up on their walls. Fee? \$935 total.

Finally, something you might not think of. Do you simply send posters, flyers, and the actual benefits guides with no heads-up and in boxes by themselves? (are these leading questions getting irritating?). No, you’ll want a series of...

4) Cover Letters

Six, in fact. One announcing the program coming up in several months, another as they got closer, one each to announce the impending arrival of the posters/flyers and benefits guides, and one each to accompany those packages when they were shipped. Fee? \$1275 (15 hours total).

You been doing the math so far? Oh, and one last thing. Right in the thick of this, I get a call from one of my BIG clients, wanting me to work on a brochure project. Not needing (or even wanting) the work, I hit them with a hopefully discouraging \$95 an hour. Fine with them. Okay, I thought, guess I'll sleep next month. That project? \$1600.

All told it added up to roughly \$16K in about six weeks. And that was quite a few years back. Typical? Not an everyday occurrence. Rare, once established? Not really.