

## **General Well-Fed Success Stories:**

### *Full-Text Versions*

I dearly love to hear about writers succeeding. Does my heart good. And that's what this link is all about: writers across the country (and beyond), with vastly different circumstances and backgrounds, all making it happen—and on *their* terms.

In the pages that follow, you'll read the full-text versions of the success-story abstracts that appeared in Appendix B of *The Well-Fed Writer*. You'll hear from general and niche practitioners (including a few nonprofit “niche-rs”). And for all you journalists out there, your erstwhile brethren are well represented here.

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

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.

*NOTE: To navigate through the document by profile headings, click on the blue icon with the bookmark to the upper left of the document.*

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## **Think You Can't Be A Successful FLCW In The Middle Of A Forest? Think Again.**

Before retiring from a job as a local government analyst, I logged 25 years of experience as an 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 held, I was the go-to person for effective writing and writing critique. Over the years, I've also been a continual but casual part-time student, taking a variety of liberal arts courses but never earning a degree. In addition, I gleaned a wealth of knowledge and insight from studies in non-traditional settings, such as an intensive course in reflective listening and informal writing workshops.

I started freelancing at age 53 after taking early retirement from a public sector job that was killing me. I had no commercial writing experience, no degree, and no portfolio. I sold my California home and returned to my native Michigan, where the cost of living is far more affordable and my small pension is worth more. While not enough to live on, the retirement benefit helped to relieve some of the financial pressure.

My first two clients were friends of a friend. Since then, I've been almost exclusively Internet based, due to my fear of face-to-face sales calls and the fact that I'm located in a sparsely populated, seasonal resort area. I created a simple Web site to display my work and establish myself as legitimate.

I put together a small portfolio, borrowing from my work as an employee and crafting a couple of articles just for display. Then I signed up with Guru and Elance, accepting the lower rates for the opportunity to gain some loyal clients and build my experience and portfolio. Today, I only use the bidding services when work is slow (rarely!), and when I do, I'm much more selective about the projects I pursue and the fees I will accept.

Also, I'm proud to say that some of my earliest Guru and Elance clients are still with me today. Probably my biggest break came when one of them—an established copywriter who hired me as a subcontractor to lighten some of her workload—became a mentor to me, advising me on everything from establishing rates to handling sticky client situations. She still engages me for overflow work and also refers new clients to me in exchange for a small commission.

As a FLCW, I guess you'd say I'm a generalist. When I began, I naturally pursued projects that matched my eclectic background: health care, psychology, communication, and entrepreneurial business. Since then, I've written for real estate, legal, and alternative health care audiences as well. Although I promote myself as a writer and editor of all forms of communication, Web content is emerging as my bread and butter, along with a few regular gigs producing articles, newsletters, and press releases.

While I'm sure it would help to have a journalism degree or years of experience in marketing or public relations, I'm living proof that those things aren't absolutely necessary. You *will* need confidence in your ability to write and communicate, good research skills, and a good dose of charm and humor will help, too. I would also recommend creating a Web site; I can't imagine how any copywriter could be in business today without one. But your site doesn't have to be elaborate, and you don't have to be a Web designer or spend a fortune to hire one. Many ISPs offer free, easy-to-use tools to design a simple site, as well as free or low-cost hosting.

My advice is to write what you know, and do it well. Choose your words precisely, and make each one count. And don't allow yourself to stagnate. There is so much to learn, and communication needs are changing rapidly. Stay on top of what's happening, and read what the experts have to say about your craft.

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## **A Portable Well-Fed Feast for FLCW in the UK**

These days I have as much work as I can handle. I charge my clients £40 (\$80) an hour—often more when I'm quoting by the project. My assignments span the copywriting gamut: hard-nosed letters selling Internet home businesses, Web sites for government departments, brochures for dentists and patent attorneys, and any number of joint ventures with creative agencies. Most recently, I've completed ghostwriting a 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 TFWF. 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. It's a fact. You don't have to take Peter's word for it. This deal works—on both sides of the Atlantic. All it takes is a will to succeed and a little imagination.

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 of the competition, it seemed, had it all: big agency experience, solid CVs, expensive Web sites, and, above all, great samples—everything, in fact, that I lacked. My own tired handful of samples (odds and ends of marketing collateral I'd written for a past employer) seemed pathetic by comparison. How would I ever compete?

I'd come across one copywriter who used de-named samples in order to protect his clients' confidentiality, as he put it. So I began by writing some de-named samples of my own: a brochure, a couple of sales letters, a press release, and even a Web site. They weren't the end word in copywriting, but they did the job.

Next I invested what little capital I had into mailing a thousand postcards to a list of CEOs of small- to medium-sized businesses.

Then I put together a Web site. It was one of those cheap template sites that look like, er, cheap template sites. Believe me, it wouldn't have won any prizes. I was ashamed of my Web site. So much so that, unless pressed, I wouldn't even tell people it existed. Perverse but true. But it didn't matter. And here's why.

Weeks passed. Nothing. But eventually the phone rang. It was the PA of a CEO of a small but successful London-based company. Her boss had received my postcard and liked it (I'd written it in a provocative tone, if only to get noticed). Could I come in and discuss their new Web site? And could I bring some examples of my work?

It was Woody Allen who said, “Eighty percent of success is just showing up.” So I showed up.

I showed up at my first-ever pitch meeting with my “book” of samples clutched nervously beneath my arm. I sat in reception, sweating, dry-mouthed. I thought of all the other copywriters the CEO had doubtless interviewed that same day. Copywriters with stunning portfolios and mind-blowing track records. I knew all about them. I'd seen their Web sites. I was on the brink of a spectacular humiliation. I should cut and run. There was still time. The CEO's door swung open.

Instead of asking to look at my samples, the CEO launched into talking about her business and how she felt I could help her. She seemed to be in a hurry. She wanted to get the matter concluded as soon as possible, she said. When could I get the job finished? Did I have space in my diary to make an immediate start? 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.

Now, with the benefit of experience, I realize my CEO wasn't just an isolated case. Far from it. Of course, there'll always be prospects out there who'll give you the third degree interview before they'll let you loose on their public image, but they aren't the norm. Take comfort: There are enough people just like my CEO who'll be very happy to give you your first break—and without even knowing what they're doing.

I've never looked back. But here's the real kicker: I still show up at pitch meetings. But these days when I say “show up,” I'm speaking metaphorically. Because, with few exceptions, I've built my business without ever visiting my clients. I have an excellent relationship with my clients, and most of them have never even met me.

I do my marketing online. And when I've closed the deal, I do everything else by e-mail and phone (I don't even have a fax machine). Sometimes a new client will suggest that we meet to discuss a project. When I ask why, they usually say something along the lines of, “Oh, you know, to put a name to the face, take a look at your work, discuss fees, talk you through the project.” In which case I refer them very politely to my Web site, where they'll find a mug shot of my face (well, they asked for it) along with everything else they could ever need to know before they hire me: copy samples, testimonials, terms of business, biography, rationale, contact details. What more could they require? And if they want to discuss the project in-depth, we can arrange a conference call and send any supporting documents by e-mail. By the time I've explained the futility of meeting and how it enables me to charge less for my services, I inevitably leave the client wondering why they ever made such an irrational suggestion in the first place. They'll sound relieved and, quite rightly, thank me for saving their time.

Another immeasurable advantage of working “remotely” is that I'm not tied geographically.

I'm able to work with clients from anywhere in the English-speaking world, and indeed I do. I live in the countryside outside of Brighton in the UK, and until a few years ago, I would have been restricted to working with clients in and around the city. And I was one of the lucky ones: Brighton is a large commercial centre, and there's no shortage of potential clients. It also has the huge asset of being just 45 minutes from London—the source of much of my business. But what if I'd lived in, say, the Scottish Isles? There was a time when I would have had to diversify into herring smoking just to survive. But nowadays I could run my cottage industry from the remotest corner of the country (world) without the slightest downturn in business. In fact, unless I told them, most of my clients would neither know nor care. Such is the beauty of being a commercial writer in the digital age.

Life is indeed peachy. And, you know, if I hadn't read TWWF, I probably wouldn't be here.

Thanks, Peter.

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## **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 materials. Our clients include Fortune 500s, nonprofits, and family-owned businesses.

I entered this niche as a subcontracted author to a specialty publisher. Corporate histories were a natural because I'd written about business, and I was also a proven writer of short, highly readable history books. (My *Perilous Journey of the Donner Party*, written for teens and also read by loads of adults, is in its sixth printing.) I had a primitive personal Web site way back then, so naturally I added my new specialty to it. Potential clients began to contact me directly—clients with healthy budgets who nonetheless balked at paying what some of the “bigger guys” or more academic custom history publishers charged.

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. I've always enjoyed managing editorial projects and working with talented designers, production people, and other creative folks.

That was the “aha!” moment. I bolted out of bed at 3:00 a.m. and e-mailed my Webmaster to reserve the URL [www.CorporateHistory.net](http://www.CorporateHistory.net). I love that our company name is also our Web address.

The business is an LLC (limited liability company). I own it with my partner, a former ad agency creative director. In addition to sharing marketing and project management duties, I usually write one book a year. Subcontracted authors with experience in corporate histories handle the rest. We also use specialized subcontractors as needed, such as archivists, genealogists, photo researchers, and transcribers.

CorporateHistory.net offers one-stop shopping, but we unbundle services if that suits the client's needs. Being flexible increases our marketability. Example: Melwood, a nonprofit in Maryland, hired us to co-write a book with the outgoing CEO. But for design and production, they wanted to use a local firm that has done award-winning work for them for years. No problem—the finished book came out beautifully.

We find clients through referrals and Web leads. Search engine click-through ads work for us; cold-calling hasn't. There are many marketing reasons other than anniversaries to do a history, by the way. Organizations may want to dust off their image, enhance their brand, or create a unique fund-raiser. And a good history is candid. No company wants to trumpet its mistakes, but we encourage clients to own up to hard times and

lessons learned. Trials by fire make interesting reading and add to the credibility of the work.

To achieve success in this niche, I believe you need the following qualities: respect for clients and their businesses, strong research skills, a talent for interviewing (book projects and even brochures may require dozens of oral history interviews), and the ability to extract and shape a compelling narrative from masses of material. I would also include experience with long-form work (books are to brochures as double marathons are to 10km runs), diplomacy, and curiosity about people and their jobs. That's one of the best parts for me; I love learning about different industries.

Getting to the contract stage requires patience and can be challenging. A sales consultant with whom we network calls it "long-cycle selling," a perfect description. For many clients the process is new, so they do a lot of investigating. They may ask for detailed proposals, teleconferences, and/or in-person meetings before arriving at a decision. The board of directors may get involved, especially at not-for-profit organizations.

Pitching represents an investment of time, and time is money. But the investment usually pays off. (It can work both ways. Once or twice our due diligence has convinced us *not* to pursue a project further.) On long and sensitive projects like these, the client and the creative team need a high comfort level with each other.

Estimating these projects is a subject worthy of a book in itself. "Do you want a Hyundai or a Hummer?" I ask potential clients half-jokingly. Each project is not only different but subject to change as it progresses. Often an organization discovers more "good stuff" than it realized it had. For example, the people at A.W. Hastings & Co., a family-owned millwork company, thought we'd have a tough time filling 48 pages. Our book for Hastings expanded to 80 pages and could have gone longer. We build clauses into our contracts to cover such situations. (A good publishing attorney is an essential business partner.)

Looking just at the writing side, a history specialist can earn a nice five-figure annual income. Experienced, busy writers can make more. Projects are work for hire and don't involve royalties.

My advice for those interested in this niche would be to see if your current clients have history needs, and start from there. Should you decide to make the leap from writer to publisher by handling whole projects, get ready to have more fun and work harder than you ever have—the buck now stops with you. If you love your business as much as we love ours, you'll want to plow a lot of your profits right back into it.



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

Before launching Cvetan Communications, I worked for 11 years as a marketing communications and public relations writer for a large hospital system. From speeches to media statements, event ads to physician marketing brochures, patient education materials to employee magazine articles, the pieces I wrote were meant to inform and persuade a wide variety of audiences.

A few of my friends launched freelance graphic design businesses and were successful very quickly. I was inspired but terrified to give up the “security” of a steady paycheck. My hours were so long, and my job so stressful, that I could not freelance part time to start my business slowly. I spent one year preparing. I took classes in software I thought I might need (HTML coding, Photoshop) on projects with future low-budget clients who couldn't afford both writing and design. I interviewed other freelancers and agency owners. I rented out part of my house to generate some steady income. Best of all, when I resigned from the hospital, I traveled to Alaska and volunteered at an Internet company for six weeks to learn all about Web site development—an area in which I felt unskilled. While I was in Anchorage, 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 that I had chosen to leave my job instead of being forced.

Currently, 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 news media to obtain publicity for clients.

Some notable projects include writing consumer education booklets for use in over-the-counter drug product packaging (I worked as part of a team at an advertising agency on this project). I wrote an annual report for one of the largest companies in the state. I was chosen to write the inaugural brochure for an international center of excellence for children's media. Recently, I edited reports on a multi-billion-dollar highway project and oil drilling. I love the variety!

A big challenge has been sales—specifically, getting in front of the right people (qualified buyers) and, once there, pricing my services correctly. During the first few years, I hated talking about money and would delay the discussion, which would only increase the discomfort. I took Sandler sales training in my third year of business, and it helped immensely.

My income potential ranges from \$3,000 to \$10,000 a month. I find that work flow can be very unpredictable: I'll bill 50 hours one week and 20 hours the next. Sales and marketing and administrative activities (and rest!) can eat up a lot of time.

My advice to those starting FLCW would be to get a CPA immediately. I pay \$300 a year to mine, and it's worth every cent. Find a mentor or two. Listen to what they tell you. Take care of your body—you will need your stamina.

I would stress the importance of possessing good writing skills and the ability to admit you don't know something about a topic or assignment and to ask for a lot of clarification. You also need the ability to humble yourself enough to seek a variety of counsel—from the RIGHT people (not friends or family). I have received fantastic advice from a sales trainer, an EQ coach, a former professional in my field, current competitors, and a mentor—a man who is 20 years ahead of me at this and eager to help me. Plus, Peter Bowerman's wonderful books.

Networking is critical. Join a professional organization, such as the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), and the local chamber or other business networking group. Also, force yourself to deal with money. I was afraid to ask for "high" payment for my work in the beginning, because I was working with micro-businesses with tiny budgets. My gross income showed it. As scary as it is to look at the numbers and to force yourself to improve in sales technique (including prospecting to businesses more likely to pay your fees), it is essential. The sales training I took helped me to get the emotion out of the way of my negotiating.

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## **Veteran Freelancer Makes The Transition From Magazines To Commercial Writing**

After a student life of writing (I won my first writing awards as a teen) always as the editor-in chief, I married another young achiever while we were still in college and devoted the next ten years to raising our four sons while my husband played the PGA Tour. Because we lived in a world of media and the business that surrounds the Tour, I got an irreplaceable education in how the corporate world uses media and sports to make money. I had an argument with a sports columnist in *Golf Digest* over his opinion, and he challenged me to write a better view...so I did!

I queried one of the *Golf Digest* editors and got my first assignment for a full feature. I had found a home writing freelance humor and essays in the Rochester, New York, Sunday newsmagazine, so I had clips, and word spread on the Tour that I was a writer. For 15 years, I wrote on assignment for various local, regional, and national magazines on golf, humor, and lifestyle, as well as interviewing well-known people and executives. But the bottom fell out of my marriage after 23 years, and I found myself in need of a job outside home. I took a job working for a staffing company and was asked to help with their marketing and advertising, being the “creative one.”

When the staffing company had hard times, however, my position was sacrificed to the Budget Volcano. By that time, I had a nice portfolio of display ads along with my business profiles. Working independently from home was what I wanted to do, so I jumped off the cliff and started “in a shoebox on a shoestring.”

Don't think I wasn't scared to death! I still had two sons at home and two in college. I was blessed to receive some small capital from a relative, and I sent out a sales letter to my contacts, in addition to making lots of phone calls. I got a microloan from a business nonprofit to buy my first computer. My former employer called the day after Christmas and asked me to do a quarterly newsletter that I'd been developing for him before I left. I started getting calls, referrals, and projects.

Under my business' name, DoubleVision Creative, I do concept, copywriting, and creative development for marketing and communication projects in broadcast, print, trade, digital video, and on the Web. I collaborate with other independent creative professionals—art designers, photographers, Web designers, videographers, etc.—on short- to long-term projects.

For example, I work on multi-level projects, often re-creating the client's branding pieces from the ground up. I have a client that had no real marketing pieces; they never had to do any. It's a very historic, huge Catholic cemetery. But times have changed, and now they must compete for pre-planning burial sales with the local city and suburban

cemeteries (yes, really!). We've produced a full-color eight-page booklet, print collateral, monthly print ads, a DVD mini-documentary, a new Web site, and a TV commercial. Or, I might just write heads and copy for ads or industrial trade show displays. I've even written and recorded the on-hold messages at a client's headquarters.

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. I work one on one with CEOs, executive directors, business owners, etc., in widely varying markets and industries. One challenge for me has been not relying on the local businesses for a supply of work. The Upstate western New York area is suffering in the economy. Also, since there has been a lot of downsizing from industry giants here, lots of very talented people are trying to work on their own. I'm trying to connect more internationally.

My overall strategy is staying small and giving excellent service, as well as being ethical and having integrity. Hand-holding, if necessary. I customize projects and teams to the client's specific needs and goals, then produce pieces that are high-quality with a "national look" for a reasonable budget. I seek to gain a reputation as someone who is top of the line in her field. Taking projects with fine people and having fun working with them is my reward.

I would advise anyone interested in FLCW to develop intestines of titanium and to be a person of your word. Working for yourself in anything is no easy path, no matter what you're doing. But if you can write well and love it, and if you are interested in the world, you can make art in anything. Excellent written and verbal skills are a must, since you're going to have to reach people at every level. Other necessary qualities for FLCW are an ability to work with varied personalities, a willingness to risk, flexibility, responsiveness, self-discipline, organization, imagination, and a sense of humor. I would also include curiosity and an interest in learning, such as taking a business start-up class (this really helps).

My income has always varied. Last year I finally grossed six figures. But then other years it's been \$25,000 to \$35,000 in a lean year. Very low overhead helps, but there are always years when I wonder if I can keep working as a FLCW. Then I remember how much I love working from home and having the freedom, variety, and client relationships I experience. Priceless.

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## **Nonprofit Niche Brings Success and Personal Satisfaction To Canadian FLCW**

A seminar given by Peter Bowerman first opened up my eyes to the possibilities that awaited in the field of commercial writing. However, the ideas lay in the back of my mind for the next two years while I spent time pursuing other goals, working as an international development volunteer in Outer Mongolia for organisations such as VSO and the United Nations. Upon my return to Canada, unsettled and needing a change, I bought and read TWWF cover to cover, along with any other books I could get my hands on about freelancing.

Going on the adage of “start where you are,” I decided to use my recent experiences to test the waters. The first three articles about my time in Mongolia that I pitched to various magazines and a newspaper were all accepted and published within months. This really boosted my confidence to begin marketing my services to paying clients.

Right from the start, I knew I wanted a job that combined my belief in working for social change and my passion for writing. Before setting up AdvocateCopy, which serves not-for-profit organisations, I spent several months learning as much as I could as well as doing some extensive market research about the not-for-profit field. I studied copywriting, read books and Web sites about fund-raising, spent hours in the public library, and went to conferences whenever I had the chance while continuing to teach full time. I also devoted a lot of time to building my Web site.

A great friend and mentor who has worked in fund-raising for many years took a chance on me and gave me my first copywriting assignment 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 for hospital foundations, charities, and hospices in Canada. Through contacts, my Web site, and some well-placed advertising, I have also found work outside of fund-raising, including writing annual reports, Web sites, and brochures, as well as contributing again to the magazine that printed my first published article. Although I’m still teaching part time at the local university, my income potential is around \$500 to \$1500 per project.

My portfolio now includes some very well-known organisations within the Canadian not-for-profit field as well as a sample of each kind of writing that I set out to provide. Most of all, I am very proud of the fact that my writing contributes towards raising thousands of dollars for organisations whose reason for being is to improve the lives of others.

Things I didn't know a year ago:

- You meet everyone for a reason, no matter if you have no idea why at the time. Never throw away a business card!
- Make the utmost effort to be professional, reliable, and easy to work with. Do what you say you will do. It's amazing how rare this is, and it can really help develop relationships with the people you work with.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help, advice, and information. It's amazing the variety of skills and contacts your friends, family, and acquaintances have when you really think about it.
- No one will make your venture a success for you. Be prepared to put in more effort than you have ever put into anything before.
- If you're doing what you're really meant to do and giving it 100 percent, things will have a strange way of working out in the end. Have faith in yourself and others will, too!

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## **From Journalist To VP To A Better (FLCW) Life**

I have worked in the field of writing my entire career. After graduating from college, where I served as an editor on the campus newspaper, I entered journalism, writing for a small daily in my hometown. A year later, I quit to attend grad school full time, earning a master's in sports administration and entering the college sports information field. I then picked up and left my job in Southern California to return home to the east coast, where I decided to stay in Pittsburgh.

A friend at a local office of an international PR firm got me in the door for an interview. Despite having no job openings, I was offered one based on my performance on a writing test (and my journalism background). I spent the better part of 20-plus years working in various agency, corporate, and nonprofit PR roles, before my most recent position: VP of corporate communications at a billion-dollar publicly traded company.

Through all my jobs, I never burned a bridge and in my last position had the opportunity to meet people from entities all over the US and Canada. In the back of my mind lived the dream I'd first had 15 years ago: to start my own business or freelance full time. While there was no "aha" moment, the time simply came to go for it. I started talking confidentially with some of my contacts about my dream and tried to gauge the amount of work that might be available.

When the time was right, I walked into my boss's office (the CEO) and told 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 (a medium-sized retainer client), and my CEO bought the proposal on the spot. And thus my new life was launched.

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 that includes taking my oldest daughter to school every day, having time in the mornings and evenings with both of my daughters, and generally more family time and happiness all around. Softball games, swimming lessons, and dance classes are all part of my life now, rather than an occasional treat. 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. I work on accounts ranging from technology companies to education entities, and my assignments range widely from specific writing and editing projects to high-level strategic communications consulting. In addition, I have begun to partner with some of the area's most creative advertising agencies—that don't have a PR function—to help service their clients.

What makes me successful: I believe strongly that good public relations is grounded in good writing and that if you can't write, you can't be successful in PR. I also believe that good writing and good PR must have both strategic and creative components. Amazing writing doesn't do a client any good if there is no strategy behind the writing to achieve a goal of some kind. By the same token, the best strategy can be killed by a lack of creativity both in the writing and the execution.

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 are so many people trying to live this life who haven't done all the homework and who don't have a foot in the water that your work is sure to stand out above the crowd. There truly is no secret formula to this, but you can do a number of things to prepare yourself. Read about other people who have 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 they are amazed that I took such a huge risk, leaving a great corporate job to pursue this new 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 might leave you out in the cold—no matter how talented you are. I now feel like I have much more control over my future, since I keep the pipeline open to make sure that I am never at a loss for opportunities.



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## **Diversifying Rather Than Specializing Suits Texan FLCW Just Fine**

After I had my second child, I began New York University's online program in Internet technology. Initially I wanted to be a Web designer. After doing a few Web design projects, I decided it was more frustrating than enjoyable. Around this period, an e-mail newsletter for Web designers had a contest asking readers to submit an article related to Web design. The winners received high-quality software, so I gave it a shot. My article was a hit. It led to a couple more in the series for the newsletter and to my first professional writing assignment with a Web design magazine. Slowly I landed more paid writing assignments as I discovered I loved working as a writer.

When maternity leave ended, I decided to return to work a couple of weeks early on a part-time basis, hoping to convince management that I could do the job part time. Management wasn't receptive to the idea. I wrote a memo with various options supported by data. Eventually the company let me work part time because another part-time employee joined the team. We didn't job share in the true sense, however; eventually she went with the wireless part of the business, and I stayed with long distance, retaining my part-time status. This allowed me to build the writing business.

I lost several clients thanks to the dot-com flop. This was a turning point: I could either scramble to get more clients or resign myself to a corporate career. With my heart fluttering as I hit send, I e-mailed many people in my network, including those I had interviewed for articles. It led to two new clients, one of which I met in person for the first time after working with him for six years. I knew I could call myself a writer after the turnaround.

I continued to work part time until my company forced me to return full time. By this time, I had plenty of business writing experience and a healthy portfolio. Only I couldn't quit my job yet because my husband didn't have health benefits. We had three kids at this point, 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.

I have faced challenges, though. One of the reasons I never dreamed of having my own business is due to concerns about marketing and growing the business. You see, I'm profoundly deaf, and I can't make phone calls like the average person. Instead, I rely on a relay service ([http://meryl.net/ci/2006/11/how\\_relay\\_services\\_work.html](http://meryl.net/ci/2006/11/how_relay_services_work.html)), which leads to many hang ups when cold-calling. People mistake the relay for telemarketing. Furthermore, relay operators have no personality when they speak because they're neutral and simply read the words typed to them. So it takes away the personality factor, an important part of a phone conversation.

Only once has my deafness affected my ability to do a job. It was an assignment where I had to write a 600-word article with quotes from two original resources within three hours. I never succeeded in submitting the story within three hours due to the problems with using the relay service to contact potential interviewees and not receiving responses to e-mail within a few hours. It was the first and only time I ever missed a deadline.

Thanks to online networking, my Web site and accompanying blog, my many online articles, and references, I managed to land enough clients to do the job full time. On top of it all, 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.

My relationship with NYU has also led to ongoing writing and research work. When I completed my certificate, one of the professors in the Internet program asked me to become his online assistant. When the dot-coms went boom, however, so did my job with NYU. Within a couple of years, someone from the Internet program recommended me to the dean of the school's graduate program in management systems. Since then, I've been an online assistant with the program, where I often review and comment on student thesis proposals. Several professors have hired me to do commercial writing and research for their non-school-related jobs.

Though experts encourage focusing on a niche, I haven't been able to move in that direction. Niche is the opposite of what I do. I'm lucky that the diversity of assignments has worked for me. I've written white papers, case studies, online and print articles, print ads, and book and game reviews. I've edited and contributed to published books and to blogs for businesses.

Doing writing on the side for five years prior to freelancing full time made a difference. Too often, I've seen writers quit the job and go on their own full time without doing much work beforehand. Unfortunately, many become disillusioned after one year and return to the corporate world. Had I quit my job after one year, I probably would've returned to the corporate world. The best way, I believe, to start a business is to keep your full-time job while doing your business on the side. Grow it before leaving the corporate life.

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## **Case Studies Love At First Write For Former Journalist**

Simply put, I tell my clients' success stories. Compelling Cases is a full-service case study development firm that, right now, consists of me and some writing and design contractors. Basically, my clients hire me to interview their satisfied customers, write a compelling case study or success story, and manage the process until the featured customer approves it. Then, my clients use their customer stories in sales, marketing, and PR—ultimately to build credibility with prospects, partners, and investors.

Right now, this is a marketing staple of smart technology companies that have to prove the return on investment of using their products or services, BUT I believe success stories can work for many types of businesses and even nonprofit organizations. Consulting and services companies are starting to jump on the bandwagon now, realizing the value of real-life stories. The best part is, I only have to talk to my clients' happy customers!

Before going to the “other” side and becoming a marketing writer, I was a general assignment and business/technology reporter for newspapers. I have a degree in communications and spent two years as an editor and project manager for a division of the University of California, Davis.

As a general FLCW, I noticed an intriguing trend—the more I specialized, the more my business snowballed. I began devising ways to specialize more and more. First, I did mostly Web site copy, then leveraged my technology writing background by working mostly with technology companies.

After a while, tech-industry clients were increasingly asking for case studies. Personally, I loved the positive “success story” aspect of the work, and this was clearly an area of growing need for tech companies.

Though I still continued doing some other copywriting for old clients, I had to be strict with myself and not take on new non-case study clients. Though the extra money in the short term was attractive, writing brochures wasn't going to grow my case study business. I started referring that type of work to other writers or overseeing subcontractors.

As I began educating my clients and the marketing community about my business, the response was tremendous. They supported me and began referring me to others. To combat the lack of awareness about success stories, I revised my elevator speech repeatedly until people understood. I began getting new clients at a faster rate than ever before, and it keeps accelerating. It was exciting to have the chance to interview organizations like Southwest Airlines, Cisco, and Vail Resorts.

Beyond the qualities needed to be a general copywriter, case study writing requires a few specific skills:

1. Most importantly, you can't be afraid to write about technology, since the majority of case study work is with technology companies. You don't have to understand the bits and bytes behind technology, but you do need to understand what it does and how it benefits end customers.
2. You should have an ability to focus on one type of writing and not get bored. If you love the diversity of doing different marketing materials, this may not be for you.
3. While not required, a journalism or newsletter background most closely matches this type of writing—strong interviewing skills and storytelling with powerful quotes, headlines, etc.

I typically handle the interviewing, writing, and management of the review/edit/approval process with my clients and the featured end customers. The average two-page customer story that includes all that brings in \$750 to \$1,000 each depending on number of folks interviewed, the industry, and the complexity (not including design). When I first begin working with a new client, I charge some up-front, one-time ramp-up costs to learn about their products and services thoroughly and create interview questions.

Begin doing customer stories along with regular copywriting to build your experience base, then specialize after you have a solid portfolio. Don't be afraid to specialize in a specific writing niche if you feel like there's a big enough market for your specialty. It works because you create a mental "hook" with prospects that makes you stand out.

The first hurdle I faced as I specialized was repackaging myself into my new "brand." Going 100 percent with this niche basically required starting a whole new business—a new name, Web site, business cards, and completely new marketing strategies. For three years, I had marketed myself as an all-purpose commercial writer. To fully seize this niche the way I envisioned required a full overhaul.

Another hurdle was the lack of awareness in the general public and marketing arena about customer success stories and case studies. Blank stares from people at cocktail parties or networking events quickly made me realize just how specialized my writing field is. While others were shocked that I would focus on such a narrow area, I strongly believed in my idea and was convinced that there were quite a few companies out there that needed what I offered. I just had to find them.

My strategy can be summed up in two words: targeted marketing. There are two types of companies out there: those who know what customer stories are and need them and those who don't. I chose to go after the companies that already do customer stories or that might need to do them in the near future. I put all my resources toward connecting with this group—attending technology-related events and seminars, reading and writing

articles for technology publications, studying prospective companies online, and finally cold-calling via phone, personalized letter, or e-mail. I chose to market myself nationally in order to reach as broad an audience as possible. I even wrote a book on the topic of customer stories, "Stories That Sell: Turn Satisfied Customers into Your Most Powerful Sales & Marketing Asset."

The day I realized my business was truly successful was when I announced to my clients that I'd be relocating to another state (husband's job change), and it didn't matter! I had a business that worked perfectly in a virtual model, as well as a strong base of loyal clients.

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## **A Thriving FLCW Business With Hollywood Roots**

Before starting the In-House Writer copywriting service, I spent eight years as a Los Angeles-based full-time entertainment journalist, including a stint as film editor of Hollywood trade paper *Daily Variety*. While I enjoyed the work—especially the writing part—I realized the pay was never going to be enough to support my growing family. At the same time, the long hours prevented me from spending as much time with my kids as I wanted. When the opportunity arose to take a non-writing executive job at an entertainment-related company, I decided to give it a try. But while the pay was definitely better, I missed the creativity of writing—and the hours were still long.

So, when after almost two years it became clear my days on the job were numbered, I began to hatch my plan. From reading TFWW I had a pretty good idea of what was involved in becoming a freelance copywriter. I called the contacts I had made as a journalist—mostly movie marketing and publicity executives—and asked them if they ever outsourced writing projects. Several said no, a few said “sometimes,” and one or two promised to throw me some work. It wasn’t much to go on, but I had received a severance package that would buy me a few months, so I figured this was my shot. I decided to take the leap.

Business was nerve-wrackingly slow for the first few months. I didn’t have the guts for cold calls. Instead, I made a lot of “warm” calls to people I knew or to whom I had been referred. Eventually a few jobs started trickling in. Then I got a lucky break: After I wrote some press releases for the home entertainment division of a major studio, the head of PR there offered to put me on a retainer to write a set number of pieces each month. Although it wasn’t enough to live on, it was a chunk of work I could count on every month that I didn’t have to hustle for.

Four years later, my business is thriving. I’ve provided copy to all of the major Hollywood film studios as well as numerous television networks, production companies, talent agencies, and entertainment PR firms. I create both product-related materials (film and TV press kits, press releases, synopses) and corporate communications materials (executive talking points, speeches, bios, company profiles, by-line articles). More recently, I’ve expanded beyond entertainment into other business sectors, including technology, travel and hospitality, financial and business services, and nonprofits. To accommodate the volume, I regularly subcontract assignments to a handful of excellent copywriters who want to take on additional projects.

I still don’t make cold calls. Instead, I focus on making sure my existing clients are so happy with the quality of our writing and the level of service we provide that they keep coming back and refer their friends and associates to me. Most of my marketing consists of cards, e-mails, 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.

Luckily for me, it works. I make a living writing and get to work at home and spend time with my kids. It's a beautiful FLCW life!

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## **Former English Teacher in UK Turns Writing Dreams Into Reality**

I write copy for businesses of all sizes, from brochures and leaflets to Web copy, newsletters, direct mail, and press releases. I work across all industry sectors. My business (Best Words Copywriting) is growing all the time. I was recently offered the opportunity to ghostwrite a book—something that I’ve wanted to do for a while.

On the surface of things, it looks like my change from school teaching to copywriting was very quick indeed. A year of portfolio building, surviving on starvation pay, writing magazine and newspaper articles, then the big launch (with TFWW beside me all the way).

In fact, my writing career started 15 years earlier when I picked up my first writing paycheck and whooped a celebratory war dance round my kitchen. It had been a “one-off” job. A person I’d met at a teachers’ gathering was looking for someone to summarise a couple of business books. I was busy with marking kids’ essays and preparing lessons, but I leapt at this opportunity. And when the work was done and 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.

I met my English wife in Sydney, where I lived. She was a teacher, too, on an exchange programme. When she had to go back to England, I “pulled up stumps” and went with her. (Seemed a good idea at the time.) In the UK, I continued as an English teacher but still nurtured the writing dream. So what was it that got me into “fly-or-fall” mode...and then pushed me over the edge?

I can’t put my finger on any one thing, but disillusion with the education system coupled with an insistent inner voice that got stronger every day certainly helped. That inner voice wouldn’t listen to reason (retirement, pension plan, family, etc.); it just kept on chanting its mantra: “Enough is enough.”

So I counted the spare pennies, figured I could survive for a year or so without a regular income, and I quit to be a writer of some sort. I read a lot of books on writing. I found out what copywriting was. And although I knew nothing about sales and marketing, I felt I could be a success at it. Yes, I FELT I could be a success at it, but I was far from certain. It was one thing to teach kids how to argue, persuade, advise, explain, describe, explore in their writing; it was another to do it myself.

The process of marketing myself involved hundreds of cold calls and e-mails. When my first paid job came in (meagre pay writing Web copy for a holistic therapist in Cyprus), I went back 15 years and danced around the kitchen again.



My marketing efforts have introduced me to networking groups, including becoming director of a BNI chapter. This group has helped me in four important ways:

1. *Self-belief*. Standing up and saying you're a good copywriter sort of rubs off. You believe it because other people believe it.
2. *Referrals*. Actual paid writing projects.
3. *Introductions*. I've been introduced to three marketing/design agencies who now give me regular business-to-business work.
4. *Alliances*. I've teamed with some great graphic designers, marketers, illustrators, photographers, and Web developers.

With my career now established (14 projects on the go as I write), I'm building a writers' support group. There are four of us now, and we meet once a month for coffee or beer.

Anybody who does what I've done is bound to make mistakes, and I've made plenty. But I've tried to put them right pretty quickly, and I've certainly learned from them. It's been difficult at times, certainly stressful, but underneath all that is a real sense of joy that I've brought that 15-year-old writing dream to life.

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## **Building A Part-Time FLCW Business With Retirement In Mind**

I've been in the water utility business for 28 years and am currently the utility director for a small municipality. This career has been rewarding in many ways, but it's also more than a full-time job. I'm on call 24/7 and often have to attend city commission meetings in the evening.

I have a life-long love of reading and writing, and I've done a lot of both as part of my water utility career. But I long to spend more time with my husband and family. So the time and location flexibility of a writing career is very attractive to me. At age 53, my plan is to build my writing business to the point where I can take an early retirement in a few years.

I started Copywriting Solutions as a part-time business. My background in the water business would make me a natural to write for engineering firms and vendors that I've worked with, but I have to avoid any conflict of interest. I've had to develop a client base completely apart from my area of expertise.

I haven't found my niche yet, but I enjoy the variety of not having one. I've written for a number of small businesses and spent my first year developing a portfolio. Some of my projects included:

- a training manual for indoor cycling instructors
- press releases for nonprofit organizations
- Web site copy
- proposals for a personal training fitness company
- brochures for several companies
- magazine and newspaper articles

I've also written several online technical courses. And I've broken into the direct mail business after taking a course from American Writers and Artists, Inc., and winning their Bootcamp Spec Challenge in 2007 ([www.awaionline.com](http://www.awaionline.com)).

Time management is a big issue when running a business part time. I haven't missed any deadlines, but finding time to market myself has been difficult. I did very little cold-calling and spent most of my marketing time attending chamber of commerce functions. I also joined Business Network International (BNI, [www.bni.com](http://www.bni.com)), a referral organization. The majority of my business came through BNI. I've learned a lot about creating a good, quick pitch for my business that I now use at other functions.

With little time to market and write, organization and prioritization are critical—and a challenge. There are times when my desk looks like a bomb exploded. Making order out of chaos is one of my specialties!

And my wonderfully understanding and supportive husband is a great help.

I didn't make a big profit in my first year. I spent too little time promoting my business. Another problem—I *greatly* underestimated the time it would take for almost all my projects, resulting in undercharging. I'm improving in these areas, and this year I expect to bring in about \$10,000 to \$12,000. With a writing business you can make a nice side income, or start part time and segue into a full-time writing career.

If you don't want to quit your present job, it's easy to get your copywriting business started part time—especially if you have any flexibility with work hours. There's no big capital outlay, no begging for business loans, and no looking for employees. Be aware that it's easy to forget about boosting your business when you're battling a project deadline. Don't neglect your marketing efforts! If you have a writing niche and existing contacts, you can probably get going a lot quicker than I did.

Working with a mentor might be helpful. I wanted to boost my profits, so I started working with business coach Beth Cole ([www.beth-cole.com](http://www.beth-cole.com)). She helped me brainstorm new marketing techniques that fit my schedule. Together we created a workable business and marketing plan to target more and higher-paying clients. To improve my skills with writing for the direct mail market, I worked with Copy Protégé ([www.copyprotege.com](http://www.copyprotege.com)).

And listen to what Peter says! Do NOT undervalue your work. I did, and combined with my lousy time estimating, I killed my profit margin for year one. You need no special expertise to start your part-time copywriting business. But it makes a difference if you really care about helping your clients solve their problems and build their businesses.

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## **Narrowing In On A Specialty Can Produce Global Results**

I became a freelance writer when one day, my boss walked into my office and said, “The company is closing; everyone is being laid off.” Since then, I have also become an author; my most recent book is *Copywriting That Sells High Tech*. I work on a broad range of sales and PR materials: brochures and data sheets, press releases, magazine articles, and Web content. My most frequent projects are customer case studies and white papers.

My primary market is technology, a niche where a writer who has technical experience and knowledge can command high rates. Clients recognize the value of a writer who can work with technical experts and translate their explanations into clear, compelling marketing messages. My last corporate job was in telecom, and writers with this subject knowledge were very rare in the early years of my freelance business.

I have been able to parlay my telecom experience into opportunities with other technology companies, such as a semiconductor manufacturer, a major computer company, even a medical systems company.

My industry focus has always made it necessary—and rewarding—for me to pursue clients in other states and countries. My client list, promotional materials, and Web site have given prospective clients confidence in working with me remotely. I believe that clients of all types are now more willing to work with remote writers, especially for projects requiring special expertise.

I have worked with several overseas clients, usually after being referred by a mutual American acquaintance or the company’s US-based communications staff. Adjusting my work hours to accommodate time zones and learning the subtle differences in communications style and corporate culture are the key shifts for working with international clients. As technology companies become increasingly global, I expect international clients and projects to become a bigger part of my business.

It has become harder to cultivate long-term relationships with individual clients, the relationships that produce multiple projects over several years. Clients are just too busy to do more than focus on near-term needs and tactics. This may mean a one-time project, then a quiet period of several months, even a year or more, before you hear from that client again. You’ll need to conduct regular marketing activity and build a broad client base to generate a continuous flow of copywriting projects.

Several self-promotion strategies, listed below, have consistently served me well over the years for attracting and retaining clients:

1. *Message.* “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.
2. *Referrals.* One advantage of working with large companies is that my name gets passed from one marcom manager to another. I’ve had relationships with some companies for five, ten, or even more years simply by working in different divisions. Large companies may also keep “approved writers” lists, which are great for helping me find projects and contacts I wouldn’t have found on my own.
3. *Print and online materials.* I still use postcards, mailed three or four times a year, as the primary way to introduce my services to prospective clients. Each mailing has always generated a few inquiries, and over time, new projects and clients. I follow up with current and past clients through articles, “stay in touch” e-mails, and news about my recent projects. Surprisingly, my Web site has not been significant on its own for attracting new prospects. Instead, the site reinforces my credibility when a prospect has found me through a referral, mailing, etc. It is tempting to save money by producing low-cost, do-it-yourself materials. Instead, invest in professionally designed and produced materials—they give prospects a higher value perception of your services.
4. *My book.* *Copywriting That Sells High Tech* has opened the doors for some copywriting work. I don’t necessarily recommend writing and publishing a book as a marketing tactic; it’s a huge and expensive undertaking! But a white paper, article, or other document can be a good tool for generating leads.

I would advise those starting in FLCW to find a niche that is a natural extension of your experience and interests. This niche will make it easier to build a business and avoid burnout over the long term. Persist with your marketing efforts, keeping in mind that what doesn’t pay off now may pay off later—and often in a surprising way.

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## **Feel-Good FLCW Success For Former Massachusetts Journalist**

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, my dream of leaving the stresses of the 9-to-5 behind to become a full-time freelance writer could no longer be put on hold. I'd had a 20-year career in editorial work, starting out as a staff writer on an alternative newsweekly, morphing into a production editor for a large nonprofit, and later, jumping on the Internet rocket ship as a content producer for dot-coms—all the while freelancing for magazines, including as a Boston correspondent for *People*.

I had the skills, the experience, and the contacts to make a go of it. When my year of surgeries and treatments ended, I was lucky to land two ongoing freelance writing jobs—one for a major dot-com and the other for a pop-tech magazine, which in turn introduced me to more businesspeople and marketing directors in need of decent writers. When those contracts ended a couple years later, I was back to pounding the pavement in search of more freelance work.

I really had no strategy to speak of and I flopped around aimlessly, doing lesser-paying, eyeball-busting copyediting and proofreading jobs or whatever writing jobs happened to land in my lap. It was a living (barely), but it wasn't satisfying. I joined my local chamber in hopes of meeting other writers, and the one writer I met told me to read this book called *The Well-Fed Writer*. Eureka!

After reading TFW, I knew the earning potential was not in journalism but in marketing communications writing, which I'd been doing in the form of employee profiles, company success stories, and such. It was the same "feel-good" human-interest writing I loved to do as a journalist but with a marketing twist. It came naturally, it was less stressful than journalism, and the clients were delighted with the work. *And it paid way better*. I expected it would take time to come up with a business strategy and build up a client base.

A few marketing professionals (including a writing coach) told 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, how to package my services, and how to land new business.

I needed to reinvent myself as a feature writer for business, education, and nonprofits and to repackage my writing services with a professional-looking brochure and Web site. I also wanted to differentiate myself by offering a niche specialty—employee and company success stories that "put the heart in business."

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.

Once I made the mental shift from “apply for jobs” with a resume (which I ditched) to “marketing a service” with a professional-looking brochure and Web site, plus my ability to offer a niche specialty, that’s when I started to actually ramp up my business. I expect to double my income this year. 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 to fill up my schedule with new writing work. 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. My greatest challenge now is managing it all!

It feels incredible to do work that I personally find very rewarding, shining a bright light on others who feel passionate about their work and telling their stories, and earning a decent income doing it. I’m happy, the employees I profile are happy, and the companies are happy. It’s a writing win-win-win. Woo!

I would advise that if anyone tells you can’t transition from journalism to marketing communications writing, they’re just plain wrong (and probably envious). But do be prepared to alter your writing approach, and learn all you can from the marketing professionals you work for. Ask lots of questions. Who is their audience? What’s the message they want your piece to convey? Ask for past examples of company communications pieces they find exemplary, and ask what areas need improvement.

(Note: Given I don’t have a marketing background, I’ve found it’s more educational for me to work for savvy marketing directors at large- to mid-sized companies who can teach me the nuances of marketing communications rather than my taking on smaller clients who are looking to me for sales/marketing guidance, which is beyond my experience.)

Naturally, marketing communications writing has a rah-rah, pro-business angle, and it’s not unbiased like journalism, but it can still entail good, honest reporting and storytelling. Journalists have a natural aversion to marketing hype, so they can write business stories that are authentic, engaging, and that people *actually want to read*. In the end, that’s what companies will pay you for. Journalists have tons of good qualities to bring to the marketing communications table. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.

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## **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. My writing has even led to a variety of speaking engagements and teaching opportunities, which boosts my income.

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!

The good news is that if I can do this from rural northwest Iowa, you can become a Well-Fed Writer, too. There are no secrets to this business—just time-tested basics:

- *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.
- *Provide personalized service.* While e-mail is a great communication tool, don't overlook the importance of picking up the phone and calling your clients if you have an in-depth question. If you know you'll be in a client's neighborhood soon, why not e-mail and ask if you could stop in at convenient time? Dropping by just to say "hi" has landed me plenty of extra work, and it has elevated my status as a valued member of the company's communication/marketing team.
- *Deliver only your best work—every time.* Quality counts in this business, and it will be remembered, long after the price is forgotten.
- *Stay in touch with existing clients.* I consider this part of my ongoing marketing plan. When one of my clients in Des Moines celebrated 30 years in business, I sent a gift basket of homemade jams. Even a simple, handwritten note will keep you top of mind.



- *Remain on the lookout for new opportunities.* You never know where your next big gig may come from. I landed an excellent corporate client by staying in touch with a colleague from my early days as a newspaper intern. When one of her acquaintances was looking for a Midwest-based ag writer, I was the first person she recommended.
- *Enjoy the fun projects that will come your way.* Because a career as a Well-Fed Writer prevents “starving artist syndrome,” you can make time for other, less lucrative writing projects, if you desire. While these may not earn you top dollar, they can be enriching in other ways. I’m currently writing a history book of my hometown, which has been an extremely enjoyable endeavor.

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## **Giving Up the Director-Level Job For a New Career In FLCW**

I used to be the gatekeeper—the corporate communications director with \$15,000 budgets for single brochures. I was always on the lookout for good freelance designers and writers, even attending a Las Vegas convention with the primary goal of meeting talented freelancers. After all, I had to hire people to help me create magazine content, maintain an updated Web site, and produce a steady flow of brochures. Still, I never quite realized that freelance corporate writing could be a lucrative, legitimate career path until I found *The Well-Fed Writer*.

They don't teach you about entrepreneurship in journalism school. Instead, I was groomed for the corporate communication director track from the minute I accepted my scholarship. I promptly mapped out the appropriate college expectations and worked around the clock achieving them: placing third in the nation on an extracurricular public relations team and winning the most competitive local internships. I even convinced my senior employer to create a full-time position upon graduation. Within a year, I left that job to become the director of communications and marketing for a 20,000-member state association. Wonderful, I thought: the 10-year-plan achieved at age 23.

Except I was miserable.

I spent all my time navigating politics and committee meetings, working late, and stressing about budgets. I was forced to hire contractors for all the fun, creative work and felt drained before I even arrived at the office. But I found myself in an existential quandary: I loved marketing but hated marketing management. Would I quit this job to go be miserable in another one? Would I have to choose between the chaos of working at an ad agency or the hum-drum machine of corporate communications? How could I make a living outside the normal 9-to-5 management track?

I thought it was unrealistic to pin my financial future on the hopes of writing funny, David Sedaris-like memoirs, but I needed to find a plausible writing career that meshed with my personality. Thank goodness for *The Well-Fed Writer*! 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 a three-month timeline and \$1,000 to sow the seeds for success, I started Riley Communications.

With some cheap online business cards, a few brochure samples, and a supportive network of statewide contacts, I was off and running! I provide primarily public relations services, but I also create brochures, Web copy, fliers, Powerpoint presentations, and brand identities for small businesses. In addition to my writing skills, I have capitalized on basic design training and contractor relationships to give my clients the option of a complete, turnkey marketing service (without the sky-high ad agency prices). Most

professional businesses have been glad to pay my hourly rate when they see the bottom-line results generated by my marketing. 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.

There have been challenges along the way (like with any job), but I find it extremely rewarding to work with small businesses. Generating even a handful of new clients with a great marketing piece makes a significant difference to their bottom line, and that feels great. While I haven't hooked any big fish, 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. There's a lot of education involved, but in the end, I really am helping some great local businesses compete with "the big boys." Plus, I get to do a wide variety of the creative tasks I love, and I work from home. My business is growing, meeting revenue goals, and gaining momentum, but the best part is doing a job that fits my talents and personality.

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## **Why You Should Always Listen To Your Parents**

The first time I walked into the second incarnation of our writers group—well, that was as cool as it gets. For one thing, we were meeting at Hennessey's Tavern, a great place for breakfast in Hermosa Beach, California, where you can sip your coffee while the waves splash around the pier outside. For another, I was going to have to make sure we adjourned after a reasonable time. I had to get back to my computer to make sure the marketing slick I was working on was being attended to. "Don't try this at home—for commercial writing professionals only" seemed the appropriate theme.

So how'd I get to the point where I'd feel entitled to pull into a "For FLCWs Only" parking space? (Believe me, it would be helpful to have a spot like that once a month in Hermosa Beach.) By trying those things Peter Bowerman recommends in TFWF. And then keeping at it.

I'd been a paralegal most of my professional life. And there are some great moments I'll always treasure from that stage of my development. Because for one thing, I've always loved to write. 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). Now, could there be a way to write, combine it with my knack for keeping things on track, and make really good money for the most demanding boss I knew (me)? Enter...my dad? Here's what happened: After my father heard Peter speak in Florida, he suggested I check out TFWF. Already being VERY well past the stage where you distrust your parents because they're your parents, I took that advice, and it changed things forever. I arranged to see Peter's seminar in Atlanta on my way to see the folks in Jacksonville, and I left feeling armed to the teeth with ideas, enthusiasm, and know-how.

So back in LA? I couldn't get arrested. Cold calls, chambers of commerce...nothing seemed to work. But then Moira Shepard, organizer of an ongoing group I was lucky enough to hook up with, suggested I join her while she headed to some additional networking meetings. I met some people who were starting up their own one- and two-person shops—a few needed copy for first-time Web sites—and they hired me for writing jobs here and there.

Next, I read an item about an upcoming B2B expo in Orange County. I made a modest investment in company pendant, plastic display items, and voila: I was an exhibitor. Had a couple of calls right away from people in one particular Orange County city. Seems the head of their chamber of commerce, who's since become a friend of mine, had taken a handful of my brochures when I wasn't looking and put them on display on his organization's counter.

I ended up writing resumes, a flower shop brochure, and various and sundry items.

Then I read in “The Well-Fed E-Pub” about Bobby Hickman in Georgia exhibiting free at Staples.

Seems my local Staples was having a similar event *the next week*. I made more local acquaintances and even got business from fellow exhibitors. Pretty cool the way the E-Pub connection worked on that one, and Peter mentioned it in his next column.

All the while, I was making calls, calls, and more calls.

So, I knew I was in this gig to stay. Still, it wasn't keeping me in the style to which I wanted to become accustomed.

And then a call from Cynthia.

Now Cynthia, it just so happened, had seen my story in Peter's column. She wanted to meet for coffee to see if I might give her some suggestions for commercial freelancing in Southern California. After thinking about it for a half second, I said sure.

We met, had a terrific chat, and kept in touch.

Here's something you need to know about Cynthia: she's a terrific writer and already had a few major projects under her belt when we spoke. Still, it's as much a credit to her perseverance as her writing talent that about a year after our first meeting she became an editor for a local monthly. At one point a large health-care facility's PR director asked Cynthia if she could recommend a marketing writer. Cynthia pointed my way, and I began a new stage of my commercial writing career: ads, newsletter, the works—it hasn't stopped since. I'm handling everything health-care related, which means medical manufacturing to physician profiles to biotechnical engineering. I never received any formal scientific training after I graduated from college. I DO research everything meticulously and cross-check. That discipline serves me well on all projects. Fascinating as health and bioscience writing is, I remain a communications generalist. One of my clients is a Los Angeles city council member.

And that brings up maybe the main lesson I've learned. Being a commercial writing pro to me means asking the right questions upfront, having good research technique, and keeping really organized writing methods. I may not know about a particular subject upfront, but it's a good feeling to know I'll be able to get up to speed fast and ask what needs to be asked. Take real-time lead generation businesses on the Internet, for instance. Knew nothing about them, but I was contacted by an owner who needed someone to write B2C and B2B Web and print material. He wouldn't have *wanted* me to come in with preconceptions about his business. He *needed* someone who could put his business president's knowledge into a format that achieved his corporate sales objectives. I *did* do some fast learning about Web analytics, SEO marketing, and clicks to conversions.

Thanks to TFWW and my personal experience, I was ready, willing, able, and at his service.

And if I ever can't cover it, I know some great FLCWs who meet at Hermosa Beach every month. I can recommend any one of them to do an outstanding job.

**Lisa Manyon**  
**Lewiston, Idaho**  
<http://www.writeoncreative.com>

## **Writing Career No Longer Just A Dream For This Idahoan**

While I'd enjoyed my job as an account manager for the premier ad agency in our local market, I'd always dreamed of writing for a living. Writing had been a large part of all the positions I'd held (i.e., advertising, electronic media, nonprofit, and social services work, etc.). When my career had peaked in the advertising agency arena in our small market (the combined population of neighboring cities Lewiston, Idaho, and Clarkston, Washington, is less than 100,000), I thought of my dream.

Coming across *The Well-Fed Writer* gelled the writing direction for me, and I decided to make a change. I left my job and couldn't be happier today. 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!).

But 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. Isn't technology grand? And, of course, be sure to tie that presence in with all of your branded materials: biz cards, letterhead, brochures, etc.

One of my short-term goals—honing my professional skills—unexpectedly opened the door to some bigger opportunities. While taking a few online classes at a local college, one of my instructors (who happened to run the local small business development center), impressed with my marketing savvy, asked me to prepare and present a proposal for SBDC trainings.

I did just that, got paid, and then turned the training material into an eBook. I went on to contact several nationally known experts (including Peter) and gained support for my training. In addition, I joined my local chamber and began writing a monthly column on marketing and copywriting for their newsletter. The resulting exposure has increased awareness of my services locally. If you're not a member of your local chamber, consider joining today. Often your membership includes a link on the chamber Web site in the online business directory, and guess who chamber members prefer to work with? Fellow chamber members, of course.

Speaking of articles, doing article marketing on the Internet has increased traffic to my Web site. My personal favorite is Chris Knight's [www.ezinearticles.com](http://www.ezinearticles.com).

Another success strategy for me was to invest in mentorship with various industry gurus to improve my game, including folks 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. I also acted as team leader for her Red Hot Copywriting Bootcamp.

After implementing all these initiatives, I've doubled my hourly rate for consulting and now bid all copywriting jobs on a per project basis. I choose to work with a select few clients, providing one-on-one marketing consulting. My main focus is copywriting projects. I continually receive paid writing jobs for brochures, Web sites, sales letters, and more—both locally and nationally.

I also joined targeted associations like NAWW ([www.NAWW.org](http://www.NAWW.org)) as a great way to expand contacts and my referral base. By thinking in larger terms and focusing on my true desires, I've made great national connections that increase my credibility locally.

Be thankful. Meaning, send thank-you cards for any occasion (Peter doesn't call me the "Thank You Card Queen" for no reason!). They definitely make a difference.

Finally, don't be afraid to broadcast your accomplishments via press release ([www.PRWeb.com](http://www.PRWeb.com) is a great resource, and there are other free options, too). And speaking of broadcasting:

My blog: [www.writeoncreative.com/blog](http://www.writeoncreative.com/blog)

My ezine: <http://www.writeoncreative.com/WOC-Ezine.html>



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## **No Limits For This Pennsylvania Freelancer-turned-Enterprise**

When I first started Anne Deeter Gallaher Editorial Services at the age of 40, I craved “how-to” freelance writing and business information books. I needed the best insight to shorten my learning curve. I discovered there are three keystones for freelance writing success: all of Bob Bly’s books, The Well-Fed Writer books, and a subscription to Creative Business newsletter ([www.creativebusiness.com](http://www.creativebusiness.com)). With dual bachelor degrees in English and communications/journalism, I had honed my writing skills but earning significant money from my skills was a new challenge. When our first son was born, I left my position as editor of a Christian publishing house to stay home and become a part-time freelance writer. After 15 years at home raising our three boys, I decided to start my own business. I began as a freelance writer with one nonprofit client. My job was to create, write, produce, and print a quarterly newsletter for a youth ministry.

My first issue received national attention in a design magazine. The client was extraordinary, but their funds were always limited and \$25/hour seemed like a lot of money to charge. It was a mindset that I had to shed. What is the value of excellent writing? How much should I charge to sell copy that makes an organization stronger or a business more profitable? I developed a business savvy from the books I read and learned how to market myself. Now, with two of my three sons in college, I am focused on providing my business clients with the best marketing and communications materials they ever dreamed of. I am passionate about their success, and I understand that my deliverables will impact their bottom lines. They lead impressive companies, and I’m privileged to contribute to their branding position and client perception.

Today I moved from my home office into Class A office space. I have changed my business name to reflect my metamorphosis—the Deeter Gallaher Group LLC. I hired my first employee a month ago and next month I am hiring my second employee. My new tagline is “Powerful language. Smart marketing.” I tell my clients that I am the Jaguar of marketing firms—I’m not for everyone, but for those who appreciate sophisticated and highly valued communications, I’m a perfect fit.

I have come a long way from writing an article to submit to an editor along with my SASE and then waiting patiently to check my mail for months hoping for an acceptance letter and a \$40 check. Today I pitch the ideas to my clients and write their Op-Eds, their ads, and their press releases, and they pay me a “well-fed” fee that I dictate. Last year I was 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 journals. I have received numerous IABC awards for my work as well as leadership awards. Not too bad for someone who only had one business/economics course in college (I advise students to take lots of business coursework regardless of your major!). I am very active on regional boards and with business women, especially On-Rampers—women who are returning to the workforce after raising their children—and liberally share advice to shorten their learning curves.

Whatever your gender or career choice, don't limit your success by your mindset or value limitations. My clients are CEOs of their companies and run impressive, very successful firms. None of them questioned why I would wait until 40 to start a business; none of them asked for my GPA (I'd gladly tell them!). They all expected great work, and I delivered. They freely share their business acumen with me, and five of them serve on my personal board of directors. They are clients, colleagues, and friends.

I, in turn, often speak to organizations and college and high school students to help guide them in career success. There is no magic bullet for success and no guarantees in business, but the business world needs passionate people who write well. I am an example of freelance-turned-enterprise success. Jump in, the water's great!

I finally realized I was a success when people kept telling me, "Anne, I see your name everywhere," to which I would 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 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. Read all you can and ask every leader you know for advice and insight. They are cartographers to help you chart your own course for success. And when you arrive, turn around and share your experiences with other writers, learners, and business builders. There is always a need for great work and great writing.

**Kristen King**  
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## **Freelancing Fresh From College, FLCW (Now 27) Drives, Thrives and Diversifies**

When I graduated with a BA in English in 2004, I knew I wanted to do something with writing and editing, but I wasn't sure what. About two weeks after graduation, while working part time as an obituary writer and copyeditor at a local paper, part time as an editorial and development associate at a statewide magazine, and part time as a bartender, I started freelancing with great skills but limited professional experience. I started out at \$50/hour. And I loved it.

At the end of the summer, I ended up getting a full-time medical editing job (the promise of health insurance was enough to overcome my distaste for commuting), but I kept freelancing on the side. By which I mean, I worked on the train on the way to work, during my lunch hour, on the train on the way home from work, and after work. It was a lot of working, and I don't know that I'd recommend it. But before long, I was turning down so much work for lack of time 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 United States and Canada, Europe, and as far away as New Zealand. My first website, [www.kristenkingfreelancing.com](http://www.kristenkingfreelancing.com), 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. My website and blog continue to be my top source of work, though client referrals and word of mouth are definitely climbing in importance.

Since I went full time on April 28, 2006, my work has grown to include not just writing and editing, but also consulting and speaking. I completed my master's degree in publishing at The George Washington University and am scheduled to start teaching there as of this writing. I still maintain my award-winning blog for writers, [www.inkthinkerblog.com](http://www.inkthinkerblog.com), and now I market my business through [www.inkthinkercommunications.com](http://www.inkthinkercommunications.com). I've blogged professionally for a major blog network and currently my own pet blog [www.meowbarkblog.com](http://www.meowbarkblog.com) and women's interest blog [www.sass-pants.com](http://www.sass-pants.com).

One of the biggest factors in growing my business and developing new skills was joining professional organizations for writers, namely American Independent Writers ([www.aiwriters.org](http://www.aiwriters.org); formerly Washington Independent Writers). And I didn't just join—I volunteered at events and was invited to host an all-day seminar before long. Then, I started speaking regularly as a panelist and was eventually elected to the Board of

Directors. Not only did this put me in touch with lots of experienced writers who proved to be excellent resources, but it also gave me some serious name recognition and authority and has led directly to some pretty handsome projects including several ongoing relationships. Other organizations I recommend include the Editorial Freelancers Association and the National Writers Union.

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