

**GOING  
THE**



**HALF  
HOG**

**FREELANCE WRITING  
WITHOUT MARKETING**

**SPIKE WYATT**

# Going The Half Hog

Freelance Writing Without Marketing

Spike Wyatt

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## FOR NOUNOUSHKA

Nobody's perfect  
as far as I see.

You may not be perfect  
but you're perfect for me.



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## Disclaimer

This book is intended to provide insight and ideas for people who want to work as part-time freelance (“half-hog”) writers or editors.

This book is not an exhaustive guide to success on any particular site or by using a strict method: it is a collection of useful information to help half-hoggers figure out how to get started, organise their priorities and, most importantly, find regular work without giving up excessive amounts of time to marketing themselves or their services.

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## What's in this book

Anyone who's looked at earning money online knows how much scam and spam is out there. Everyone's trying to make a buck and too many are doing it by regurgitating the same useless crap at the expense of people who are often desperate for a bit of income.

Rewrite three chapters of someone else's work about how wonderful life can be as a freelancer, add two more chapters with vague motivational rubbish, include some more pages that don't say anything new or particularly helpful about the subject, slap on a dramatic title with "Internet" and "millionaire" in it and flog it for \$100 a pop. Easy money – and lacking any ethics, in my opinion.

This book is *exactly the opposite*. It's a no-bullshit guide to being a valuable, ethical, part-time freelance ("half-hog") writer. Wherever possible, I avoid generalisations, vague concepts and useless motivational garbage. This is real information with actual, explicit ideas and guidelines.

The majority of the content here is intended specifically for half-hoggers working with words – primarily writers, with a section for editors and proofreaders. However, much of it will be just as useful for whole-hoggers – freelancers who want to make a full-time business out of their writing.

### A note about "being exceptional"

As I read through this book for the umpteenth time, looking for grammatical errors and other stupidities, I realise that some of it goes against the grain of currently popular publications and "exciting new ways of thinking".

If you're a regular at sites like Seth Godin's, Chris Guillebeau's, Zen Habits or even Lifehacker<sup>1</sup>, you'll notice that the underlying message is to be different and/or exceptional. Everyone's pushing for outstanding creativity, individual contribution and ways of thinking that deny conformity.

This book does not encourage you to approach your freelance business in a non-conformist way just to be different. There's a lot to be said for a measure of orthodoxy in business, especially when you're trying to convince people to hire you. Sure, some clients want the crazy-eyed artistic types but most just want a

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<sup>1</sup> [sethgodin.typepad.com](http://sethgodin.typepad.com), [chrisguillebeau.com](http://chrisguillebeau.com), [zenhabits.net](http://zenhabits.net) and [lifehacker.com](http://lifehacker.com), respectively.

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reliable, professional writer who will produce high-quality work on time, every time.

I'm all for being exceptional and making your mark on the world but if you want to do that through your freelance career, you need to go the whole hog. And if you're going the whole hog, this book will get you started on a firm foundation but eventually you'll need to venture beyond its scope.

My fundamental assumption is this: you want a stable half-hog career that leaves you enough time to "be exceptional" in areas of your life that you consider more important – parenting, your studies, your job, writing bestsellers, caring for the less fortunate, snowboarding or whatever else it is you do.

Enough of that – on with the half-hogging!

## Part 1: The Basics of Half-Hogging

Almost everywhere you look on the Internet, you'll find marketing information. Search Google, open Twitter, read the spam in your email: they're all full of people trying to sell you a course, a service or even just a motivational buzz. There are so many self-proclaimed marketing experts out there that, if you put them all together in one room, their combined weight would probably cause the Earth to implode and form a black hole.

But some freelancers don't have the time or inclination for marketing. Some of us are constantly struggling to fit assignments around other responsibilities. Some of us don't want a full-blown business because we don't have time for it: we're full-time parents, students, carers or have another job.

So where does that leave us, the half-hoggers, freelancers who want to earn a decent income from part-time work but aren't looking to be the Bill Gates of writing, the next J.K. Rowling or Better Than Seth Godin?

The marketing gurus say we're doomed: we'll struggle to find clients, we'll be badly paid and no one will trust us because we're not professionals with brands, company names and whatever else their mantra demands.

Most of all, those marketing gurus want us to believe that it's impossible to be a freelancer without chewing up all our spare time in self-promotion. They're wrong.

You don't have to spend  
hours on marketing  
to be a successful  
freelance writer

If you want to go the whole hog and build a massively successful writing business that'll push \$150-an-hour work your way every day of the week and pay for a Beverly Hills home, you're listening to the wrong guy.

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If you want to go the half hog, fit your writing around other responsibilities and be paid an acceptable rate for the work you do – and be able to scale up later – read on!

### Why "freelancing without marketing"?

In November 2008, I had to face the fact that a serious back injury was not going to get better quickly. I knew that, once I had reached a point where I was no longer lying on the floor in pain most of the time, I'd have to find a replacement for my previous vocation as an IT geek: I wouldn't be able to do normal office work for quite some time, if ever again.

I turned to the Internet for opportunities to earn a little extra cash and keep myself busy. I researched the possibilities for a month or so and concluded that the ideal work for me involved words. And thus began my reinvention as a freelance writer and editor.

However, as I learned more about freelancing, I found that I had a problem. Apart from avoiding all the spam and scam, the biggest hurdle was what everyone said I needed: *marketing*. And this is the most important thing you need to understand about me and why this book exists:

I'm cynical about advertising,  
I don't enjoy marketing<sup>2</sup>  
and I don't have time for either

Some writers love marketing. They're passionate about networking and demographics; there's nothing they'd rather talk about than branding and keyword research; they eat motivational courses for breakfast, buzzwords for lunch and metrics for dinner. Then they write advertising copy before bedtime.

I'm not one of those writers, so I need other solutions to build a half-hog career. On top of that, I simply don't have enough time to dedicate the universally suggested one-third of my productive hours to the marketing process. Most

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<sup>2</sup> Advertising is a subset of marketing – see "What is marketing, anyway?" on page 13 for more information.

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weeks, I have between 10 and 20 hours in which to work. Let's say I have an average of 15: according to the marketing mantra, that means I need to find another 5 hours for marketing (sleep is for wimps!) or lose 5 hours of paid writing to make myself more popular.

I'd rather earn the money, thank you.

### **No marketing at all? Really?**

I know you're going to ask, so I'll answer the question now.

Half-hogging is for freelance writers who want to work part-time and don't want to spend one-third of their time on marketing as most of the "experts" suggest.

Although I hate to say it and I know you don't want to hear it, you cannot run a successful business if you don't do any marketing at all. The good news is that you're probably already doing some without realising it: I call this "natural marketing" (see page 24).

The good news is that a lot of what you already do can be adjusted to build a successful half-hog career in which you use almost all your available work time for working and, when necessary, finding new clients.

As far as this book is concerned, "no marketing" means any or all of the following:

- No marketing plan
- No business plan
- No market research
- No competitor analysis
- No sales strategy
- No brand development
- No media plan
- No advertising
- No corporate identity
- No SEO

Of course, there are certain parts of marketing you can't and wouldn't want to avoid, such as customer service and deciding how much your work is worth (or, if you like icky buzzwords, "determining a pricing strategy"). But don't worry, we'll look at them a bit later and they don't take much time at all.

## What is marketing, anyway?

Marketing and advertising are often thought to be the same thing: they're not.

Advertising is a specific part of marketing: it's the bit where you tell the world what you do and make sure that people remember you. It involves writing catchy titles, using funky photos, sounding dramatic and selling the positive aspects of your product or service so that customers flock to your door. It's also something you pay for. Ads for products – whatever the products are, even if they're people – get placement because advertisers pay for it.

Marketing is a much bigger subject, including (but not limited to) market research, media planning, public relations, pricing, distribution, support, strategy and, of course, advertising.

One of the main differences between exposure from advertising and exposure from marketing is that, while ad placement is paid for directly, marketing placement – such as getting a mention in the newspaper or hearing a guy in a pub tout the excellence of a product – costs no money.

## Getting your priorities right

Here's a true statement that will make the marketing gurus cringe: if you're not trying to build a freelance income to replace full-time work and maintain your current lifestyle, you don't need to spend lots of time on marketing.

Think about it: your needs are different. Let's look at the priorities for a whole-hog (full-time) and a half-hog (part-time) writer:

A whole-hogger wants to build their business and therefore:

- Needs to attract customers – the more, the better
- Needs a recognisable brand to improve trust
- Needs to understand the competition for better niche domination
- Needs a constant flow of work
- Needs to have more work than it's possible to complete immediately, to grow the business in the long term
- Needs everything as quickly as possible to make the business viable

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A half-hogger wants more control over the work schedule and therefore:

- Needs control over the number of clients
- Needs control over the amount of work
- Needs longer-term clients who understand the work situation
- Needs to be able to increase or decrease workload at short notice
- Needs to maintain flexibility in the work schedule

The point here is that you're not trying to build an international mega-corporation. You're trying to fit freelance work around other responsibilities and earn a decent income from your efforts.

As a half-hogger, it's much more important to keep control over how much work comes in so that you still have time to do it – removing marketing from the equation means you choose when to add a new client, rather than have them come to you asking for a commitment you can't meet.

It's also important to maintain deadline flexibility: if a client starts to load you up with urgent demands that have to be met in short order, your work will overflow into the rest of your life. In the short term, this may not be a problem – and could represent a nice chunk of extra cash – but in the long term it's not what you want to experience again and again.

### Do half-hoggers earn less?

The short answer to this question is “almost certainly, but not per hour”.

Without marketing, you are very likely to have fewer clients and less work: this is a simple fact of life in a free-market economy. But that doesn't mean your pay rate must be lower than a full-time freelancer who spends lots of time promoting their business.

It's a common falsehood that part-time freelancers should be cheaper to hire. If you believe that, it's absolutely *critical* that you stop and reconsider. Otherwise, you'll trap yourself in low-income jobs that don't reward your skills.

Repeat after me: you deserve to be paid the same as full-time freelancers of similar talent for similar work.

The lower-pay misconception often stems from a lack of confidence on the part of the half-hog freelancer (or snobby full-timers who look down on them) but

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stop and think about it for a moment: you'll quickly see that there's no reason for you to be cheaper.

You're doing the same job with the same output quality. You're also doing it on the same deadline. As far as the client is concerned, they're getting almost exactly the same service as they would with a company or a whole-hog freelancer.

Your initial contact with the client, including a possible interview, is online. There's no way for them to know you're a part-timer unless you say so. All they're likely to see of you is your portfolio and any email (or similar) communications. Provided you have high-quality content to show and conduct yourself professionally, they're getting almost exactly the same service as they would with a recognised, well-established, full-time writer.

So here's a new mantra for you:

**Just because you  
don't market yourself  
doesn't mean you have to  
charge less**

There is a downside to the low-marketing model: since you won't be promoting yourself as much as the whole-hog freelancer, fewer people will be aware of who you are and what you do.

Consequently, you'll have to put in more effort searching for work and sending applications to clients than someone who spends a lot of time promoting their services and thus has more chance of being sent proposals or invited to bid on contracts. Personally, I think this is a fair trade.

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### Common misconceptions

While we're talking about false beliefs, there are a few others I'd like to clear up:

- "You need to be an expert to earn good pay"

No, you don't. If you want to write for *Scientific American* it'll certainly help if you have a degree in your subject, just as being an experienced fisherman is a bonus if you're targeting *Angling Times*. On the other hand, for the vast majority of online work, all you need is a brain, Google (or a nearby library) and some time for research.

Don't get me wrong: experts can certainly earn a lot more than amateurs in their field, especially if they're recognised authorities. But the Internet makes it easy to claim expertise where there is none. How many of those online gurus who say they're experts are recognised as such by other people who actually know better? Hint: not many.

- "Everyone has to pay their dues"

No, they don't. A lot of new or part-time freelancers lack the confidence to go after the \$100-per-article work but that doesn't mean they can't get it. There's nothing forcing you to take crappy \$1 jobs if you don't want to.

Conversely, slave labour jobs can be quick to complete and may provide positive feedback to build your reputation, especially if you're just starting out or are using a bidding site to find work. When it comes down to it, the choice is yours.

- "You're doing it wrong"

No, you're not. There is no "right" way to run a business, beyond a few simple concepts such as honesty, integrity, producing quality work and meeting deadlines.

There's no magic formula to being a successful freelancer and anyone who says different is trying to sell you a course. There are *better* ways and it's worth listening to solid advice from people who've found success by following a particular formula but in the end, what worked for them may not work for you.

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- “You have to take risks to succeed”

No, you don't. While it's true that bigger risks often mean bigger rewards, you're not playing *World of Warcraft*: there is no “game balance” in real life. The riskiest task doesn't always result in epic loot. You're producing content on demand: a client is just as likely to pay for yet another regurgitation of “20 Ways to Get Extra Traffic” as they are for a world-shaking, belief-changing article.

If it suits you, go ahead and take greater risks for greater rewards. If not, stick with what you know and do it well. As long as you're satisfied with the results, it's all good.

- “Taking low-paying jobs ruins the market for everyone”

No, it doesn't. If you aim at the lower end of the job market, you'll hear this frequently – usually from snobby freelancers who've been working for a long time and who don't want to accept that, despite their desire to continue earning thousands for simple work, the Internet has changed the industry.

We're now in a truly global marketplace in which a talented writer living in Turkmenistan can access the same work as someone living in Tokyo, regardless of their relative costs of living.

It doesn't make any significant difference to the market whether you take high-paying or low-paying jobs. For starters, a bunch of cheap-ass freelance jobs isn't suddenly going to encourage every employer in the world to drop their prices. On top of that, some employers are going to set their rates ridiculously low regardless of whether anyone accepts the work. Good clients know that writing is a GIGO profession: if they put garbage wages in, they'll get garbage content out.

The important thing is to find work *at your skill level* that pays *sufficiently well* for you.

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### **The bare necessities**

Baloo may have been a bear<sup>3</sup> but he knew what he was talking about (apart from the bit about eating ants): as a half-hog freelancer you'll only be doing the absolute minimum marketing you can't avoid, so you need to concentrate on the bare necessities.

### **Get the basics right and you'll do less marketing**

These basics include telling potential clients who you are, showing them your work and giving them an indication of how much you're going to cost. This is the absolute minimum of marketing. It's essential: without it, you simply don't exist in the eyes of potential clients. As a bonus, most of it's very simple, doesn't need frequent updating and can be re-used in multiple venues.

The time spent on these activities is critical for finding work, especially if you're a new freelancer. Do this properly and you won't need to touch it again for quite some time.

### **Your principles**

I've never read a business book that bluntly suggests you should decide your guiding principles before starting work. That says more to me about modern business than anything else.

So I'm going to suggest it now. Write down your guiding principles. They don't have to be complex. For example:

- I will be honest
- I will be clear about what I can and can't do
- I will meet deadlines or warn the client as early as possible if I cannot
- I will do the job to the best of my ability
- I will suggest an alternative freelancer if I cannot do the job

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<sup>3</sup> If you've never experienced Disney's *Jungle Book*, you really should. It has some of the best songs they've ever used, in my opinion.

## Your profile

Almost all the online job markets require a profile. If you're applying direct to clients, they're likely to want to know a bit about you, too. And your web site or blog needs an "About" page.

No matter how eager you are to dive in and get working, it's important to take the time to do this properly: your profile is the first thing employers will see and, given that they're guaranteed to have a lot of applicants, they're only going to scan it quickly unless you draw them in right away.

Most profiles contain a standard minimum set of information, plus whatever extras individual sites offer, so if you put together an outline with all the important details, you can reuse it.

First, you need a photo. Employers honestly prefer seeing a face, rather than a logo or a photo of your dog: it reassures them that they're employing a real person. This is especially true on the bidding sites where cheap, faceless SEO companies apply for every possible opportunity. A simple head shot with a clear background is best, much like a passport photo. Remember to smile (but don't give them a Jack Nicholson, *Shining*-style grin).

Next, you need a tag line. Most sites display names with a single line of text that summarises what the person does. Something simple, such as "Professional copywriting and editing services" or "Quality you can trust" will do, unless you can come up with better. Don't try to be too clever: throwing in half a dozen buzzwords can make you look tacky.

You'll also need a summary of who you are and what you do, to go in the main text of your profile. Avoid mentioning your age or anything else that will need frequent updates. Describe what your specialties are, any relevant experience and your preferred type of client (business, blogging, magazines, technical and so on). You can include roughly how long you've been writing, if you want to.

Avoid including "trinkets" such as winning school prizes or having your poem chosen for the local Sewing Circle's monthly newsletter: although you may be rightly proud of such achievements, employers don't care. To make matters worse, you'll bring their attention to the fact that you haven't received any major acknowledgement for your work, something clients may not have thought about had you not listed the minor stuff.

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You should also avoid too much personal info. My profile used to include a whole load of useless junk until I trimmed it back to state simply where my experience lay, what I'd done before and a variety of example subjects I'm comfortable writing about. Again, employers don't care about your personal life: they care about what you can do.

On the other hand, site-specific awards *are* worth mentioning. Ranking in the top 5% of authors or rating very highly on the site's tests effectively adds to your reputation. The same goes for being a regular contributor to a well-known publication (or web site).

**Show your ideal client why  
you are a better choice  
without alienating other employers  
who can keep your  
work queue full**

If you've never put together a profile, drop in on a couple of the bidding sites and browse through some of their top earners. You'll quickly notice that some people sound like a marketing seminar while others – who are just as successful – are very down-to-earth. Don't fall into the buzzword trap: pitch your profile how you want to be seen.

Note: many sites have a résumé or CV option in addition to a profile. If you want to add one, feel free – but notice the phrasing in that first sentence: “in addition to a profile”. Do not use the CV option instead of filling out your profile: employers won't hunt through a CV unless they need something very specific. Put important information in your profile, where they'll see it immediately.

### Your portfolio

A portfolio is essential for any freelancer: employers want to see samples of your work, especially if you're a specialist in certain areas. Most online job sites allow you to upload a selection of documents but you should also have a portfolio ready if you're applying direct to clients.

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Gather up some of your best work, bearing the following in mind:

- Don't give them URLs – make it easy for them to see what you do by including the actual documents. If it's a web page design, give them the URL and a screenshot.
- Stick to standard formats – plain text, Word documents, PDFs, JPGs – again, to make it as easy as possible for potential clients to see your work.
- Include a variety of subjects and styles to show your range.
- Do not include anything unpublished, ghostwritten under someone else's copyright (unless you have their permission) or confidential.

Virtually all computers can handle compressed archives, so it's often easier to put together a zip file of the whole portfolio. However, be prepared to send the documents in their raw state to clients who want things quick and easy.

### Your rate of pay

This one's a biggie. Bear with me here.

Every time the discussion about freelance pay rates looks like it's going to die down, someone comes along and asks the question again – and the debate continues. Should you charge \$2 an hour, \$20 or \$200? Should you charge less as a newcomer? Is web content worth less than magazine content? How much is experience worth? How can you measure talent?

Thankfully, as a half-hogger, you can cut through the crap and concentrate on a simpler question: how do you set your basic rate?

There are two main schools of thought:

- charge what you need to run a full-time business or
- charge what you think your work is worth.

Some writers, particularly those in developing countries or new to the market, will work for as little as \$1 an hour, while experienced specialists in the US may want \$250 an hour (or even more).

Let's ignore several million words of debate and be blunt: freelancing pay varies wildly. When it comes down to it, you can set your rate as high or as low as you want: *there is no yardstick to measure by.*

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# Decide the value of your work and state it clearly

If you have absolutely no idea how much to charge, a good way to start is to use an online tool like the one on Freelance Switch<sup>4</sup> (it's very cool, seriously). It's designed for people who want to work full-time but it can still give you a starting point for your ideal rate, as well as remind you of all the things you'll need to consider if you decide to scale up your half-hog career in the future.

Alternatively, if you have no idea how much you want (or need) to earn, you can start with a general figure and work from there. What if I were to say "\$20 an hour"? Does that sound about right or is your gut reaction that it's too high or too low? The method's vague, but it'll give you an idea of what you think your work is worth.

If you're *really* lost, consider the following facts, all of which – since there's no yardstick to measure by – are just extra info to help you decide:

- The average high-quality article of 500 words takes about an hour to produce, including research.
- Some writers in countries with low living costs consider \$1 per article good pay.
- Professional journalists in the UK expect around \$750 for a leader article of 1,000 words in a national newspaper and three times that for a feature piece<sup>5</sup>.
- Web writing (for online use rather than in print) generally earns a lot less, though professional prices from \$25 to \$50 or more for a standard 500-word article are considered normal.

You should also bear in mind that, unless you're a well-established professional with a great deal of experience, regular work and a large amount of feedback (or a long list of testimonials), your fees will be negotiable. Even if you set a fixed rate, many clients want to barter.

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<sup>4</sup> [freelanceswitch.com/rates](http://freelanceswitch.com/rates)

<sup>5</sup> This is by no means a standard rate for every publication: it's an example from the NUJ (National Union of Journalists) rates page at [media.gn.apc.org/rates](http://media.gn.apc.org/rates).

## Quoting to customers

Once you've decided your basic rate, you'll need to figure out how much you can produce in an hour, so that you can quote to clients. If you're charging \$25 an hour and it takes you three hours to research and write a 500-word article, you're going to quote \$75 for the work.

An average writer can put together a high-quality 500-word article in an hour, assuming they're reasonably familiar with the subject and don't need to do too much research (or it's simple and quick). That number of words per hour can easily halve for a technical subject with involved research or double/triple if it's your particular specialty and/or you're a fast typist.

Proofreaders and editors generally work a lot quicker, since they're reading and adjusting, rather than creating the work. Averages run at about 3,000 words (10-12 book pages) an hour for basic proofing. That number changes dramatically for editing, depending on the edit depth and the quality of the original work. The word count can easily drop to 1,000 per hour (or even half that) for a complex substantive edit with all the fact-checking and accompanying research.

Now that you've worked out a base rate and a per-article or per-word rate, there's a question sitting at the back of your head, desperate to be answered: "Am I good enough to charge that much?"

You're the only person who can answer that: if you have the *cojones* to set your rates high, go after high-paying jobs and produce the high-quality content the client demands, then you're certainly good enough. But if your clients never come back or you never land the jobs, you need to find out why. Is it pricing, presentation, lack of experience or something else entirely?

Finally, you need to consider economies of scale. This is the reduction in unit cost a business experiences as it expands, e.g. from large manufacturing runs of the same item. In the writing world, these economies refer more to a reduction in unit price when you take on a bigger project – i.e. bigger jobs cost relatively less per item than smaller jobs.

Do these economies exist in writing? In many ways, yes: if you write 50 articles on 50 different subjects, you're not going to save any time on the research but if they're all on a similar theme you can re-use anything you learn. The latter job should be quicker and therefore can be cheaper.

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You also need to consider the fact that someone's paying you for 50 articles, which means you won't need to find new projects for a while and can use your job-hunting time for paid work. That should be worth a small discount. The same goes for ongoing work from regular clients: slightly lower prices can encourage them to stay and keep you in-tray full.

However, don't get caught out. Just because a client offers ongoing work doesn't mean they should automatically get a big price reduction. You've worked out your base rate for a reason: make sure you're still earning enough for your time, no matter how big or long-term the job is.

### **Your web site or blog**

Yes, you need one. An online presence is absolutely essential to the modern freelancer. Not only does it provide ways to contact you, it can also be a showcase for your work.

The marketing uses of a blog or web site are only limited by your imagination. Thankfully, your online presence is a part of the natural marketing you're probably already doing.

### **The "natural marketing" alternative**

Every time you send an email, you're marketing. Every time you write a blog entry, you're marketing. Every time you apply for a job, you're marketing. Every time you post something on a social network, you're marketing. Although you may not be aware of it, you're already doing a lot of valuable self-promotion just by interacting online: this is what I call "natural marketing".

In my opinion, natural marketing is completely separate from the rubbish advertising the gurus want you to believe is essential for success – and it brings in a lot more business than spamming a bunch of people with crap they don't want.

It's also less forced or stilted than typical ad copy because it's normal human communication (or as normal as it gets online), it doesn't take up any extra time and you can be completely honest without shooting yourself in the foot.

**Natural marketing is effective  
and requires very little  
extra effort**

Let's look at some of the main ways you can adjust your current activities to promote yourself without extra work:

**Email**

How many emails do you send every day? Statistics from the Radicati Group<sup>6</sup> estimate that around 294 billion emails were sent *every day* in 2010. Given that about 90% of that was spam and there were about 1.9 billion email users worldwide, that made an average of about 15 real emails per day, per person.

Assume you're a half-hog freelancer who only sends a third of the average number. If you work 5 days a week and take 4 weeks' holiday a year, you'll still send over 1,200 emails per annum.

That's more than 1,200 opportunities to pass on your site or blog URL in your email signature.

Most email programs support signatures, which are automatically attached before the email is sent. It doesn't have to be anything fancy. Just three simple lines – "John Doe, Freelance writing services, <http://www.johndoewriting.com>" – ensures that everyone you contact knows where to find you.

While we're talking about email, remember to keep the layout simple. Yes, I'm sure you have lots of pretty fonts, background graphics and 16 million text colours to choose from but your clients just want plain, black-and-white communication. Many email programs will prohibit or block graphics, so stick to basics.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91366853>

## Going The Half Hog

### Blogs and web sites

As I mentioned earlier, the modern freelancer needs an online presence. It doesn't matter too much if you base it around a static site, a blog, your LinkedIn profile or even Facebook<sup>7</sup> – you just need to make sure you have a “home base” where potential clients and other freelancers can find you.

With that in mind, a regularly updated blog is excellent natural marketing. It's one of the easiest and best ways to show your work, reveal your personality and network with clients and other writers – all with relatively little effort.

The potential gains from a professional or personal blog make it well worth finding the time to post something once a week – or more if you enjoy the medium. However, if you don't have a great deal of time or anything much to say to the general public, you can opt for a static web site instead. Either way, you need to make sure your online presence is up to date, even if you only check it every month or so.

**Your online presence makes  
you visible to anyone who  
uses the Internet, including millions  
of potential clients**

Blogging is a huge subject that merits an entire book. I'm not going to go into all the ins and outs of successful blogging – there are some excellent texts already available on the subject. Unfortunately, most of them are about blogging for profit or as a business, not as a support system for a freelance career, so they are more interested in things like driving traffic, writing with SEO<sup>8</sup> in mind and other activities that involve a lot of additional work.

As a half-hogger, the purpose of maintaining a blog (or site) is to have a “home base”. Although you could easily spend hours tweaking every tiny aspect of your blog, there are a few basic essentials you need to include:

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<sup>7</sup> [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) and [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), respectively.

<sup>8</sup> SEO stands for Search Engine Optimisation – see page 54 for more information.

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- Contact details

There's no point having an online presence if clients can't contact you! These days, putting your email address in clear text is an open invitation to spamming but there are still ways to do it. You can use a graphical version of the address (though some web spiders are clever enough to figure that out), you can spell out the punctuation or you can add a contact page on your blog/site and let people leave a message there.

- Portfolio

You've already put together a portfolio of your work: include it on your site to show visitors what you do. Writers who are regular bloggers can also turn their most popular and useful posts into ebooks, adding them to their portfolio and offering them as freebie downloads to encourage more visitors. (If you don't know how to make ebooks, there's a simple guide on my blog's Free Stuff<sup>9</sup> page.)

- Testimonials

Employing a freelancer is a difficult decision for many people: there are far too many stories of untrustworthy service providers making off with advance payments or supposedly reliable individuals producing utter rubbish for high prices.

Testimonials from happy clients are a great way to show that you can be trusted. It's always worth asking your clients for a testimonial or, if you're working primarily through job sites, you can paste copies of your feedback. The best references are those which can be traced: include the employer's business name and/or site.

- Profile

You can re-use the profile you put together earlier or you can write a longer, extended bio. Just the same as any job site, your own site needs to show potential clients who you are and what you're good at. You don't have to include your pay rates unless you want to: some

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<sup>9</sup> [scrawlbug.com/free-stuff](http://scrawlbug.com/free-stuff)

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people believe it's best to be completely up-front about it while others with a more general blog prefer to keep their work details private.

- Spelling and grammar

Your site or blog is your public persona. Make sure – especially if you're a writer – that your profile and contact info are grammatically sound and have no spelling errors. No one can reasonably expect you to always post 100% perfect content, especially if you're a regular blogger, but all your static content must be absolutely correct – you're shooting yourself in the foot if they're not.

Blogs are better than static web sites in many ways, especially in their ability to build a community of followers with whom you can interact. It's very important to respond to comments on your blog – visitors who take the time to interact and get nothing in return are unlikely to ever come back.

### Networking

Networking covers all those activities through which freelancers meet clients, peers, colleagues and each other, as well as other useful contacts.

Thankfully, networking doesn't have to mean wearing a snappy suit and a name badge, painting an insincere smile on your face and slipping your business card to everyone in a seminar: it can be a lot more human, friendly, fun and natural.

As soon as you post your profile on your blog or a job site, you're networking. You're making yourself visible to the general public and inviting them to contact you for "mutually beneficial opportunities" (that's manager-speak for "work").

However, since you already have a profile prepared you can post it on some other sites that aren't specifically intended for jobs and employment, purely for the additional interest your pretty photo could generate.

LinkedIn<sup>10</sup> is the essential site in this category: its original purpose was to facilitate networking with people, though it has since expanded into one of the biggest job-hunting tools available. With over 35 million users, you'd be daft not

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<sup>10</sup> [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

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to use it. In similar fashion, [ecademy](#)<sup>11</sup> offers the networking part of the equation, without the job listings.

There are also a lot of communities on the web where you can converse with other writers. Many of these are aimed specifically at authors (as in writers of books) rather than content producers – such as [Scribophile](#) or [Athonomy](#)<sup>12</sup> – but there are also some populated by freelancers.

Be careful, though: unlike the novelist communities, professional freelance networking sites are often flooded with spam, scam, marketing talk and snobby “experts” who get sadistic pleasure from ruining a half-hogger’s day.

In general, the same approach as for your email can be used on any networking site where you have a profile. Always include your blog or web site URL and the fact that you’re a freelance writer: you never know who’s going to see it.

Don’t limit yourself to online networking, either. A simple mention that you’re a freelance writer can bring in extra work from almost anywhere – from another parent when you’re picking up the kids, from the cashier at the supermarket, from the guy who delivers your pizza... being friendly is a great way to network and get the word out that you write for a living. You never know who might need a leaflet, newsletter or prospectus created.

### Forums

Nobody knows how many active forums there are on the Internet: given that the format has been around for a lot longer than any of the social sites, blogs, directories and even search engines (and for that matter pre-dates the web itself in its previous incarnation as the BBS), a safe estimate is that there are “more than anyone would imagine”.

It doesn’t matter whether you’re an active writing forum member or you post occasionally on one about gardening, collecting stamps or bungee jumping: wherever you post, make sure your profile and signature have those three precious self-promotion lines in them.

One word of warning: check the forum’s Terms of Service. They might not allow URLs in your signature!

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<sup>11</sup> [ecademy.com](#)

<sup>12</sup> [www.scribophile.com](#) and [www.athonomy.com](#), respectively.

**Whatever** you do online  
make sure you include your  
**three lines** of self-promotion

### Social media

The youngest child of the Internet, social media is a collection of sites that were primarily designed to help users keep in touch with old friends, make new friends, share news, gossip and, well, be sociable. They have since been invaded by marketers, advertisers, spammers, virus distributors, big-name companies and other such lovely people.

However, they're still a very good way to promote yourself without making too much effort. Once again, you can use the profile you prepared for the job sites (it's all very *Blue Peter*<sup>13</sup>, isn't it?), making sure to point people to your blog or web site.

However you approach your social media marketing (or lack of it), there are some basic tips below to help you get it right and not look like a complete arse:

- Post something. No one will follow you if all your entries are links to other people's content or replies. Followers follow people who have something to say.
- Fill in your profile. No one will follow you if they don't know who you are or what you do.
- Get a proper name. Social media identities like Kitty82754 are used by spammers and everyone will assume you intend to flood them with crap or porn links.
- Post a real profile picture or your company logo. Anything else looks like you're a marketer.
- Quality is more important than quantity. Having 10,000 followers does not make you interesting – it makes you a marketer. You're much

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<sup>13</sup> For the uninitiated, *Blue Peter* is a British children's television program that has been running since 1958. One of their regular spots is "makes" – creating craft items – and, since it takes time for glue or paint to dry, they always have a perfectly crafted example ready for the next step of the process. The catchphrase "Here's one I made earlier" is known throughout the UK.

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better off with an interested network of like-minded people who know you well and can push work your way if they see it (and vice versa).

- Don't post automated junk like what you're listening to, your horoscope, quotes and so on unless you have something to say about them or that's the main focus of your freelance work. Nobody cares.
- Don't auto-update every time you post an article, get a new follower, land a contract or anything else. Take the time to write an individual post if you want to point people to something you created and don't do it too often.
- Don't advertise. As a half-hogger you want to create a little community – you need *good* followers. Is it really worth losing people because you can earn an extra dollar every month by spamming them with stuff they don't want to read?

Of the social sites, I've found Twitter<sup>14</sup> to be the most effective for generating community and contacts. It takes a while to start getting followers but the maximum tweet length of 140 characters makes it quick and easy to use. Assuming you tweet interesting things occasionally, you'll soon have a growing group interested in what you're doing. Incidentally, keep your tweets short: using third-party sites to bypass the normal limit doesn't add anything – in fact, it takes away from your impact because you end up with half-finished babble showing up in your feed.

As time goes on, Twitter followers can develop into very useful contacts. I've picked up work from followers and passed jobs I didn't want to others. You're not only building a community of freelancing friends, you're helping yourself look more professional if a client needs someone for a job and you have high-quality contacts on tap.

You'll also want an account on Facebook<sup>15</sup>, since it seems to have eradicated the competition it had from MySpace<sup>16</sup> and is still growing. It's a little harder to find groups of people who'll be helpful on there and you have to be careful of rabid marketing spammers. You may also want to consider Google+<sup>17</sup>, the search engine people's version of Facebook.

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<sup>14</sup> [twitter.com](http://twitter.com)

<sup>15</sup> [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

<sup>16</sup> [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

<sup>17</sup> [plus.google.com](http://plus.google.com)

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### **Bookmarking**

Social bookmarking sites such as Digg, Reddit, StumbleUpon and Delicious<sup>18</sup> have gone the same way as social media sites. They're regularly abused by groups or companies who work together to market their wares, pumping promotion into their latest gimmick so that it appears high on the list of popular items. However, it's a lot harder to manhandle a bookmarking site than it is many other social media, so the most popular items can be anything that the site's users find interesting, including your articles.

As a half-hog freelancer, you won't have a lot of use for bookmarking unless you write on revenue share sites, content directories or your own blog. If you do any of those things, just remember to add every article you create to your list of bookmarks.

If you've written something exceptional, you can also ask your followers if they'll bookmark it for you as well – short-term, this can produce a massive influx of traffic, though you don't want to ask too often or your friends are likely to get a bit miffed.

### **Word of mouth**

Universally recognised as the most powerful marketing tool in the world, word of mouth (and its online equivalent, viral marketing) is the Holy Grail that companies are desperate to harness. There is quite simply no better advert than a satisfied customer who voluntarily recommends your services to their friends, family and colleagues.

Much to my personal amusement, it's easier for a half-hog freelancer to generate a positive reputation and extra work by word of mouth than it is for all those mega-corporations with their million-dollar marketing budgets.

It's very simple: right from the start, no one trusts a big company. But you're an individual, so clients will generally give you the benefit of the doubt. Provided you always complete projects to the best of your ability and start to pile up positive reviews, feedback and testimonials, you'll quickly find clients are quite happy to send more valuable work your way if you want it.

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<sup>18</sup> [digg.com](http://digg.com), [www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com), [www.stumbleupon.com](http://www.stumbleupon.com) and [www.delicious.com](http://www.delicious.com), respectively.

Word of mouth also works in the real world. The more store owners, business people and other potential clients you are friendly with, the more chance you have of landing extra work. If everyone knows their smiling customer is a writer, why would they look elsewhere when they need something written?

### **Business cards**

Speaking of the real world, it's worth getting some basic business cards printed and carrying them. You never know when someone might ask what you do for a living and being able to hand them a card with your contact details could be the start of a beautiful business relationship.

## Part 2: Getting Started as a Freelance Writer

The Internet is both bane and boon for freelance writers. On the positive side, it's given us a global marketplace of phenomenal size, filled with employers of every sort asking for content on every subject imaginable (and several that should've been left unimagined). On the other hand, it's opened the writing profession to enormous amounts of competition from every country and every level of ability.

If you're already working as a freelance writer, much of this section will be old news to you. I won't suggest you skip it all, as there might well be little tidbits of information you've never come across before, but you can certainly skim through a lot quicker than a complete newbie.

In this section, I'll look at the bare basics, from questions to ask before you start, through the tools you'll need, types of writing, some terminology and other info that will ensure you don't feel lost in the online freelancing world.

If you're just starting your career or are researching before setting up, here's an extremely important fact for you:

**Freelancing is not  
a get-rich-quick scheme**

Just like any other business, you have to go into this prepared. That's what this part of the book is for: all the basic information you need to understand the online freelance writing market and figure out how you want your half-hog career to work.

### Asking the right questions

It doesn't matter whether you're a half-hogger doing a few hours here and there or the next Richard Branson working 60 hours a week to build a multi-national mega-corporation – freelancing is like any other business: you still need to plan ahead and ask yourself some important questions.

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This book isn't the right place to go into the details of business planning, strategy, market research, branding and a whole bunch of other stuff like that: there are already plenty of excellent texts on how to run a small business. However, before you start a freelance career, you should consider what you're getting into.

Budding half-hog writers need to start by asking themselves a lot of questions, the majority of which revolve around work, clients and payments. Here's a sample list of things you should consider – a list which is by no means exhaustive:

- How much will you charge?
- Where will you find clients?
- How will you decide if a client suits you?
- What qualifications or qualities do you have or need?
- How many hours can you dedicate per week or month?
- Will you offer other services, such as editing or transcription?
- How will you agree deadlines that fit your schedule?
- How will you manage the work queue?
- How long is your standard article?
- How will you maintain quality?
- How do you decide if a client deserves a rewrite when they complain?
- What do you do if a client's not happy?
- What payment system(s) will you use?

Remember: the more questions you ask yourself, the more you'll know. Better questions give better answers, too: instead of asking "Are jobs listed online?" you can ask "Where can I find freelance writing jobs online?" That's more specific, it has a purpose and the answer's longer than "yes" or "no".

### **The harsh reality of freelancing**

It sounds great, doesn't it? You can write whenever you like, wherever you like and earn loads of cash. The reality of freelancing is very different: yes, it has its advantages (a lot of them – and they're really nice<sup>19</sup>) but it also has its drawbacks.

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the advantages of freelancing, see the blog entry "*10 Best Things About Freelancing*" (scrawlbug.com, 4 June 2009).

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To open your eyes a little, here are some of the harsh realities of freelance writing that you need to embrace before you set foot on the path:

- You are only one drop in the vast ocean of unknown writers, although a lot of the competition really sucks.
- Believing you are talented does not make you so.
- You are extremely unlikely to be able to pay your rent with your half-hog income – at least not for a long time (unless you live in a tent).
- Hardly anyone gets to be a ProBlogger<sup>20</sup> or earn \$150 an hour, especially if they're a half-hogger.
- Being popular on your blog or the social networks does not mean you are famous in the real world.
- Just because you listen to someone inspiring giving a talk on releasing your creativity doesn't mean that you will suddenly be wildly creative – even if you listen really hard.
- It doesn't matter how many great posts about writing you read: unless you write consistently, you won't succeed.
- Writing for bylines will not pay the bills, though the reputation gained may help you get more paying work.

## Freelance writing toolkit

Let's start by looking at a few of the essential things every freelancer needs to get started in the business:

- An Internet connection

Obvious, really. Even offline freelancers should get connected: you're missing so many opportunities if you don't trawl the web on occasion.

- An email address

The bare minimum means of online contact. It's worth setting up a new, separate email address for your work to keep it separate from your private life. Free, reliable email addresses are available from a variety of providers, such as Google and Yahoo. If email is your primary form of communication, you *must* pick it up regularly – at least every hour. Make sure you choose a good name, too: "john4326" sounds amateur.

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<sup>20</sup> Darren Rowse, who maintains [www.problogger.net](http://www.problogger.net) and is an excellent source of tips and ideas for budding bloggers.

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- A bank account

Everybody needs a bank account but a freelancer needs it for more reasons. You need somewhere to put your pay and you'll need it for verification purposes for the next item.

- An online payment system

The vast majority of sites and clients pay through PayPal<sup>21</sup>. It's easy, it's immediate, it's traceable, it has payment protection and you can even do your invoicing through it.

You'll need to verify your account, using a bank account and a debit/credit card, to lift any restrictions PayPal imposes at the start. Bear in mind that, in Europe at least, you'll also need to verify your identity once you reach a certain amount of income – a legal precaution against money-laundering practices.

You could also open accounts with other services, such as Moneybookers and AlertPay<sup>22</sup>, though they're less frequently used in the US and Europe.

- A word processor

The standard document format is Microsoft's Word ".doc" or ".docx". It's simply not worth working in any other format (with the exception of Adobe's PDF and occasionally raw text). If you don't want to pay for Microsoft's software, the free OpenOffice<sup>23</sup> suite produces documents in the same format.

- Good language skills

As much as I would love to say that spelling, punctuation and grammar are absolutely essential skills for a writer, they're not. No, really; they're not. The important thing in most writing – unless your client says otherwise – is *to be understood*. That doesn't necessarily mean knowing the plural of "nemeses" or "prospectus" without looking it up, where to use a semicolon or how to spell antisestablishmentarianism without copying/pasting.

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<sup>21</sup> [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com)

<sup>22</sup> [www.moneybookers.com](http://www.moneybookers.com) and [www.alertpay.com](http://www.alertpay.com), respectively.

<sup>23</sup> [www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org)

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I'm not saying that spelling, grammar and punctuation are unimportant: they just don't have to be perfect for the majority of online media. It's a thousand times easier to understand a general interest article that's written in "proper" English (or whatever language you're writing in) than it is to understand dewdspeak, txtspk or gibberish. As long as you write well enough to be understood, that's all you need – especially if you have an editor to catch the mistakes.

Traditionally incorrect grammar such as starting a sentence with "But" is perfectly acceptable in most online work, unless it's very official or literary. If a piece reads easily, it's all good. This is especially true with regular clients, who often return because they appreciate a writer with personality giving their business a distinct voice.

In addition to the essentials, there are many secondary tools that can be very useful in freelance work, especially if you want to offer extra services to your clients:

- Qualifications and/or expertise

I discussed this back in *Common Misconceptions* on page 16: being qualified or a recognised expert can do wonders for your pay rates and open a lot of doors but it's not a necessity.

- A PDF reader/writer/converter

Some clients want work done in PDF format. By default, these documents are read-only, unless you happen to own a copy of Adobe Acrobat<sup>24</sup>. There are many free utilities available online which will convert a PDF to text or a text document to PDF.

- A file compression utility

If a client wants a huge document containing many images sent by email, there's a chance your connection won't hold up, your email provider will reject it as too large or their inbox won't be big enough. If you're sending a batch of documents, a single compressed file can be easier to manage than

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<sup>24</sup> from [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

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a whole load of attachments. A Zip or Rar utility can make things easier and smaller. Just make sure your client can decompress it at their end.<sup>25</sup>

- A graphics editor

Graphic design and graphics work isn't really a job for a freelance writer. Owning a small, effective graphics app can still be useful for trimming screenshots, writing notes on images, resizing pictures and other basic operations. Then again, if you've got a flair for the graphical, flaunt it as an extra service!

- Copyscape

The online copy detector Copyscape<sup>26</sup> checks an article's content against every other piece of written content it can find (and that's a lot). If a match of closer than around 85% is found, it'll accuse you... sorry, *warn* you that your work is almost a copy of someone else's. Employers use it to check that articles are unique and you can use it, too. Note that the basic service compares a web page with other existing content: to check documents before publishing you'll have to pay for premium access.

Copyscape also provides paid services that automatically track all your content (by site, etc.) – if you produce a lot of work for your own sites or are concerned about plagiarism, it may be worth looking at this automated option.

- A dictionary and style guide

You'd think these would be in the 'essential' list, wouldn't you? With most word processing apps supplying their own spelling check, a dictionary is no longer necessary. However, you may want to have one on hand for specific checks or if you don't want to use an online version.

Style guides, such as the Chicago Manual of Style<sup>27</sup>, are guidelines used primarily by large publications or other business entities. Job descriptions usually state *very* clearly when they demand work that adheres to a

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<sup>25</sup> You can also send a single large file (up to 2Gb) for free at [www.yousendit.com](http://www.yousendit.com). The recipient doesn't need a massive email inbox to receive: they download the file via their Internet browser.

<sup>26</sup> [www.copyscape.com](http://www.copyscape.com)

<sup>27</sup> [www.chicagomanualofstyle.org](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org)

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particular style manual. If in doubt, ask – some smaller companies and publications have their own internal editorial or style guides that they'll make available to save time later on in the publishing process.

- Disaster recovery

A full disaster recovery plan is rarely needed by a half-hogger but it's good to have backup options. Free online file backup services such as Dropbox<sup>28</sup> are a boon for freelancers, especially because they run automatically and save everything you produce without a second thought (once they're set up properly).

You should also consider what you will do if there's a power outage, your computer breaks down, your documents get corrupted or something awful happens in your life. How will it affect your schedule? Have you allowed for it in your contracts? Do you have an alternative means of notifying your clients of delays and problems?

## Job titles

What's the difference between a writer and an author? What's a content producer? Is a blogger different?

In a way, all those terms mean much the same thing: someone who writes. However, in the freelancing world, they are generally treated differently:

- Writer

Someone who produces articles, blog posts, landing pages or any other kind of content for the client. The title of "writer" implies quality work.

- Author

Generally reserved for a writer who has published a book, either printed or electronically. Few unpublished writers refer to themselves as authors because it sounds snobby, although the person who writes an article is referred to by other people as its author. Confused? Here's a simple rule: don't refer to yourself as an author unless you've published a book (preferably under your own name).

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<sup>28</sup> [www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)

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- Blogger

A blogger is a specific type of writer. Unsurprisingly, their work is published on blogs. Blog entries (or “posts”) are generally shorter than articles but are usually published more regularly, more frequently and with inter-post continuity.

- Content producer

Many employers ask for “content producers” instead of writers or bloggers. It’s a sort of catch-all term that covers someone who writes content of any length, quality, style or form. Some clients even want a bit of graphic design thrown in for good measure. In snobby writer hierarchies, being called a content producer is like being called “common”.

- Wordsmith

This was one of those buzzwords that went around a little while ago. To be honest, saying you’re a “wordsmith” is even worse than calling yourself an author. It’s like a tea-boy saying they’re a “liquid resource technician”. Bigger the buzzwords: call it what it is and be proud of it.

- Creative writer

Creative writing is the act of producing fiction, poetry and other artistic or fictional works. However, some employers – especially those on the bidding sites – will sometimes ask for a “creative writer” when they mean “a writer with creative ideas”. Be careful what you’re signing up for.

- Editor or proofreader

Particularly vague job titles these days, editors and proofreaders are asked to do all sorts of work. See *Part 6: Editing and Proofreading* (page 103) for more information.

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### Customer service

A lot of newbie freelancers believe that they can write and never worry about customer service: they do their job and that's it.

Unfortunately for them, freelance writing is like any other business. Customer service is just as important if you're doing one-off jobs as it is for a multi-national household name.

The one exception to this is revenue share writing (see page 46). If you're building your half-hog income *entirely* on this model, you're the site's client and have no direct contact with the end-customer (the reader). Any other kind of work, especially direct sales, needs some understanding of how to give good service.

- Communicate quickly and patiently

All client communications should be handled "in a timely manner". This is more difficult for a half-hogger than for a full-time freelancer because our work hours are fewer and often more erratic.

It's extremely important to be reachable: nothing is worse for a client than being met with silence when they send queries by email. Check your inbox regularly and always respond as soon as you can, after careful thought. If you know you'll only be able to check email once or twice a day, make sure your clients know this and, if possible, give them another way to contact you quickly – SMS or the phone are, of course, excellent solutions. Use an online calendar to show your availability.

Patience is also important. Many employers do not really know what they want, nor do they understand the complexities involved in some of their requests. You must be prepared to explain what's needed *in their terms* so that they don't think you're screwing them on the work required.

- Be clear

Another part of communication – one which deserves separate treatment – is *clarity*. Remember that your clients don't always understand what they're asking you to do. They know what they want (or think they do) and express it in their terms but you need to ask questions to determine the exact parameters of the work.

## Spike Wyatt

There is little worse for a freelancer – especially a half-hogger – than vague objectives and imprecise job specifications. Everyone writes something that completely misses the point at least once in their career but you can reduce wasted time by understanding what the client *really* wants, not what they *say* they want.

Clear contracts and terms are also critical. Even if they're only agreed by email, it's essential that you have everything written down somewhere. This not only helps resolve payment issues but also lays down the exact nature of the job, what is expected by both parties and any ramifications of missed deadlines, extra work and unforeseen circumstances.

### **Excellent customer service is the best way to keep regular, long-term work coming in**

- Provide solutions

Excellent clients who know precisely what they want and define it accurately are a rare breed. Most have a problem that needs solving and they expect you, as the expert, to provide answers.

Your job is to offer solutions for your client's needs: it's as simple as that. To understand their needs, you must *listen* to their requirements, *consider* the situation and *suggest* answers. Then go back to the matter of clarity and make sure everything is defined to both your and your client's satisfaction.

- Organise

Some people are naturally organised; others need to work at it. Half-hog freelancers who are disorganised will have a terrible time trying to fit everything into their schedule, especially when they're starting out and still learning to estimate how long jobs will take to complete.

Even if you're awful at organising yourself, you can take some simple steps: write down deadlines (put them in your diary), take notes during meetings, query anything you're not sure you understand and don't take on too much work at the outset. It's much better to earn a little less and over-deliver

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exceptional work than it is to get yourself in trouble and damage your reputation even before you've gathered momentum.

- Best interests

Every freelance job is a careful balance of best interests: yours and your client's. There are times when you'll be able to offer an option that will earn you a little extra but isn't really in your client's best interest: don't do it. There are times when a little extra money can bring them far more valuable returns: definitely tell them.

One aspect of superb customer service is fearlessly recommending other freelancers. If you're not sure you can do the work or you don't have time in your half-hog schedule, recommend someone else. If you're sure you can do an average job but know someone who can do outrageously good work (even for more money), mention this to your client. It gives them options and shows them you're considering *their* best interest rather than your own.

When you start freelancing, you probably won't know anyone to recommend. With time and your presence on social networks and forums (even if you only visit occasionally), you'll soon meet other writers, editors and freelancers.

- Flexibility

This is a very difficult issue in any business. By being flexible in response to a client's urgent or unusual demands, you provide better service but can create more work or scheduling problems for yourself. A little flexibility goes a long way, especially if you make it clear to your clients (in a friendly way) that sudden changes or extra requirements are exceptions, not the rule.

- Professionalism

While friendliness is a positive quality, most employers also want a professional writer. As you saw when we looked at creating profiles (page 19), they don't care whether you're a househusband, have kids, work with the disabled or love collecting milk bottles. Unless it has a *direct effect* on the job, that's just fluff. What they want is a freelancer who will do what they say and say what they do.

Even worse is bringing emotion or personal issues to the job. The last thing a client wants is to pick up the phone and talk to a teary-eyed contractor who's upset because their pet hamster is sick.

- Smile

Friendliness is a great asset in freelancing. That's not to say you should treat customers as friends but a smile and a friendly attitude goes a long way in providing excellent service. In many ways, you're selling your services, so a cheerful, helpful freelancer who asks how the weekend went is far more inviting than a grumpy old bugger who treats clients as if it's a privilege to use the freelancer's services.

Don't greet your clients by saying "Yo!" Although that level of familiarity may come with time, it's not likely to endear you to clients on first contact.

Provide solutions. Create accurate specifications. Offer simple, clear contracts. Keep deadlines. Do quality work. Over-deliver. Be professional at all times.

## Part 3: Ways to Earn

As a half-hog writer, there are as many ways to earn as you can invent. However, for simplicity's sake, we'll break it all down into three basic, common categories:

1. Direct sales
2. Revenue share
3. Write for yourself

Since there are no "official", all-encompassing definitions of these, let's lay down how they'll be treated in this book.

### The three earning categories

#### Direct sales

Direct sales is any kind of work that is done for or sold to a client for a specific, one-off payment and where you're in direct contact with the customer. This includes most work from the bidding sites or applying to job listings, discovered by prospecting offline or acquired through your online presence (blog, web site, etc.).

One could argue that bidding site clients aren't direct work, since you're using a middleman (the site) who takes a cut of the proceeds, but I'll include them here, since you are still in direct contact with the end client.

#### Revenue share

Earning by "rev share" is achieved by writing content for an existing, preferably high-traffic site. The site management gathers revenue by displaying advertisements on every page, distributing content through various channels and by a multitude of other means. They then pay a percentage of this income to you, the content creator, in return for your efforts. In short, your work earns them money and they share some of the proceeds with you.

Some sites work on a direct revenue share, where they pay every author a given percentage of the income generated by the work submitted. For example, a 50% ad revenue share would give you half the earnings from any ads clicked by visitors while reading your content.

## Spike Wyatt

Some sites use a per-view model, wherein they determine the total revenue generated by the entire site and pay a given amount (either a percentage of their overall earnings or a fixed sum) for every 1,000 hits a page receives.

Other sites use their own particular brand of revenue share or a mix of several methods. Always check the terms and conditions of sites that interest you to find out exactly how your earnings will be calculated. It's remarkably easy for a revenue share site to sound like they're giving you a good deal when you're actually getting badly screwed.

Revenue share writing is a form of writing for yourself, but I've separated it from the next category since it's a large enough medium to warrant its own definition.

### **Writing for yourself**

Although any kind of freelancing is "writing for yourself" since you're self-employed, I define this category as any kind of writing work that *doesn't have a client* – either by direct contact or through a third party.

This includes revenue share work, monetising your own blogs and web sites, offering articles for sale in a marketplace and anything else without a specific end client.

I'll look at examples in *Part 5: Working for Yourself* (page 86) but, for now, that's the simplest definition.

### **Different types of writing**

When you're trawling for work you'll see requests for articles, evergreen articles, topical and news content, editorials, opinion pieces, press releases, technical writing, user manuals, marketing and advertising copy, landing pages, blog posts, autoresponder email chains, short stories, academic papers, family histories, memoirs, affiliate sales pages, how-to articles, poetry, elevator pitches, personal accounts, Wiki articles, catalogue descriptions, reviews, summaries, creative writing and a whole load of other stuff.

Any attempt to list all the different types of writing is doomed to failure before it even begins – there are just too many. That said, the vast majority of freelance work tends to fall into certain broad categories.

### Standard article types and lengths

You'll see the word "article" many times in this book. The pickier readers will no doubt make tutting noises because I use the word "article" as shorthand for any kind of written content (including but not limited to all those listed above), rather than in its strictly defined sense. To the purists, my apologies: it's easier, alright?

Now that we've cleared that up, online writing has certain commonly accepted standards when it comes to how long a piece is and how each is defined.

- Article

A standard online article is 500 words long. Some employers want longer pieces, some are happy with shorter work. Always assume an article is 500 words long until you've checked with the client (and yes, you should always check).

- Blog post/entry

Blog posts don't have a standard length. Tech blogs tend towards the shorter end at around 250 words per entry while personal development blogs tend towards the other extreme at 1,500 words or more. The majority of freelance blogging gigs ask for 350-450 words per post.

- Review

Like blog posts, reviews vary in length. Review sites tend to keep things concise and to the point, aiming at the 200-250 word mark. Sponsored, detailed reviews are more like standard articles in terms of length.

- Landing page

A landing page is the one visitors see first when they visit a site by clicking an advert. For companies this is usually their home page but "gurus" (those people selling schemes, courses, books and so on) usually have a separate landing page. They vary enormously in length from a simple signup form (also called a squeeze page) with a couple of hundred words on it to great tracts of marketing that can run for pages and pages. Marketing theory has it that the longer you can keep a person reading about an offer, the more interested they become – that's why some of these pages contain thousands of words.

## Spike Wyatt

- Email

A marketing email is similar to a landing page and can vary in length depending on the client. That said, an email's purpose is not to sell – it's to get the reader to click and visit the site. The site's job is to sell. Using this strategy, emails are rarely more than 300 words.

- Autoresponder email chain

An autoresponder sends marketing (or other) messages to a list of subscribers at predetermined periods. For example, a response is normally sent as soon as a registration or some other kind of communication is received and follow-ups can be scheduled the next day, the third day, the fifth day, the tenth day and so on. Each email is normally of standard length (300 words or so), though some can be much shorter or longer, depending on the client.

- Web page

Another variable-length job, web pages can be designed to display on a single screen or can go on much longer. Since they usually contain a lot of graphics, the number of words depends very much on the client's requirements.

- Brochures, prospectuses, reports and other business documents

These can range from single article-length pieces to entire books. From a personal point of view, I've written brochures with a few hundred words in them and reports that are several thousand words long – not to mention operations manuals and the like, which are book-length jobs.

Note that business writing is *very* different from normal online content creation: it generally has stricter style rules, stricter rules for mechanics (grammar, punctuation and spelling requirements), a specific format and is expected to be much more analytical in approach.

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### Standard article content

Every job is different and the guidelines laid down here are merely a common opinion among web sites and clients. You should always endeavour to produce content to each client's individual requirements: if you're not sure what they are, ask.

A basic article covers one subject. While it may digress into other areas in due course, its purpose is to convey information or opinion on a single matter. Remember to keep your focus as tight as possible.

Good, informative articles commonly have a simple structure:

- The opening paragraph, which describes what the article is about.
- The body of the piece, which presents the subject in a logical fashion. Good text flow is important to carry the reader from point to point without abruptness or jumping all over the place.
- The concluding paragraph, which sums up the information or argument and, for most online content, contains the "call to action". This is a request for readers' opinions, a link to the next article to read, instructions on what the reader must click to apply for an offer and so on, depending on the article's content and purpose.

In most cases, writers should avoid using the first person when writing: telling the reader about personal experiences has its place (such as on a blog or in an opinion piece) but informative and analytical articles should be written in a neutral, third-person style.

### List articles

List articles ("The 10 Best...", "12 Ways to..." and so on) are very popular because they're easy to read. A bulleted list seldom has long paragraphs, so readers can just whizz through and appreciate the subject with less effort.

However, producing *only* list articles can make a site look cheap and shabby – it's best to intersperse them with more analytical pieces to break up the monotony. Bear in mind that every point in a list article should be expanded: don't just list ten things with no description, opinion or other content.

## **The importance of titles**

An article's title is almost certainly the most important factor in attracting readers. Dramatic titles that ask questions, pique curiosity or suggest a solution to a problem work much better than simple, informative statements.

Since the title is the first thing people see – whether they're searching or going straight to the article from a link – it's essential to make it as attention-grabbing as possible.

**Learn to grab attention  
with titles that ask a question,  
answer a problem  
or pique curiosity**

Marketing studies have been performed to come up with title strategies and there are now many (free) resources on the Internet which discuss how to structure and word your headlines so that they get attention.

## **Topical and evergreen writing**

Most content falls into one of two categories, no matter what subject it covers: topical or evergreen.

Topical subjects are short-lived with relatively high daily traffic. They're the "hot" pieces of the moment like breaking news, current trends, opinion or critique of events and so on. Their life-span varies greatly, from a few days to a season, then their visitor traffic drops significantly. Other examples are entertainment news, fashion news, film reviews, holiday articles, coupons and special offers.

Evergreen subjects are long-lived with relatively low daily traffic. They're analysis pieces, detailed examinations of stable systems, instructions, how-to articles and so on. Their life-span is measured in years or – in the best cases – decades. Other examples are language courses, business concepts and strategies, financial planning, historical pieces and personal development.

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As you would expect, there is crossover between the two types. A “how-to” article covering a popular application like Twitter, for example, is now evergreen content but was also a hot topic when the site was featured on *Oprah* and its popularity skyrocketed.

### **Copyright, scraping and rewriting**

Plagiarism is stealing other people’s work or, for a more “dictionary” definition (from dictionary.com), the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work. Plagiarism breaks copyright law and is illegal. It’s also cheap, tacky, mean and horrible.

International copyright law is a complex thing: whether you’re allowed to republish, use extracts, quote, rewrite or otherwise publish someone else’s work depends on how much of it you copy, how old it is, how much you add or change, how you use it and where you publish.

**Copying other people's work is  
pathetic and illegal – always create  
unique content**

A common “black hat” practice employed by unscrupulous individuals is called “scraping”. This is where an automated script takes blog extracts (the first 30 words or so) from user-defined sources and republishes them. The cover story is that the content generated by scraping is “aggregating useful resources”. In reality, the extracts are often posted with nothing else on the page except advertisements – what the owner really wants is to steal traffic from the scraped site and get ad clicks for revenue, without doing any work.

Although copyright infringement in scraping cases is not as clear-cut as straightforward copy/paste jobs (depending on where the scraper is hosted, how much other content is displayed and a variety of other issues), most ISPs and blog hosts frown on the practice, so complaints from the victim often yield results.

## Spike Wyatt

On top of that, any site using scraping techniques and running AdSense is in violation of the program's terms. Reporting a scraper to Google can be a very good way of cutting off a plagiarist who uses the method and is an AdSense publisher: if there's no revenue, there's no profit.

For more detailed information about copyright law, you'll have to consult another source. For our purposes and to keep things simple:

- never copy work created by someone else
- if you quote someone else's work, provide a reference to the original
- if you use someone else's work, ensure the copied part makes up only a small portion of your whole article (i.e. quote, cite source and analyse)
- don't scrape content
- if you're not sure something's legal, don't do it (ignorance is not a legitimate defence in law)

Rewriting content exists in a slightly greyer area of copyrights: technically there is nothing to stop you rewriting existing content in your own words and publishing it as original work, provided it's sufficiently different. It's like reverse engineering: if the site owner can keep a straight face while they assure everyone they thought of all that stuff on their own, it's extremely hard to prove plagiarism.

The greyness of rewriting lies in the ethics: stealing someone else's *ideas* by rewriting their words is not a very nice thing to do. Another dilemma for your conscience.

If you're concerned about plagiarism, there's a short ebook on the subject available on my blog<sup>29</sup> and plenty of resources online, such as plagiarism.org.

## Online earning terminology

The MMO (Making Money Online) industry has a language of its own. PTC, PPC, SEO, affiliate marketing and dozens of other terms are used, usually without thought as to whether the reader knows what they mean.

I won't cover all the different areas here, since this book focuses on freelance writing (and editing). If you're interested in other ways to earn online such as

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<sup>29</sup> [scrawlbug.com/free-stuff](http://scrawlbug.com/free-stuff)

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paid to click, tasking and so on, download *Making Money Online: A Guide For The Absolute Beginner* free from my blog<sup>30</sup>.

### Search engine optimisation

SEO is a complex set of skills that, when combined, result in a writing style that is favoured by the search engines. Its primary purpose is to improve a web page's ranking on Google, since they still get the lion's share of search traffic.

A better ranking means that the article, and therefore the hosting site, is more likely to appear on Page 1 of Google's search results.

To this end, SEO has produced a vast number of strategies and tactics – both “white hat” and “black hat” – that vary from working with the system to trying to “game” it and get better results than deserved.

Google retaliates by refusing to reveal the details of and occasionally changing its ranking algorithm. The most important change in recent history is Google Panda (apparently named after one of the engineers, before you ask). I'll look at the effect Panda has had a little later, after we've covered the basics.

### Basic SEO principles

There are a few simple principles that underpin SEO writing.

The first and most important principle is keywords. Choosing the right keywords for a web site is essential to bringing *targeted* traffic from search engines. For example, a customer who types “cheap running shoes” into Google doesn't want to be shown last-minute travel deals. They want inexpensive shoes to run in, so their search terms are important to a site with the products they want.

By making sure a phrase like “cheap running shoes” is repeated on their pages, a sports retailer ensures that the Google spider (the little program that crawls around the web examining and categorising content) picks up on the repetition and concludes that the site is about cheap running shoes and not last-minute holiday offers.

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<sup>30</sup> [scrawlbug.com/free-stuff](http://scrawlbug.com/free-stuff)

**Experienced SEO  
writers are always  
in demand and have  
excellent earning potential**

SEO also deals with meta-tags – the HTML tags that are stored in the web page’s source code but which aren’t displayed to the visitor. These contain further information for the web spiders and determine what text is displayed on the search engine results page, so they can be used to inform potential visitors of the site’s purpose (or to market to them) before they visit.

Other areas of SEO include directories, keyword research, linking, backlinking, page rank, structural SEO, semantic SEO and a lot of other stuff that’s too complicated to cover here. There are some excellent online resources, the best of which (in my opinion) is Peter Hoggan’s free course on HubPages.<sup>31</sup>

At its worst, SEO writing reads like it was created by a demented robot on drugs. It says the same thing again and again, with the same words and phrases that aren’t even close to normal English. It doesn’t read like proper writing of any kind.

At its best, SEO writing is almost indistinguishable from “normal” writing. Skilled SEO copywriters can drop keywords and phrases into their work so smoothly that the reader’s only clue to any optimisation is the subtle repetition. Writers who are this good are hard to find and deserve every penny they earn.

### **SEO before Panda**

Before Google’s Panda update, SEO was primarily concerned with repeating keywords and getting links to the page. The more links there were, the better the ranking. That’s a simplification, of course, but you get the general idea. It was easy to “game” the system and revenue share sites suffered the consequences, with submissions of thousands of junk articles designed purely to point to affiliated, money-generating blogs and landing pages.

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<sup>31</sup> [peterhoggan.hubpages.com](http://peterhoggan.hubpages.com)

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### SEO after Panda

The Panda update's intent was to separate quality content from the rubbish. The main changes were in what's considered "quality":

- There aren't hundreds of ads on the page
- It's not a copy of something else
- The content will pass inspection by a real person
- It has good external links
- Visitors don't read it and leave – they stay to read more

This doesn't mean keywords are any less important. It means that how the content is *written* and *linked* is important.

In simple terms, the best advice for any site wanting to work with the Panda update is to follow Google's webmaster guidelines<sup>32</sup>. By providing a useful, interesting site with quality content (not regurgitated, repetitive crap), you'll get better traffic.

As a writer, it's worth keeping up with Google's algorithm changes<sup>33</sup> and letting prospective clients know that you're aware of updates. Many employers panic when they see changes announced and a writer who's familiar with how SEO is affected is a more attractive employment option than one who isn't.

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<sup>32</sup> [www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=35769](http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=35769)

<sup>33</sup> A list of official Google blogs where they post all their news is available at [www.google.com/press/blog-directory.html](http://www.google.com/press/blog-directory.html).

## Part 4: Finding Work

Possibly the most critical aspect of half-hogging is finding work. Since you're not marketing, you need to cultivate the essential skill of spotting good employers among the low-paying, untrustworthy dross.

How does a half-hog freelancer find work without having to promote their skills beyond the "natural marketing" they're doing as part of their everyday Internet use? There are plenty of ways: the bidding sites, job listings, direct application, prospecting, doing *pro bono* jobs... your options are only limited by your imagination.

### How easy is it to find work?

That's difficult to answer because it's not a very good question. It's easy to find work; it's harder to find *good* work; it's *much* harder to find well-paid, regular, interesting work. Just like in any business, there are all sorts of freelance gigs: figuring out which jobs to apply for and making your application stand out are critical.

The first contract is always the hardest to land. When you're just starting out, with no reputation, no feedback, no traffic to your online presence and a portfolio consisting mainly of revenue share or unpublished articles, the fight for work is a tough one.

The important thing to remember as a half-hogger is to keep plugging away at it. Don't let your relative lack of experience show; don't play down your ability (but don't overplay it, either); don't accept low pay just because you're new. Go back to the bare necessities you prepared (starting on page 18) and use them as best you can.

From personal experience and listening to other freelancers, I've found that finding and getting the first job (whether half-hogging or not) takes about a month. Is it possible to land your first contract in days? As Tom Jones would say, "It's not unusual". It really comes down to the luck of the draw.

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### The bidding sites

The Big Four: Elance – Guru – oDesk – Freelancer<sup>34</sup>

Any book about freelancing has to cover the bidding sites – the “reverse auctions” where employers post jobs and freelancers bid for contracts. The employer chooses the most suitable (or at least the one they hope will be suitable); the freelancer does the work and gets paid. Everybody’s happy.

Unfortunately, in the real world things don’t always work out like that. The bidding sites are lauded by some and despised by others. Let’s start with a look at the positive and negative:

#### Positive

- Always lots of work
- Easy to search
- Less effort to apply
- Some payment protection
- Free natural marketing
- Good to build a portfolio
- Long-term clients

#### Negative

- Full of slave-wage jobs
- Extremely competitive
- Site takes a cut of pay
- Limited bids in free membership
- Unreliable payment protection
- Feedback is unreliable
- Haven for scam and spam

### The positive experience

Anyone visiting the bidding sites for the first time immediately sees their biggest advantage: there are thousand of jobs available for a wide variety of skills. The flow of work is constant, with thousands of employers keeping the list of new opportunities topped up all day, every day.

The four big sites all categorise their job listings to make it easier to find work and provide a search facility if you’re looking for specific things. Since the application process is automated, it’s also a lot easier to apply for jobs – a short message is often enough, compared to a lengthy composition for the majority of direct-to-client positions posted elsewhere on the Internet (see *Job listings* on page 72).

Add the fact that you can upload a full profile and portfolio, display positive feedback and take skill tests to show employers how good you are and, well... it’s a lot easier than most other forums.

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<sup>34</sup> [www.elance.com](http://www.elance.com), [www.guru.com](http://www.guru.com), [www.odesk.com](http://www.odesk.com) and [www.freelancer.com](http://www.freelancer.com), respectively.

## Spike Wyatt

Most freelancing sites offer some kind of payment protection, usually in the form of “escrow”. This is when the employer puts money into the site’s account up front: only when the job is completed to everyone’s satisfaction is payment approved, the money released and the worker gets their cash<sup>35</sup>. The employer is protected from a worker running off with an upfront payment and the worker is protected from an employer disappearing when payment’s due.

However, some of the biggest advantages of the bidding sites are often overlooked. They’re a great place to put up a profile – which is instantly visible to thousands of employers – and build up reputation through the automated feedback system. On top of that, some freelancers and their clients find a perfect match, providing long-term work in direct contact, off-site.

Word of warning: suggesting that you take the job off-site immediately is not only considered tacky, it’s prohibited by at least one of the Big Four and will get your account suspended. The first job (at least) from any client should always be completed through the bidding site upon which you found it.

### **The negative experience**

Detractors often refer to the bidding sites as a scam. There are many accusations levelled at them, from refusing to settle pay disagreements to full-on fake job posts to cheat members out of their membership fees. I have yet to see proof of either of those, although they are both frequently voiced and I have a standing invitation on my blog to provide details<sup>36</sup>.

The main complaint directed at the Big Four bidding sites is that they are full of low-paying jobs. In the writing arena, this is certainly the case: some employers offer wages of 10 cents per article, 89 cents per hour or even less. However, there is nothing forcing you to take that work and there are plenty of jobs with reasonable pay as well.

Note: I’m not going to go into the accusations that the bidding sites are “destroying the market for serious writers” as this is neither the time nor the

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<sup>35</sup> Although this is the ideal situation, it’s not always the case. Some sites release payment as soon as the job is “completed”, regardless of whether the freelancer or employer are happy. Others hold the money until there is some form of agreement. Always check the terms and conditions of any site you use.

<sup>36</sup> scrawlbug.com, 11 December 2009

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place for such debate. Suffice to say that I disagree and there's a post on my blog<sup>37</sup> to explain why.

Newcomers to the bidding sites should bear in mind that free membership comes with a limited number of bids so, unless you're going to pay for premium membership (which you might want to do if you get a lot of work and the benefits make it worthwhile), you'll need to pick where you bid carefully.

The most legitimate detractor for the bidding sites is that their payment protection and feedback systems are unreliable. Starting with the payment protection, it's easy to see how an unscrupulous client could put a small part-payment into escrow, wait for the job to be done then dispute the quality of the work and refuse to cough up the balance. The freelancer is left with little recourse unless the site's management steps in to mediate.

Conversely, it's equally easy to see how an unscrupulous freelancer could ask for 100% escrow payment upfront, then provide crap results and still demand the money. This time, it's the client who's stuck with hundreds (or thousands) of dollars trapped in the system and no way to get at it unless, again, site management steps in to mediate.

The feedback system is also frequently flawed. It's fairly easy to abuse, especially on sites where feedback can only be given on a single milestone of the job: the freelancer does great work to the first milestone, gets a 5-star rating and stops working. The employer has no recourse and has already given what turns out to be misleading feedback, much to their (and future clients') annoyance.

All bidding site users should be aware that, like any semi-open forum, the Big Four are havens for scammers and spammers despite attempts to curb them – there's more about avoiding that kind of trouble below.

### Setting up

The bidding sites are extremely easy to manage: you can get set up in a matter of minutes, as long as you sorted out your bare necessities earlier on.

Simply open a free account as a provider (freelancer, worker or whatever the site calls it) and paste your standard profile into the fields provided. Fill out any extras, upload your portfolio and you're away.

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<sup>37</sup> scrawlbug.com, 22 June 2009

## Half-hog tips for the bidding sites

There are many ways to improve your chances at landing a job. A lot of them are common sense but some are less obvious. As a half-hogger, remember that you're trying to find the best work in the shortest time.

- Take the competence tests

Most of the bidding sites have built-in tests to show your skill. Before you take them all, hang out for a while on each site in turn. As a half-hogger, you're probably only going to have time to monitor one of the four even if you use a clever RSS subscription (they're that busy), so you want to pick the one that suits you best.

Each of the four is very different from the others and each works better for different people – for example, I fly through Elance and struggle with Guru while one of my blog visitors expresses the opposite opinion. Figure out which one you find easiest to use before you commit the time to taking their tests and completely filling out your profile.

- Conserve your free bids

The general approach of the bidding sites is to give free members a limited number of bids, refilled each month, and to charge a fee for more. Some go a little further and “charge” more bids for higher-paying jobs, thus limiting your active bidding or even putting the biggest projects beyond the reach of non-paying members.

Conserve your bids. Especially at the start, it'll be tempting to apply for everything you see but remember that new jobs are posted every hour of every day. If you use up your free bids too quickly, you might miss the opportunity to apply for an absolute gem.

- Get the feed

Once you've figured out which site(s) you'll be using, get the RSS feed for your work category. Although the bidding sites offer email subscriptions, you're often better off going to your category, listing the jobs and asking for an RSS feed of that. New jobs will be pumped into

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your newsreader at periods of your liking, with a lot more information than in an email.<sup>38</sup>

- Don't undercut yourself

Contrary to popular belief, the lowest bid doesn't always get the job. Yes, some employers are looking for the cheapest worker they can get but a lot more equate price to quality. They're looking for a happy medium or, ideally, the freelancer who has mad skills and isn't too expensive.

Try not to feel like you're missing opportunities: new jobs are posted all the time, so there's absolutely no point in undercutting yourself. Bid at your normal rate unless the job is something you would love to do and for which you're willing to take a hit in the wallet.

- Don't ask for more than they'll pay

It sounds incredible but people actually do this: they bid on jobs with a strict budget of \$50, for example, and state that they want \$100. That's not only dumb, it wastes your free bids. If the job's too small, don't apply for it.

This doesn't apply if the job description gives an ideal figure or an acceptable range and you're more expensive – the client may be willing to negotiate for your awesome talents. It may be worth the risk of using one of your limited bids in return for a great job!

- Be enthusiastic but don't beg

It's a fine line but you'll need to walk it. Enthusiasm for a job can really make you stand out, especially if the competition spends all their time going on about how clever and experienced they are. But don't beg for work: it's unseemly and good employers don't like it (though the unscrupulous ones will see you as an ideal sucker).

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<sup>38</sup> Microsoft Outlook users may want to look at RSS Popper, a free plugin that creates individual "emails" from RSS updates and posts them to a mail folder of your choice. Very useful for centralising everything in one application. More information is available from [rsspopper.blogspot.com](http://rsspopper.blogspot.com).

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- Bid individually

No matter what you see advertised across the Internet, template bids *do not* land 90% of the jobs for which they're used. They may work well for one or two job applications but the vast majority of employers will quickly spot them and ignore you. Template bids are used by every cheap-ass SEO company in the world: don't be like them.

You're far better off with an individual bid, even if the text is shorter. Be polite, talk specifically about the opportunity and state why you're a good choice. Answer the client's questions. Showing you read the job post and that you're interested enough to respond personally – rather than just pasting in some text you think sounds cool – is a much better way of attracting attention.

That said, there's nothing wrong with having a few standard paragraphs that you can paste into your bid to save time (it's *Blue Peter* again). These could include a carefully prepared description of your experience, your rate(s) of pay, names of major clients and a little info on previous jobs of note. As long as you tweak them when necessary and the main part of your bid addresses the job posting, most clients won't notice when you use standard paragraphs.

- Be clear about pay rates

If you're estimating the amount of work based on the job posting, say so in your bid. State your rate per hour or per 100 words or the assumptions you have made to arrive at the figure for the whole job.

It's perfectly acceptable to say that your rates are negotiable. Some clients assume that a bid price is final and will decline anyone above budget rather than pursue a writer who looks great and ask them to consider a lower offer. By offering to negotiate, you stay in the running.

- Do what they want you to do

If the job posting asks for a sample, send one (though not something unique and unpublished – that's a common scam to get free work from applicants). Don't send a URL for your work or ask what kind of sample they'd like: it may only take a few seconds for them to look up or

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answer but they probably have hundreds of bids to read. Make it easy for them to see your work.

It's also best to avoid sending massive files. Your article might look great as a 2Mb PDF but if the words are the same in a 4k text file, most employers would rather have the small download. Unless they want design work done, of course.

- Make it easy for the employer

Would you believe that some people bid for jobs with a 2-line application and an invitation to Google their work? No employer wants to spend time looking you up, hunting down your work or even checking your profile – at least not until after they've made the first cut. Make it as easy as possible for them to see who you are and what you do.

And don't let your ego get in the way. You may be a published author; you may have been writing since the printing press was invented; but putting yourself on a pedestal can really turn off a lot of employers. Keep it simple, direct and to the point by including one or two pertinent bits of information and experience.

- Agree an initial period

If the job isn't fixed-term, for a precise amount of content or the client's vague about how long the contract will last, make sure you define an initial trial period. This is not just for them to see how good your work is, it's so you can get out if the employer's asking too much or the work is unsuitable for you.

- Over-deliver

The first few jobs you land will be key to your continued success on the bidding sites. It's essential that you get great feedback, so over-deliver. Finish early, re-read everything twice, write a bit more than they ask for – whatever you do, do a bit more. It'll be worth it for the five-star feedback.

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- Be patient

New users expect to land work within days. This is unlikely to happen because you have no feedback. As I mentioned earlier, most of the people I've spoken to find work after the first month of bidding; some take longer.

### Alarm bells

There are certain expressions that should immediately set off alarm bells when you see them in job descriptions on the bidding sites (or anywhere for that matter). Although they may look like simple expressions, they can indicate an employer who has unreasonable expectations.

- Bulk work

Any job asking for bulk work should be examined very carefully. Although the idea of producing dozens (or hundreds) of articles looks very promising, especially if the deadline's flexible, the pay for these jobs is often horrendously low.

Calculate exactly how much work is required and estimate the cost at your normal rate of pay. How close is the client's pay? How flexible is the deadline? Do you really want to work for less than a dollar per article?

- Easy jobs

Everyone knows that writing is easy. That's why there are no professional writers and everyone in the world is a published author...

Any job that states the work is "easy" should be examined very closely. Frequently, employers use the word because they don't understand the amount of work involved but, every once in a while, they know *precisely* what they're asking for and drop in the word "easy" to negotiate a stupidly low price. Bid at your normal rate and, if they whine that the work's simple, let them do it themselves.

- Data entry

One of the worst-paid jobs in the world in these days of widespread computer literacy is data entry: it requires no skill and no knowledge beyond basic typing or copy/pasting, so the rewards are commensurately

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low. If this kind of work interests you *because* it's so simple, make sure you understand precisely what the employer expects before you bid. Some of them hide writing, rewriting and transcription tasks under the "data entry" title.

- Pay in points or a share

Some sites and employers – though not those on the bidding sites – pay in points rather than money. This is very common on survey sites but I've included it here as the same warning goes for *anywhere* that pays in points.

Inspect their reward system and work out how many points make up your normal hourly pay rate. An employer or a site might well be offering 8,300 points for an article but if that comes out at fifty cents, do you really want to do it?

### **Bidding site scams**

As I mentioned in the list of negatives (page 58), the bidding sites are havens for scammers and spammers. The easy posting format and often idealistic attitude of people who use the sites leave many freelancers open to abuse. Some of the scams are obvious, others are nefariously complicated, but they'll all screw you out of your money or work, usually with no recourse.

Here's a short list of the most common scams encountered on the bidding sites (and elsewhere on the web):

- The unique sample scam

Perhaps the most common and (once you know it) obvious scam on the freelance sites is the one asking for a unique sample of your work. It runs like this: the employer says they need a large amount of work done and offers an excellent budget. However, they want all applicants to submit a unique sample of work – which won't be paid for – as part of the application process.

The scam is that there's no job. The buyer is simply fishing for a lot of unique articles for free. Everyone who applies and sends original work gets screwed.

Thankfully, the big freelancing sites strictly prohibit asking for free, original samples because the scam is so well-known. Even so, these

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jobs are posted all the time and it can take days for the admins to take them down. If you ever see a job like this, report it immediately to the site admin and blacklist the employer.

- The low starting pay (or ongoing work) scam

This one's also very common as it once again plays to the inexperienced bidder. The employer posts a job that has terrible pay (such as \$1 or less per article for 20 articles). They state that this sample batch is to gauge your skill and speed. For the right person, it "can lead to ongoing work with much better pay".

The scam is that there is no ongoing job. They're just fishing for stupidly cheap, quality articles from as many bidders as they can get. Using the bait of "ongoing work" is extremely common on the bidding sites and, although you should not completely ignore those words wherever you see them, they should start all sorts of alarm bells ringing.

Focus on the job itself, not vague future possibilities: if it meets your criteria, bid on it. If it pays too low, ignore it.

- The membership (fee) scam

You won't see this one on the bidding sites very often, as they prohibit external linking. However, it does happen, especially on smaller sites based outside the US and Europe. The employer claims that they have hundreds of clients lining up to buy your work or pay for your efforts. They ask for an initial membership fee to access all these wonderful opportunities.

The scam is so obvious it's painful. Even if they really do have all that work, you just paid them to let you work. That's right: you paid someone money so that they would allow you to work. Read that last sentence again and realise how incredibly stupid it is. You're doing the job, they should pay you. And you can't even be sure they have any work. Double dumb!

In some cases, there's no fee involved: the employer simply asks that you create an account, fill in a profile and let them know what your login name is, so that they can find you on the system and send work

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your way. Of course, there's still no work: they just want lots of logins and more email addresses to sell to spammers or they're doing a freelance publicity job and getting paid for signups.

- The newbie, student, WAHM and SAHM scam

This is a sneaky one because the employers invariably sound friendly and understanding. They'll post their job and suggest that it's ideal for students who need a little extra cash, for WAHMs (Work At Home Moms), SAHMs (Stay At Home Moms) or for new writers with no feedback or history.

What they're not telling you is that the pay sucks. They're playing on the general lack of confidence shown by the target group to get quality work at lower prices. Remember what I said way back at the start of this book? Just because you're a half-hogger does not mean your work is worth less!

In these cases, you should bid at your usual rate if you're interested in the work. You can even allude to the fact that you may be in the target group but your work is just as good as a full-timer's, though the employer might not take kindly to being "outed".

There are exceptions to this scam: firstly, you might want to work for less money in exchange for awesome feedback to kick-start your bidding site career. Secondly, some enormous companies with great reputations take on unpaid or low-paid trainees or interns. In this case, the choice is yours. Is working in an environment like the *New York Times* worth taking a salary hit? Are you going to learn enough with Penguin Books that you don't mind doing the job for less money? Do you think they'll mentor you?

- The revenue share scam

I'm not talking about the established revenue share sites like Helium, HubPages and others<sup>39</sup>. I'm talking about the small startup sites that offer a share of the revenue, often in exchange for rewriting scraped content.

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<sup>39</sup> A list of revenue share sites is included in *Making Money Online: A Guide For The Absolute Beginner*, available free from [scrawlbug.com/free-stuff](http://scrawlbug.com/free-stuff).

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The employer usually advertises for a rewriter, since their “blog” is actually just a scraped regurgitation of other people’s content, with AdSense slapped on top to bring in revenue and the content rewritten to avoid plagiarism issues. They offer a share of site revenue in exchange for the work.

The scam here is that the site’s likely to be brand new. It’s only going to earn pennies for months, unless the employer’s doing a lot of marketing on the side. This is unlikely, since they’re employing you on revenue share because they can’t be bothered to do any promotion for the site themselves and you’re cheap labour with your dewy-eyed hopes of massive advertising income.

And if it does become successful, they can just terminate your contract and re-advertise for a cheap per-post writer so they don’t have to share the income.

A related scam is associated with book work: the client says they can’t afford to pay more than a small amount now but offers a percentage of earnings when they hit the bestseller list... which may never happen.

These offers create a tougher decision for many freelancers, but not for half-hoggers. Your time is limited; you simply cannot afford to take a job that offers vague promises. You need fixed rates and fixed contracts. Ignore any revenue share unless the site’s well-established and gets hundreds of thousands of hits every month.<sup>40</sup>

- The working-around-the-system scams

Some employers like to take their work off-site, to avoid paying the bidding site fees. This is perfectly natural in a competitive market but it should also act as a danger signal for you as a bidder.

There are two similar scams that run this way. The first suggests making an upfront payment direct to your bank (because the budget is so big) and the client asks for your details. They will then use this information to commit identity theft and empty your account of everything you have.

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<sup>40</sup> You can check a site’s traffic on [www.compete.com](http://www.compete.com).

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The second is to take the work off-site and pay you direct. Of course, as soon as the work is completed and you've sent it to them, the client simply disappears without paying.

Any client asking to take a contract off-site from the outset is dubious. Why are they posting jobs on the bidding sites if they're not going to use the system? The sites themselves frown on this kind of activity (and may suspend your account if they catch you doing it), so you should always try to negotiate an on-site payment.

If the client gets funny about it, explain that it's to protect your reputation on the site as well as theirs. If they still refuse, ask for at least a part of the payment upfront, to make sure they'll cough up.

Important: a lot of great clients prefer to work direct with their freelancer. I've picked up three myself, all of whom are reliable, honest and a pleasure to work for – but they all started by using the site's payment system. Make sure they're legit and you could be onto a serious winner!

- The no-contract scope creep scam

This one is generally limited to bigger, long-term projects with low ongoing wages and a big payout at the end, although it can happen on almost any job. The employer agrees the terms of the job but is vague about exactly what's required. They're very friendly and helpful, but say they don't need a contract. Work begins.

At some point, they disappear without paying or they keep extending the scope of the project so that it's impossible to finish. They may even wait until the work is complete, then say that you didn't meet the requirements and refuse payment.

Any big job needs a contract. Employers who refuse to sign something are not trustworthy – no businessperson in their right mind will turn down a legally binding agreement on paper that defines precisely what's expected of you, even if it's just a list of the tasks you are to perform, the remuneration you can expect, the deadline and any important details that must be considered.

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This is another situation where working via the bidding site can be an advantage: they generally have mediation facilities that will look at both sides of the argument and make a decision, though many of the so-called “neutral” mediators are said to be inconsistent and even biased, so don’t count on them too much.<sup>41</sup>

- The no-escrow refused-payment scam

This is one of the hardest scams to spot. It’s happened to me. The employer is friendly and helpful; they’re pleased with your portfolio and organise direct payment outside of the site’s normal process (even if they’ve used escrow before). Everything goes great until payday. Then they have a problem.

The problem is usually that “PayPal wants more info from them” or “PayPal’s refusing” their credit card. In either case, they’re “working on it”. At this point, one of two things happens: either they disappear completely and never pay or they use their “brother’s card” (or some other relative or friend’s card) to pay.

A month or two later, they dispute the payment, claiming the card was stolen. Or the actual owner of the card disputes it because the card really was stolen. The money is reclaimed and you lose out.

The only way to protect yourself from this is to work through the bidding sites’ escrow systems. Provided you work through the system, the battle over funds will be between the client and the site, not you. Even if they provide stolen card details, you’ll get paid and it’ll be up to the site to pursue the scammer when the payment is disputed (and my guess is they have insurance for this kind of thing).

There aren’t any real indicators of this kind of scam, other than a short deadline and a job of considerable size.

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<sup>41</sup> This is an unsubstantiated claim; for a good example of how to handle scope creep, see the blog post “*An Elance Dilemma*” (scrawlbug.com, 12 July 2009).

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### Converting bids into regular work

The first step to converting a bidding site client into a source of regular work is obviously to win the bid for their job. It normally becomes quickly apparent whether a job has the potential to continue beyond the initially agreed period (you *did* agree a trial period, didn't you?).

If it looks like there's a possibility for future writing, you need to step back for a moment and consider the advantages and disadvantages of continued, regular work:

- Is it "regular" by your definition rather than the client's?
- Is it the kind of work you'll enjoy doing long-term?
- Is the pay acceptable?
- Do you want the work (and client) as part of your portfolio, long-term?
- Are you certain you can keep providing the desired content on the employer's schedule?

Assuming the job fits your criteria, you'll need to work on converting the client into a regular employer. The best way to keep a client on your books is to provide what all profitable businesses strive to achieve: great customer service (see page 42).

### Job listings

Job listings are individual positions or gigs advertised on the enormous number of classified ad and writing sites around the Internet. Thankfully, there are also sites that aggregate many of these listings to save you the trouble of hunting around. Unfortunately, there are far too many to list here.

The resource I always suggest to newbie freelance writers is *Freelance Writing Jobs*<sup>42</sup> which posts daily updates.

While there are many one-off gigs advertised on job listings, there's a relatively high percentage of positions with regular work (and/or decent pay) compared to the bidding sites. Consequently, the competition's a lot tougher and you'll really need to shine if you want to stand out among the applicants.

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<sup>42</sup> [www.freelancewritinggigs.com](http://www.freelancewritinggigs.com)

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The rules for applying for these positions are much the same as for bidding-site work, though you'll often have to write a cover letter with less guidance from the employer's job description.

It's also more important to show personality in a direct-to-client application than on a bidding site. Virtually every employer who takes the time to advertise for writers in a classified section or on a job board wants more than just an article mill to churn out boring content: they're hiring *you* as much as they're hiring your writing abilities.

While job listings have a better reputation for pay and employer reliability than the bidding sites, be warned: as lists become more popular, they also become the target of all the same scammy, spammy scumbags who frequent the bidding sites. What starts off as a quality list can turn into a pile of useless crap unless there's some kind of human intelligence behind the list, checking as best they can. Be much more paranoid on "job boards" where anyone who's registered or who pays can post.

Remember: just because you see a job on a reliable site does not mean the employer is trustworthy: go through the same checking process that you employ for any job search (see *Picking the right offers*, below).

### **Selling your own work**

The mid-way approach to freelancing – selling your content in a marketplace – is covered in *Part 5: Working For Yourself* (page 86).

I mention it here because article marketplaces can also be a source of clients. By putting your work on sale to the public, you're building your reputation: it doesn't take a genius to see that visiting clients who buy your work (and are pleased with it) may want to employ you on a more direct basis.

### **Working for nothing**

Although it might sound completely demented, there is definitely something to be said for *pro bono* work.

For starters, it can be a lot easier to land impressive-sounding jobs if you work for free: unless the employer's a major publication, they'd be stupid to turn down free content or services from a budding professional and, once you're accepted, you can put them on your client list.

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There's also the fact that high-quality *pro bono* work often sticks in a client's mind better and longer than paid work. In my experience, a business owner who got some great content for nothing is far more likely to talk about what an awesome deal they got... and word of mouth is the best advertising. You can put two and two together, can't you?

Incidentally, scientific research shows that people who do voluntary work live longer<sup>43</sup> so writing content for free can do far more than help you feel good about yourself and bring in more work!

If you're thinking of doing some free writing, a good place to start is local and national charities. They're always looking for volunteers and, once you're on their books and listed in their publications as an author, you'll have a great reference for future clients.

Don't be afraid to contact normal, profit-making businesses as well: many are part of an association, a guild or a network of business owners. This produces additional free marketing when they tell their colleagues that they know a great writer.

### **Picking the right offers**

I said it before but I'll say it again: since you're only doing the bare minimum marketing of publicly making yourself available, you need to learn the essential skill of spotting good employers among the low-paying, untrustworthy dross.

Given that there are hundreds of offers posted every day on the bidding sites and job listings, how can you filter out the rubbish and find the good stuff? Unfortunately, there's no simple way. Whatever process you use, you're going to have to look at a lot of offers and spot the ones to avoid. The more you can quickly eliminate, the more time you'll have to look at potentially interesting work.

For starters, you can check the employer's profile. All the major bidding sites make employers' job histories available with details of pay and feedback: paranoia dictates that you avoid anyone who has no history and no feedback.

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<sup>43</sup> Dr. Sara Konrath et al., University of Michigan, studied over 10,000 people and found that only 1.6% of those who had volunteered had died since 1957. Around 4% of non-volunteers had died in the same period. Results published in the American Psychological Association journal *Health Psychology* (September 2011). Source: <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2011/09/volunteering-health.aspx>

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And no, there's no such facility on individual job listing sites, I'm afraid: you'll have to rely on your own research.

Assuming you're looking at offers from employers who appear to be established and have a reliable track record, you need to filter out the junk and get to the worthwhile stuff.

I'm going to say it a third time: it is *absolutely critical* that you cultivate this skill. To help you do that, I'm going to give you an exercise to complete!

On the next few pages are sample job postings (taken from real jobs and adjusted slightly), followed by commentary.

- Before you read them, grab a piece of paper and make a list with room for Jobs 1-9.
- Read through each offer and work out whether you think it would be worth applying for.
- Write down whether the job is a definite, to be considered or for the rubbish pile.
- Write down what alarm bells they set off for you.
- Try not to cheat by looking at the commentary after the descriptions until you've thought things through for yourself!

Note: the commentary is my opinion and may not be 100% complete or accurate. As any good Buddhist will tell you, reality depends as much on your perception of things as it does on what you see!

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Job 1: Looking for hard-working content writers!

Budget: \$1,500

This is a job position for someone who can produce up to 10, 500 word articles per day. Looking for someone dependable, hard working and, of course, a good writer! This is bulk work and the pay will be \$1.50 per successful article, plus the possibility of bonuses for great work!

### **Ignored immediately.**

This is a prime example of “bulk work” requests: writing crap for equally crap wages. For starters, it’s far too much work to fit into a part-time schedule. Even if you write really fast and can manage three articles an hour, that’s over three hours a day, every day. And the pay sucks: at a very fast three articles an hour, it’s still only \$4.50 an hour. Note the “possibility of bonuses” as standard bait for junk work of this type.

On top of that, did you notice the expression “for each *successful* article”? Although every job comes with an acceptance check, putting that expression in the description implies your work may be rejected and you’d earn even less.

Job 2: Writer and research worker

Budget: \$600

I need writer. I need you write some articles for my blog in <niche>. I need 50 articles. Content must be unique, in the style of <sample URL>. How many days you need?

**Interesting, but it needs some research and has an alarm bell.**

For 50 articles, the pay comes out at \$12 each – not bad for blog articles which are generally 300-400 words. That also gives you a bit of leeway to bid lower if you know the niche well and can produce work quickly. The employer is obviously not a native English speaker but appears to understand the need for good content – an ideal combination!

The job details are sketchy, though: evidently there are time constraints, since the employer asks how long it will take; there's no article length defined; there's no choice of style (SEO or otherwise). Once those details are cleared up, this could be a nice job – especially since blogs always need more content: that's a potential opening for regular employment.

Be aware of the stolen payment card scam (the time constraint sets off a little alarm here) and make sure you get escrow payment.

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Job 3: Sales page writer

Budget: \$45

Looking for someone with excellent skills and proven track record in the field of creating highly-converting sales pages. I will need to see examples of previous work.

**This is obviously just a one-off, given the budget, but could be a filler.**

The employer knows what they want. The description's clear and concise, too: given that and the description, the client could come back in future if your work's good. If it's on a bidding site, you'd have to weigh up the cost of using one of your bids against such a small financial return but if it were in a job listing it'd definitely be worth a shot.

Job 4: SEO Web Content (5 pages)

Budget: \$149

Professional web site content writer needed to research and creation of content for hotel web site. Content MUST be easy to read, fun to read and most importantly SEO-oriented. Ideal candidate has already done similar work and can create SEO content while writing very welcoming information.

5 pages needed: About us, Rooms, Car rental, Airport transfer, Restaurant/bar/facilities.

Research for keywords is required prior to writing. Only experienced people with proven record need to apply.

Job would be best suited for SEO professional NOT a travel writer.

**Definite bid/application: a professional employer.**

They know what they want, they give you all the relevant details and they define the scope clearly. The only negative factor is that you need to do the keyword research for them, which could double your writing time unless you're experienced. That said it's almost \$30 per page, which is a good price... depending on page length, of course.

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Job 5: Need to create a FREE report

Budget: \$100

I have quite a bit of research and content already. I also have a sample of a report for something else. I am looking for 9-15 pages in length. The report is to spotlight the <problem solved by the business> and lead the person to a consultation with me to evaluate their needs. Additionally, I will be using this FREE REPORT on a dedicated page as an opt-in and to generate future leads. Once I have several people that have expressed interest and opted in then I may invite them to a conference call or a webinar for me to discuss further. Please include your Skype ID, Country, and Time Zone to discuss the project if needed.

I am looking for someone with experience in this type of work and with a history of creating these reports in the past. Please submit examples of work you have completed. I may verify that you in fact did the work. I am looking for a fixed price for this project to be completed. I understand that you may need to discuss further once my other requirements have been met.

### **A good bid/application with one very loud alarm bell.**

Another good employer. The scope and requirements are clearly stated and the fact that there's actual contact by conference call means they're serious about getting high-quality work.

"9-15 pages" could be a problem, though: what kind of pages? Some ebooks have as few as 200 words per page; letter or A4 format contains around 500, depending on typeface and other factors. That means anything from 1,800 words (equivalent to 3-4 articles at \$25+ each) to 7,500 words (equivalent to 15 articles at just over \$6 each).

There are two phrases I particularly liked: "I may verify that you in fact did the work" – looks like he's been burned before, which will actually work to your advantage as an honest, ethical half-hogger – and "I understand that you may need to discuss further", which shows the employer understands the writing process and the need for clear goals better than most. I'd definitely investigate this further, with a caveat on the length of the work.

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Job 6: Advertising agency web site copy

Budget: \$150

We need someone to write copy for an online advertising agency. About 3 pages. Candidate should have experience in writing for a marketing or advertising agency.

### **Priority application!**

As an agency, they obviously understand the value of good copy and are willing to pay appropriately for it (although the number of pages might change, given their use of “about”). Assuming you have the experience, this is a no-brainer: the pay’s great, the work’s great and an agency is a wonderful contact for future contracts if you over-deliver. Any of their clients could ask “Who did your web site?” so make sure you over-deliver and that they remember your name!

Job 7: Professional eBook Writer for a New Product

Budget: \$200

We are looking for a professional ebook writer for a new product. We will work with you on the project in writing the content. Please provide previous ebook sample work.

### **Definitely interesting, with an alarm bell.**

There’s hardly any detail, so you’d need to hammer out the requirements *very* carefully before you start work: this kind of vagueness sets off the “scope creep” alarm. On the upside, the employer will work with you on the content, which generally means less research and an easier job. I’d want more information on the size of the project before agreeing a price or timeline but it’s definitely got potential.

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Job 8: Copywriting – Direct Response Copywriter

Budget: \$1,000

Looking for a proficient direct marketing copywriter. Must have experience writing to sell products online and/or offline.

Requirements:

Have heard of <the subject matter> before.

Must be able to write clearly and persuasively.

Must be great at incorporating story and using simple language.

Ideal writing level is around 6th grade (this is not written for children, just needs to be that simple and clear).

Must be able to research and work independently.

Must be able to meet deadlines.

Please no literary or academic types – it's not appropriate for this style of work.

To be considered, please send at least 3 samples of real campaigns along with their results (conversion rate, opt-in, etc). If you're good and interested, I have virtually unlimited work.

### **Definitely interesting with two alarm bells.**

The budget's nice, it's obvious the employer's a professional, and they've got their criteria nailed down tight. Their request for actual conversion stats from previous work means they won't put up with any amateurs: this one's going to be very demanding on quality.

There are two potential difficulties, though. Firstly, they need you to meet deadlines: as a half-hogger you may not be able to control your schedule enough to promise them this. There's a workaround, though. If they are willing to send you work requirements an agreed amount of time before each deadline, you'll have breathing room to fit them in. Secondly, did you notice there's absolutely no information about the size of the project?

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Job 9: Looking for a great and persuasive copywriter

Budget: \$700

I need someone to write a great and converting copy for the whole web site (between 10 and 20 pages – I will give you the details about the product's benefits later)... in the way that makes an already phenomenal product convert better.

The product has great potential. However I need somebody to put this potential in words that will convert. I need you to be able to write in the way that it's engaging for the visitors. So they want to read more, watch more videos about this product and eventually feel that they have to have this product.

Question:

1. Can you do this in 3 – 5 days from start?
2. Are you available via email and Skype?
3. Could you show me some samples/web sites of your work?

### **Very interesting, with several alarm bells.**

The fact that it's a new product explains the large budget: the employer is willing to invest in high-quality copy as part of their overall product investment. The time constraint could be a serious problem for a half-hogger, given that 20 pages (of indeterminate length) are needed in 3 days – always assume the worst possible situation.

There are also two other, less obvious alarms: (a) they sound like they know what they want but, if you read between the lines, they're not a marketing professional and (b) they want Skype contact.

The first could cause friction if their expectations are based on the wrong ideas. You could end up with bad feedback because your work "didn't bring in the business anticipated" – you'll have to put in extra work managing their expectations and being the expert (even if you're a newbie).

The second isn't normally a worry but look at the passion in their job text: they're very excited about this and that excitement could overflow into your Skype phone in the form of constant adjustments, new ideas, changes to the requirements and so on. Be *very* careful when you define the scope of the job.

## The ups and downs of direct sales

For freelancers looking to maximise their short-term earnings rather than going the residual income route, direct sales or “writing on demand” is the ideal solution.

Direct work includes all the bidding site jobs, of course, but can also be work garnered from regular clients, job listings, article marketplaces and so on.

Like all forms of freelancing, direct work has its share of advantages and disadvantages:

### Advantages

- You get paid more

Probably the biggest advantage of direct work is that the pay is generally a lot better than any other form of content writing. Apart from those who pay crap and get crap in return, employers looking for content to their specification are willing to pay more to get high-quality output by a given deadline.

- You don't pay any fees

Apart from the bidding sites, there are no fees when the client pays you. There's no middle-man taking his cut, so you earn the exact amount promised. The exception to this is employers who use online payment systems like PayPal, where there's a small “handling” fee (which you also have to fork out if you use the bidding sites, so it's not really a loss).

- You're seen as a professional

It is by no means true that bidding-site writers are amateurs: there are some exceptionally talented individuals who use these sites because they like to work that way. However, it *is* true that bidding-site writers are frequently *seen* as amateurs unless they have a really good profile. “True” direct-to-client work (i.e. not via a site) is viewed as more professional and classier than a job picked up by bidding.

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- You build relationships and a client base

By working in direct contact with a client, you greatly increase your chances of getting follow-up work. They know who you are, they know what to expect and, with time, they know they can trust you to deliver and be flexible if they have a problem or an urgent need. From a personal point of view, over 60% of my workload comes from regular direct clients.

- You benefit from word of mouth

With direct work you're building a relationship that can produce "natural marketing" effects for you. Every happy client who works directly with you could go away and tell their colleagues, partners and other people in their network (or on the site) about your services. That's invaluable.

- You get better feedback

It's much easier to get better at what you do if you get good feedback. The bidding sites do this pretty well but asking a "real" direct client for their opinion or testimonial can give you invaluable insight into the quality of your work and relationship. This is especially true once you've built trust with a client and they know they can speak freely without offending you.

### Disadvantages

- You commit to a contract

Every direct-to-client job is a contract, whether it's written or just verbal. As a half-hogger, this is especially important: you *have* to deliver or you're in breach. You must make sure you can fit the work into your schedule or you risk not only your reputation but also legal proceedings (in extreme cases).

- You only get paid once

Direct work doesn't produce residual income. You get paid for the job and that's it. No more. Unless you can convert the client into a regular customer, you're not going to earn anything extra.

- You're expected to be a professional

Clients generally pay more for direct work and they expect commensurate levels of professionalism and quality. Flaking out in the middle of a contract,

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producing rubbish or being egotistical is not acceptable. They want high-quality work from a serious, professional writer: make sure they get it.

- You have to work to deadlines

Half-hoggers with “unusual” schedules need to be triply careful with direct work. The employer doesn’t care if your kid is sick, you feel a bit ill, your gran’s come to visit or the sink’s blocked: they want their job finished by the deadline, as agreed. If you can’t do it, you’ll suffer the consequences – both financially and by the effect on your reputation.

- You don’t choose the work or how you do it

Direct clients know what they want and they expect to get it. You’re writing to order, so follow orders: you’ll have little room for creative flourishes, your own personality or innovative ideas unless the client specifically wants them. You must follow their instructions and guidelines to the letter.

- You can get pigeonholed

An unexpected result of direct work can be pigeonholing. For example, you may like to write about entertainment and fashion but you take a job about home renovation because it pays well. You do your research and produce quality content. The client is happy and sends more work, which you do. He or she also recommends you to a colleague, who asks you to write about loft conversions. Over time, the fact that you’re writing about property somehow becomes your expert subject... and all your new clients want the same. You’ve been pigeonholed.

- You have to keep hunting for work

Most direct jobs are one-off contracts. This isn’t always the case but, unless you can convert clients into regular customers, you constantly have to search for new contracts to keep your work schedule filled.

## Part 5: Working for Yourself

The previous section assumed that your half-hog career would rely on clients to provide work. However, thanks to the wonders of Internet marketing, there's another option.

### You can be a **freelancer** without any clients

Sounds crazy, doesn't it? How on earth can you run a business without any clients? Easy. You use a middleman... or rather, a site.

By putting your work on display for the entire population of the Internet, you can earn revenue from visitors. There are three main methods of achieving this no-client income:

- Revenue share
- Advertising revenue
- Marketplace sales

The first two are very similar, in that they rely on third-party revenue. The last is similar to direct-to-client work with the main difference being that there is no *specific* client.

Before we look at the different ways to work for yourself, it's important that you have an understanding of Internet advertising.

### Internet advertising

Anyone who's been online for more than a few days will be familiar with the almost ubiquitous displays of text adverts, graphical adverts, Flash-based billboards and other methods used by marketers to present their offers.

Revenue-generating online advertising breaks down into a few simple categories, primarily paid space and PPC (Pay Per Click). Of the two, paid space generates the best returns but requires a very popular, high-traffic site. Half-hoggers are unlikely to be able to sell space on their web sites or blogs to

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advertisers because no marketing means lower traffic and therefore less advertiser interest.

PPC advertising is most familiar in the form of Google's AdSense program, which works roughly like this:

- Advertisers 'buy' keywords relevant to their service or product
- Publishers sign up to the program to display ads
- Google distributes adverts to appropriate sites
- Visitors click the adverts which interest them
- For every click, Google pays the publisher an amount relative to the value of the keyword 'bought'

In practical terms, AdSense ads appear on pages talking about their subject and earn the displaying site revenue for click-throughs. For example, if you publish a site about sailing and use plenty of appropriate keywords, adverts from sailing suppliers, clubs, magazines and other sailing-oriented businesses will appear. Every time a visitor clicks an ad, you earn a few cents.

### **Revenue share sites**

The basic premise of "rev share" is that you write content for an existing, high-traffic site and get paid a sum of money every month, depending on how popular your articles are.

All revenue share sites use their own methods to determine pay, so always check the terms and conditions of sites that interest you to find out exactly how your earnings will be calculated.

### **Choosing a revenue share host**

Although revenue share sites all pay relatively little per article when compared to direct sales, there are significant differences of which you should be aware.

Firstly and most importantly, check the site's reward structure: some pay per view, others pay per ad click and yet others have their own system. More commercial content tends to do better on ad clicks, since the visitors are looking for solutions and are primed to buy (or at least look at suppliers), whereas topical content tends to do better on views. Favour a site with the model that works best for your subject niche.

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You should also check how long the site has been around. Not only is this reassuring for reliability but it also gives an indication of the *stability* of the payment system. New sites with no publication partners often go for a per-view system but, once they start attracting large numbers of visitors, many find the model unsustainable. This is because their ad revenue falls behind the number of views per article and results in a change of terms: they switch to the ad revenue model and writers' earnings are affected.

Speaking of longevity, the older sites tend to have a better PR (Page Rank<sup>44</sup>) than their younger brethren. Given that this is a major factor in determining search engine ranking, higher PR sites<sup>45</sup> usually get more visitors and your work there is more likely to appear high up in search results.

There's also the question of the average number of views per article. Is it better to write on a site that gets 250,000 visitors<sup>46</sup> a month or one that gets 3 million visitors? Well, that depends: the obvious choice is the latter but if it has PR2 (low) and a million general interest articles compared to the former site's PR7 (high) and 50,000 specialist articles, what then? The average views per article, the relative ease with which they can be found by the average reader and specialised forums that include your niche count for a lot. Try a few searches yourself and see how the available sites compare for your subject(s).

The biggest concern for most rev share writers is optimising income. Since these sites pay so little (per article, in the short term), it's worth looking at what options they provide for increasing your returns on the time you've invested in creating content. There are two things to consider here.

The first is whether the site offers secondary income options. While some rev share hosts work purely on a per-view or per-click model, others have expanded to include an on-site marketplace (or "assignments") system or affiliate links through which you can earn more cash.

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<sup>44</sup> Page Rank is a Google system that allocates a value (from zero to nine) to every site on the Internet. The system is incredibly complicated but basically comes down to this: a higher PR number means the site is more popular and therefore has more visitors, influence, etc. Look it up on Wikipedia.org if you'd like to learn more about Page Ranks.

<sup>45</sup> You can check PR on a variety of sites such as [www.prchecker.info](http://www.prchecker.info) and [www.webprrank.com](http://www.webprrank.com).

<sup>46</sup> Remember, you can check site traffic on [www.compete.com](http://www.compete.com).

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Marketplace assignments are special offers for site members to write on particular subjects (usually seasonal, topical or sponsored) and earn a little extra. Payments range widely, though they mostly fall into the \$1-\$10 range. If you're good at writing on demand, they can significantly enhance your earnings.

Affiliate links, where available, are usually limited to corporate partners carefully selected by the rev share site owners. Writers can earn a little extra from affiliate accounts with well-known suppliers like Amazon and eBay<sup>47</sup> by including links appropriate to their rev share content. For example, if your article is a list of the ten best films of the year, you can include sales links that earn you a little commission if the reader orders one of the DVDs you mentioned by clicking through to the retailer from your content.

The second consideration is on-site reputation. Some revenue share sites reward their long-term contributors by awarding a rating (the naming convention for which is individual to each site) dependent on quality, popularity or simply on the amount of content the contributor produces. As the writer's reputation increases, so do their earnings. If you intend to run your half-hog career purely (or primarily) on rev share sites, this kind of system is obviously a big advantage. Note that reputation systems are *only* implemented on sites that pay per view or have their own bespoke rewards program.

To sum up, here's your revenue share checklist:

- Check that the rewards system suits your niche/content
- Check how long the site's been running
- Check the site's PR
- Check traffic stats for the site
- Check for secondary earning systems
- Check for a reputation system

### **The ups and downs of revenue share**

In much the same way as direct work, revenue share comes with certain pros and cons. You should consider these carefully before choosing how you want to work.

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<sup>47</sup> [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com), respectively.

## Going The Half Hog

### Advantages

- Your income is residual

Possibly the most important benefit of rev share sites is that any income generated is residual. Instead of being paid a one-off amount for the work, your content stays on display for as long as the site exists, earning money for every view or click, every day. Write once, earn for years.

- You're not tied to a schedule

As a half-hogger, any job that gives you flexibility in your working schedule is a bonus. With rev share, you write whenever you want: there is no client breathing down your neck or setting deadlines.

- You can write whatever you want

Most rev share sites allow content on almost any subject. This means that you can write about anything and still generate income. No set subjects and no research (unless you want to).

- You can get away with lower quality

I know rev share site owners will scream when they read that but it's true. An individual client is almost always more demanding when it comes to quality than a site with editors grinding through hundreds of articles every day. Quality is still high but imperfect English sneaks through the gaps a lot easier.

- You can write creatively

Most rev share sites have a "creative writing" category. If you're not writing novels (yet) but don't enjoy non-fiction, this is a real boon. Poets, especially, can find a paid outlet for their bubbling emotions.

- You can include affiliate earnings

Not always true, admittedly, and many sites limit the options to avoid abuse by "black hat" SEO methods for affiliate marketing. However, some sites allow "whitelisted" affiliate links in their content, which means you can earn for your articles *and* earn on affiliate sales (assuming you have an account with the affiliated company).

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- You can build reputation

If you're too frightened to apply for direct work straight away or have no portfolio to show, the rev share sites are a great way to build samples and reputation.

- You don't have to market

The big revenue share sites have massive amounts of traffic and high ranking in the search engines. This means that you don't need to do any work to promote your articles: the site does it for you.

- You can re-use the content

Most rev share sites offer non-exclusive publication of your work, so you can post the same thing on several sites. Bear in mind the negative effects on Google searches and unique publishing income, though (see below).

- You can get upfront payments

Several of the larger article directories offer assignments or have an in-house marketplace where particularly popular subjects and individual requests are posted. By writing on demand to a predetermined title, you can increase your earnings.

### Disadvantages

Unfortunately, like everything else, this type of work has its share (excuse the pun) of disadvantages as well:

- Your income is extremely low at first

Probably the biggest negative of rev share is the pitiful earnings. Most articles earn only a few cents a month, especially if you're not using SEO techniques to improve the chances of getting views.

- You need a vast portfolio to earn

The obvious result of low earnings is that you need to produce an enormous amount of content. With each article bringing in a little income every month, you'll need a few hundred (or thousand) to generate enough money to compete with short-term, direct earnings.

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- You need to be self-motivated

There's no client setting deadlines and no one pushing you to produce content, so you'll need to get your butt into gear all by yourself.

- Your choice of subjects is important

More popular subjects earn more money but they tend to be topical, whereas evergreen content will earn better over time. Your choice of subjects can affect your earnings enormously. On top of that, you'll have to come up with the subjects yourself which can be a strain for less creative individuals.

- You need to consider SEO

Revenue share articles need extra consideration for SEO (see page 54). Since your income depends on traffic to your content, you need to spend time researching and including the right keywords to make sure your articles rank as high as possible on the search engines. You could just rely on the site's PR but you'll be selling yourself short.

- You have to maintain productivity

Many rev share sites require that you maintain a presence to keep earning. Although most of them only ask that you log in once every month or three, some have stricter criteria to ensure that their writers are active and interested. Remember to check the terms and conditions before you commit!

- Your lack of marketing is a negative

Although the sites have lots of traffic and high search ranking, the fact that you're not doing your own, additional marketing for your content is a definite negative: you're relying on the site's reputation to generate interest in your work. Some articles can get as few as a half-dozen hits per month unless you actively promote them somewhere. Of course, this goes with the territory as a half-hogger.

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- Google's algorithm hates article directories

Changes in Google's ranking algorithms hit the article directories – which constitute the majority of rev share sites – very hard. Some studies showed that rankings after the Panda update were down by over 75%, with commensurate drops in traffic. This undoubtedly has a negative effect on earnings for a large number of writers.

- Your work is no longer unpublished

Although this is of less importance to freelancers, it can be a real shame if you write an astoundingly popular piece without realising it. Once it's been published on a rev share site, you've lost the possibility of selling it for a massive amount of money (to a magazine, for example) as a unique piece of work. The same goes for fiction: most magazines pay *significantly less* for stories that are already published elsewhere. Don't waste your best work!

### Revenue share versus direct work

Considering all the advantages and disadvantages of revenue share outlined above, many half-hoggers face a dilemma: do you opt for rev share or for direct work?

Two main factors affect this decision: your individual cash flow needs and the reliability of the site. A third governing factor is your schedule and the amount of time you can commit to your freelance writing.

- Cash flow

Since revenue share payment per article is much lower than direct work in the short term, half-hoggers looking for a quick increase in their income are often disappointed by the returns.

The exception to this is for writers who cover topical, short-lived subjects that generate a lot of interest and therefore a lot of views or ad clicks.

On the positive side, residual income is one of the best ways to earn long-term. By writing once and earning for years, you can maximise the cash potential of every word.

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- Site reliability

Writing for rev share sites means that you're relying on the site's consistency, stability and traffic-generating ability.

At any time in the future, the site could disappear, change its earning system or suffer from low traffic: as a content producer, you have no control over this and just have to accept the consequences to your earnings. If you rely on a single host, you could suddenly find yourself with no income. You could even lose the exclusive publication rights to all your work, depending on the site's terms and conditions.

On the positive side, the big sites have been around for years and show no signs of slowing down. Although many have changed their revenue model over time, payments are reliable and consistent.

- Your schedule

If you have very little time to commit to your half-hog career, rev share can be a real boon: you can sit down and write whenever you have a moment, with no pressure and no deadlines.

If you can guarantee a certain number of hours every week or month and are good at managing your money, direct sales can often outstretch rev share: by saving or investing the higher, direct income from regular clients, you can generate your own residual income without relying on a rev share site's management.

All in all, revenue share or direct writing comes down to personal choice. The income is lower from rev share in the short term but the work is much less stressful and far more flexible. In the long term, per-article earnings will almost always outstretch those from direct work.

Revenue share is a long-term prospect that requires a large stock of content or very popular articles to generate a decent income. If you have more hours available than you have direct work (and the task of searching for work) to fill them, it's worth creating some rev share content to supplement your income and keep your hand in.

The best tip for half-hoggers going the revenue share route is to create predominantly evergreen content – articles which have a very long useful

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lifespan and remain interesting for years (or even decades) rather than months. Although the earnings from such work are lower on average per month, their longevity more than makes up for fewer hits.

Mathematically, this makes sense. As a real-life example, take two articles I wrote for HubPages in 2009. The first was about unusual calendars on sale; it racked up around 2,000 hits in a couple of months then almost completely stopped getting traffic. The second was an evergreen article about French comedies; it averages about a thousand views every month with a total of over 20,000 hits two years later. It's obvious which one earns more in the long run.

### Marketplace sales

Frequently overlooked by many freelancers because there aren't many places to do it, selling articles in a marketplace can generate enough revenue to earn a very good part-time wage. Some writers even operate a full-time business with this model.

Marketplace sales are a sort of half-way solution, somewhere between revenue share and direct-to-client work. Like revenue share, you can write to your own deadlines and focus on your own subjects; like direct work you can write to pre-determined titles or target certain buyers to improve your sales.

The only site I know that does this is Constant Content.<sup>48</sup>

Here's how the system works:

- You write articles
- You decide what rights to sell
- You set prices for each "rights level"<sup>49</sup>
- You put them in the marketplace
- Buyers browse and purchase content of interest to them
- The site takes a cut and pays you the rest

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<sup>48</sup> [www.constant-content.com](http://www.constant-content.com)

<sup>49</sup> Constant Content uses three "rights levels" to determine how the buyer can use your work. "Usage" rights allow them to publish the work as-is, with your byline and no changes except formatting and adding links. "Unique" rights are the same except that the buyer is the *only* person allowed to use the article – the content is removed from the marketplace afterwards. "Full" rights sells the work to the buyer in its entirety: they become its owner and may publish it under their own name, make changes or do whatever they want to it.

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It's a simple model that works effectively, profiting both you and the site. Thanks to the higher prices commanded by quality work, the site can afford to employ editors who manually check articles to ensure they're up to scratch, thus keeping value and quality high for the buyer.

Buyers can put out public requests for particular subjects which give a much higher probability of a sale and defined price ranges so that you can decide whether it's worth your time.

Buyers can also send private requests to particular writers, so it's worth the extra time and effort to woo clients by showing your expertise and reliability.

Let's look at the advantages and disadvantages of the marketplace system. As you'll quickly see, for the most part they're a combination of direct sales and revenue share:

### Advantages

- You get paid more

Much like direct work, marketplace pay per article is generally a lot better than many forms of content writing, especially revenue share.

- You can set your own prices

If you're a real expert in a particular field, you can set prices that reflect your knowledge. Alternatively, you can price your work to sell quickly and earn less (but hopefully with more frequent sales).

- You're not tied to a schedule

In the same way as rev share, you can write whenever you want. As a half-hogger that's a real bonus, especially if your availability is intermittent.

- You can write whatever you want

Again just like rev share, marketplace writing can be about almost any subject. This means that you can write about anything (unless you want to respond to buyer requests) and still generate income, though lower-interest subjects are harder to sell.

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- You don't have to market (as much)

Buyers know where the marketplace is and they know what they're looking for. You'll need to choose your article keywords (for the site search, not necessarily the content) carefully to make sure potential buyers can find your work, but you don't have to publicise yourself.

- You're automatically advertising for clients

By selling articles in a marketplace, you're showing potential clients (who are willing to pay well) the quality of your work. Although it may seem odd, an article marketplace can be a great way to pick up one-off or even regular jobs.

### Disadvantages

- Your income is erratic

Probably the biggest negative of marketplace writing is the uncertainty: there are no guarantees that your work will sell, even if you're responding to buyer requests. Articles can sit on display for months (or even years) without success.

- You can't avoid "usage" rights

This is specifically a Constant Content issue: all articles posted on the site must have "usage" (i.e. non-exclusive) rights for sale. While this means any article can earn from repeated sales, the pay is lower and, unless you're producing very popular, general content, it can put a serious dent in your exclusive-rights sales. Once the "usage" rights are sold, the higher-price exclusive sale is lost. The workaround is to set both "usage" and "unique" or "full rights" prices to the same value.

- You need a sizeable collection and regular output

Since you can't guarantee sales, the only way to generate a steady income is to ensure you maintain your work output. By constantly adding to your marketplace portfolio – either by spreading your subjects wider or producing more work in a particular niche – you increase the chances of selling something.

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- Your choice of subjects is important

More popular subjects sell quicker whereas evergreen content tends to command higher prices. Your choice of subjects can affect your earnings enormously. On top of that, you'll have to come up with the subjects yourself which can be a strain for the less creative half-hogger.

- Your risk increases the more you focus your output

Writers who produce content for very specific niches have to be careful: if demand for their work is negligible, they won't sell anything. Keep an eye on the site's lists of popular topics and what's selling.

- You need to be self-motivated

In the same way as revenue share, there's no client setting deadlines and no one pushing you to produce content, so you'll need to motivate yourself to keep working.

- You're expected to be professional

Marketplace buyers pay well for articles and they expect commensurate levels of professionalism and quality. Producing rubbish is not acceptable and won't get past the on-site editors. They want high-quality work from a serious, professional writer: make sure they get it.

## Monetising sites

Monetising (a horrible buzzword that simplifies typing "implementing a range of revenue-generating possibilities on") a blog or web site generates income in much the same way as for the owners of revenue share sites.

For the majority of mid-traffic sites (several hundred or several thousand visitors per month), this means implementing an advertising program like Google's AdSense, then waiting for visitors to click on the ads.

Before we get into the details of the different methods, it's important to note that the vast majority of half-hoggers won't earn any significant income from monetising. Virtually all forms of monetising rely on having a lot of traffic, which in turn relies on marketing the site to keep it in the public eye.

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Unless you're lucky enough to have a popular site, your earnings from monetising will be extremely low. However, there's no reason you shouldn't do it anyway: it costs very little time or effort and a few extra pennies are always welcome!

### Advertising programs

Unless your site has so much traffic you don't know what to do with it, it's unlikely you'll be able to sell space to advertisers. Consequently, you need to find other ways to earn by monetising.

The most common approach is to sign up to an advertising program. These days, most programs run "contextual" ads: they try to determine what your site is about and display appropriate adverts that should interest your visitors. There are a few exceptions, though.

Of all the programs, the best known is Google's AdSense. Unfortunately, it's also the program with the toughest entry criteria: sites must not be of certain types, must have unique content, must have been around for at least six months, must be active... the list is pretty long.<sup>50</sup>

In exchange for all that, accepted sites become part of one of the biggest ad programs in the world with reliable payments, statistics, analysis tools and a lot of other benefits.

If you decide to use their program, you must be very careful not to cross Google. They suspend AdSense accounts (and all your current earnings) very quickly if they spot any kind of malfeasance, including asking your friends to click on your ads. Read their rules and abide by them or you'll lose out. They're very good at tracking down dodgy stuff, believe me.

If your site doesn't qualify for AdSense membership or you just don't want Google's ads, there are literally dozens of alternatives<sup>51</sup> operating at any given time. With the advertising industry being what it is (i.e. erratic and volatile), it's

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<sup>50</sup> For a full list of AdSense policies and criteria, visit

[https://www.google.com/adsense/policies?hl=en\\_US](https://www.google.com/adsense/policies?hl=en_US) and

[https://www.google.com/adsense/localized-terms?hl=en\\_US](https://www.google.com/adsense/localized-terms?hl=en_US). See, I told you it was tough!

<sup>51</sup> For a helpful list of alternative ad programs, visit [www.adsensealternatives.org](http://www.adsensealternatives.org) or [www.rosswalker.co.uk/adsense\\_top10](http://www.rosswalker.co.uk/adsense_top10).

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always best to research your options before committing to any particular system.

### **Affiliate programs**

Another branch of independent income that doesn't need a specific client is affiliate marketing. What? *Marketing?*

Yes, marketing. I mention it here because it's something you can easily put on your web site or blog at no cost and just leave there, hoping someone wants it enough to click it.

Affiliate marketing is one of the biggest potential earners on the Internet, especially if you're good at it. Take a look at Clickbank<sup>52</sup> if you want to include affiliate links.

### **Sponsored blogging**

Back when paid-per-post blogging sites still existed, sponsored blogging wasn't needed: budding writers would open an account on sites like the now-defunct Today.com and get paid a few dollars for every post they made, plus per-view revenue on top.

However, since the paid blogging bubble burst, opportunities like that have disappeared. They're simply not financially viable in the modern online market, so blogging for money has been reduced primarily to revenue share<sup>53</sup> and monetising your own domain.

Sponsored blog posts rose out of the ashes of paid blogging: advertisers pay bloggers who meet their criteria to write an entry about whatever product or service they're offering.

The pay and frequency of offers vary a great deal but are usually dependent on the hosting blog's Page Rank and whether the blog is self-hosted or using one of the free services, such as Blogger or WordPress.<sup>54</sup>

While some writers love blogging and maintain very popular sites, sponsored blogging is not often a viable option for a half-hogger. This is because you're

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<sup>52</sup> [www.clickbank.com](http://www.clickbank.com)

<sup>53</sup> Revenue share blogging is available on many sites, such as [www.orble.com](http://www.orble.com) and [worldblogosphere.com](http://worldblogosphere.com).

<sup>54</sup> [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and [wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com), respectively.

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unlikely to have a high-traffic, popular blog to post on, since you're concentrating your efforts elsewhere and doing the least possible amount of marketing.

Having said that:

- You don't need a Page Rank to qualify

You can pick up work even with a Google Page Rank of zero. Provided your blog has been around for a few months and has regular posts, you're fine: the important, qualifying criteria are that the blog is owned by you and that it's been around for long enough that the sponsor can be sure it won't evaporate in a matter of days.

- You don't need to compromise your values

Virtually all the sponsored post offerings on legitimate sites ask for entries that are either neutral or as unbiased as possible. Sponsorship should not (and in my opinion *must* not) compromise your integrity. Thankfully, the majority of sponsors understand this and mostly just want extra traffic. They will ask you to include links to their site and write about a general subject.

- The pay is pretty good

On average, a PR0 (Page Rank zero) blog post pays a dollar or two for 250 words or so. That's pretty low pay for freelance writing but it's a nice bonus for a bit of typing. Higher-ranked blogs earn a lot more: a PR2 (Page Rank two) site can get \$5 or \$10 for the same post and higher PRs can earn very nice amounts indeed.

- Disclosure of sponsorship is always permitted

Anyone saying otherwise is not dealing honestly: though in some cases, where no disclosure is needed, it should always be *permitted*. It's generally best to mention that it's a sponsored post, too (if it's promotional in nature) for the sake of your reputation and transparent disclosure.

- You can always refuse

If you don't like the way the sponsorship is worded, if it isn't suitable content for your blog or if you just happen to hate the company, you are

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allowed to refuse. All legitimate sponsorship sites allow refusal without compromising future offers. Most will ask why you're refusing so they can track dodgy advertisers.

- It's not constant income

Sponsored post offers appear pretty randomly. You'll have to keep an eye on your personal offers and most sites run a "grab bag" of general post subjects that are available if you qualify and claim them quick enough.

If you're lucky enough to have a popular blog, you can pick up sponsorship on sites like ebuzzing, SocialSpark, Smorty, PayPerPost and Blogsvetise<sup>55</sup>. Bear in mind that you may have to lay some of your principles on the line if you're expected to rave about something unfamiliar or not to disclose that the post is sponsored. The choice is yours.

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<sup>55</sup> [www.ebuzzing.co.uk](http://www.ebuzzing.co.uk), [socialspark.com](http://socialspark.com), [www.smorty.com](http://www.smorty.com), [payperpost.com](http://payperpost.com) and [www.blogsvetise.com](http://www.blogsvetise.com), respectively.

## Part 6: Editing and Proofreading

Up to now, I've been talking about half-hog writing: producing content in a variety of ways. The other side of that coin is editing and proofreading.

The funny thing about editing and proofreading is that most people who want to get into it are like amateur singers. They're popular at the local karaoke and, hey, singing professionally is the same thing, right?

The same goes for editing and proofreading. Most people think that because they can spot spelling mistakes and correct bad grammar, they'd make great editors, right?

Not necessarily.

Editing and proofreading are skills that require a certain state of mind and a good deal of experience. From a personal point of view, I'm still learning a lot after years of editing and proofing everything from online magazines to press releases to non-fiction for publication.

### Traditional editing and proofreading

An editor is like someone who grinds peanuts to make smooth peanut butter: it's easier to spread than the crunchy stuff, even though it contains the same nutrients and tastes just as good. It hurts your teeth less, too. Every writer should have a good editor to flatten their peanuts!

In a nutshell (excuse the pun), an editor's job is to make sure that every piece says what it means and means what it says.

Traditionally, the publication process went like this:

- The writer created content on the desired subject.
- The editor was responsible for checking all the facts and sorting out the mistakes in a writer's work, as well as managing the flow; their goal was the 5 C's – clear, correct, concise, complete and consistent copy.
- Whether the editor corrected the mistakes or sent the piece back to the writer for adjustment depended on the publisher's individual process.

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- Once it passed the editing stage, work went for proofing; the proofreader saw the *final product*, complete with page numbers, images and everything else.
- The proofer’s job was to spot any mistakes before the copy was finally pressed: they were the movie continuity people of the writing world, who constantly kept their eyes on the background scenery as well as the words.

### Online editing and proofreading

Editing is one of those job descriptions that has become very vague with the endless changes in publication procedures and online content creation. You’ll notice at least four different uses of the word “editor” in your hunt for half-hog work:

1. An editor in the Perry White vein – the man who sits in the *Daily Planet* office and decides exactly what makes it into print. In this sense, the editor is the embodiment of the publication’s spirit: he or she guides the overall direction and tone of the articles, manages the team of sub-editors and writers, and is omnipotent within the pages produced. In traditional terms, this is actually an “Editor-in-Chief” (or even “Proprietor”) position.
2. An editor as a proofreader and checker – the least “powerful” position, as the job simply involves verifying the accuracy of articles before publication. That’s not to say the job is simple – it’s not. Facts must be checked, grammar and spelling corrected, the tone brought into line with the publication’s spirit and so on. This position is more accurately called “copyeditor”, as the work involves verifying copy (written material). It usually involves some rewriting. In traditional terms, this is an “Editor” position.
3. An editor who straddles these two jobs. Many employers want a freelancer to do a bit of everything as an editor. They expect you to come up with creative ideas, to produce written copy, to verify the accuracy of other people’s work, to publish content and even to manage other writers’ deadlines in line with the publication’s schedule. This position doesn’t really have a traditional equivalent (apart from “dogsbody”, “overworked” and other adjectives used to

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describe the person doing it), though many traditional editors also wrote some copy. Where did you think “editorials” came from?

4. An editor as a content creator. This usage stems from editors who write editorials and is severely misused on the bidding sites. From personal experience, around one in every three editing jobs posted on those sites wants a writer.

Online proofreading is rapidly changing to become a pre-editing check for errors while editing is evolving to become the final stage before publication, when all the picky details are checked. Traditional proofreading still exists and is usually called “proofreading” as well, which confuses matters.

As a half-hogger, it’s absolutely essential to clarify exactly *which type of editor* a client needs.

For example, if you set your rates at a normal level for a No.2 position and the employer expects a No.3 job, you’re going to be terribly underpaid for almost everything you do. Your limited time resources as a half-hogger also mean you’ll risk not being able to deliver on schedule, which can cost you money and damage your reputation.

The important thing here is, as always, to get a proper description of the job. Most people posting work on freelance sites and job listings don’t really know what they want or don’t know how to express it. You must bear this in mind when negotiating terms and pay.

### Half-hog tips for editing and proofreading

Here are a few tips for making sure you don’t get caught short if you’re building a career as a half-hog editor or proofer:

- If there’s time and you can talk with the employer before applying, ask them to clarify *exactly* what the role’s responsibilities are.
- Don’t state a single rate: whether you’re bidding or putting together a price list for your own blog/site, it’s alright to state a *basic rate* and make it clear that it depends on the job’s requirements.

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- Set a per-word rate (usually for 100 or 1,000 words): editing/proofing rates per page, line or article do not take into account page size, font size, etc.<sup>56</sup>
- Be clear (in communications, in your profile, on your blog/site) about what you can do and how you see separate roles: it's quite acceptable to list editing, proofreading, copyediting and any other facets separately (for example, whether you include writing editorials in your role as an editor).
- Set a rate for each separate role but be willing to negotiate on combinations.
- Make sure you get written details of everything the employer wants before you agree to start, whether the client writes them or you do.
- Be wary of expressions like "any other appropriate tasks" in agreements; they can run rampant through your time and cause terrible problems for half-hoggers.
- Be wary of rewriting: make sure you are *very* clear whether you will or will not rewrite (either whole articles or just phrases); some editors only mark text that needs correcting and expect the writer to deal with it, while others will rewrite in the general style.

The editing job will no doubt continue to change in the future, as will the role of copywriters, proofreaders and just about everyone else involved in publishing, both online and off.

Remember: it's *always* worth clarifying what a client means when they ask for an editor. Keep your wits about you and make sure you don't get caught out!

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<sup>56</sup> Yes, some clients will try to pull a fast one by sending you a page typed in a size 8 font with the margins reduced to the bare minimum and claiming it's still a single page. Guard your back!

## The four types of editing

Although there are many variations of editing and every client has their own expectations, the vast majority of work can be broken down into four types.

Note that I'm not talking about jobs with titles like "Fashion Editor" which are often another way of saying "Fashion Writer" – I'm talking about actually editing copy, not producing it.

- Copyediting

Also called "line editing", this is the line by line, sentence by sentence edit. It includes verification of facts and checks for spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalisation, sentence structure and so on. The flow of the text also matters a great deal, especially in larger publications. A good editor will spot text that lurches from subject to subject and help smooth the road by suggesting changes.

- Proofreading

As noted above, this is very similar to copyediting but is performed on the final product, complete with images, page numbers, headers, footers and all the other fun stuff. Although it's a different job, editors often do it.

- Substantive editing

Much like line editing, but the editor actually rewrites parts (or all) of the document. This is a much more involved process as the editor tries to keep the original tone of the piece while correcting it, reshuffling the content, rewording unwieldy phrases and making the writing much better. This kind of work takes time and is much more expensive than a simple read-through to find errors.

- Developmental editing

This is when the editor's in on the work right from the start, working hand in hand with the author to help build a better document. It's usually reserved for very experienced individuals and very large works, such as books, scripts and so on.

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### What skills do I need?

Editors and proofreaders need similar skills, since they're doing similar jobs. Substantive editors need writing skills on top of all those listed below, as they're expected to rewrite content without sending it back to the author for revision.

- A love of language
- Good pattern recognition
- Good organisation and categorisation skills
- Excellent language skills (grammar, spelling and punctuation)
- An excellent vocabulary
- Broad general knowledge
- Good critical thinking
- Attention to detail
- Desire for perfection

From a personal point of view, I believe that a love of language and good critical thinking are the most important. Spelling, grammar and punctuation are less of a concern with modern writing – partly because we frequently use a more conversational style and partly because software helps us spot the mistakes.

Editors don't just correct spelling, they correct *arguments*. They absolutely always want to be right and are expected to spot the holes in a debate or when vital information is missing from a writer's work. They have real trouble walking away from a document when they can see a mistake, no matter how small it is. Most publishers still consider their editors to be the "last line of defence" as they spot legal issues, vagueness, incorrect facts and everything else that could cause trouble for the writer or publisher.

### Large edits

A "large edit" (for our purposes here) is anything that's more than a few pages long. Books, scripts, manuals, large ebooks – anything where there's a great deal of information covering a number of subjects and presenting a lot of information (or a good story).

Large edits need extra skills. Instead of just checking over a short document with one main point, two or three supporting arguments, a counter-argument and a conclusion, the editor needs to take a much wider, more visionary view of the document.

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They need to be able to keep track of where a large document is headed without losing sight of all the details. This is not simple: while you're reading through a long document, it's easy to get carried along and let the vague changes of direction in the text slip past. Focus becomes your main tool.

Novel editing is especially difficult, since future readers are absolutely guaranteed to spot inconsistencies in the story. It's also harder to maintain the intellectual distance needed to edit a novel when you're drawn in by a cracking yarn!

## Part 7: Get Off Your Butt!

In the last hundred pages or so, I've covered everything you need to become a half-hogger. But there's still one thing missing: *you*.

Although I'm not a fan of life coaches, gurus and motivational speakers, there is one thing they say that is absolutely true:

**If you don't get off your butt,  
you WON't achieve anything.**

Freelancing isn't a get-rich-quick scheme. Just like the offline world, the Internet has an economy and that economy follows very similar rules to the bricks-and-mortar world. You won't earn anything for doing nothing.

There are a million reasons why you shouldn't start your freelance career – lack of time, information overload, fear of failure, lack of experience and procrastination, to name a few – but unless you take the first step, you have no chance of success.

I'm pretty sure that if I asked 100 people who want to be freelance writers what's stopping them, the most common response would be "I don't know where to start." Getting started is the toughest part of any new enterprise.

I realise that, even with all the information you've just read, the practicalities of setting up are often daunting so, although there is no definitive "best" way to start your half-hog career, I will offer the following advice:

1. Do some research. Although this book is unique (no one seems to have considered the possibility of freelancing without marketing before), there are a lot of excellent resources on the Internet that can give you insight into the business<sup>57</sup>. They'll talk about marketing *a lot* but that's to be expected. They're not half-hoggers.

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<sup>57</sup> I already mentioned Freelance Writing Jobs ([www.freelancewritinggigs.com](http://www.freelancewritinggigs.com)). About Freelance Writing ([www.aboutfreelancewriting.com](http://www.aboutfreelancewriting.com)), Men With Pens ([menwithpens.ca](http://menwithpens.ca)) and CopyBlogger ([www.copyblogger.com](http://www.copyblogger.com)) are definitely worth a look as well.

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2. Check out the work opportunities. Drop in on the bidding sites and look at the jobs available. Visit a couple of revenue share article directories to see the topics and the quality of their content. Read a few writer profiles. Keep notes of anything interesting you find.
3. Take the first step: decide how you want to earn. Will you go for direct sales or revenue share? Will you work for yourself, volunteer to write for a local charity or pursue that columnist opportunity in the local paper? Pick the one that's right for *you*, not the one peer pressure or some "expert" or book tells you to choose. Once you've made this decision (which you can change later if you discover you don't like it), you're on your way.
4. Pursue the work you want. For the confident writer, this often means applying for jobs direct or through bidding sites. For the less confident, it's usually signing up for a rev share site.
5. Join in. There are loads of great blogs, forums<sup>58</sup> and sites where you can meet and talk (virtually speaking) with other writers. You can start by visiting any of those I've mentioned and following their links... and links from those sites... and so on.
6. Write. You don't have to do it every day but you do have to do it!
7. Find a mentor or an expert. Nobody knows everything about freelancing but if you can find someone who thinks like you and is successful doing what you want to do, contact them via their blog, a forum, social networking or direct email (whichever they're comfortable with). You can't reasonably expect them to mentor you for free but you can hope they'll be friendly enough to answer your questions and perhaps be a sounding-board for your ideas.

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<sup>58</sup> The Half-Hog forums at [www.halfhog.com](http://www.halfhog.com) are absolutely essential, of course!

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### Final words

You did it. You reached the end of the book. As Obi-Wan Kenobi would say: “That’s good. You’ve taken your first step into a larger world.”<sup>59</sup>

With the knowledge and resources I’ve laid out here, there’s nothing to stop you from finding successful part-time work as a writer (or editor). That’s why this book exists: to help aspiring half-hoggers like you get your career off the ground and start earning an income from what you love: writing.

All that remains for me to say is: “Now get your butt in gear... and good luck!”

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<sup>59</sup> Do I *really* have to tell you that’s a quote from *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*?

## Acknowledgements

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Fourthly, a big “Wow!” to Damon Za (also on Elance) for the fab cover design!

## About the author

Spike was born and raised in the UK, studying computers at University in London. After a time working in a variety of jobs, he went to France, where he lived and worked for an enormous American networking company (yes, that one) for over seven years. He returned to the UK recently.

In the past, he’s worked for online magazines as a writer, proofreader and editor; he’s been a CRM expert and the go-to guy for Business Intelligence; he’s worked for charity, private enterprise and the government.

You can follow Spike on his half-hogging site at [www.halfhog.com](http://www.halfhog.com) or on Twitter (@HalfHogNetwork). He’s also a frequent contributor on the Half-Hog Forums, accessible through the main site, where you can ask questions, post jobs, find work and meet with other half-hoggers for a chat!