

FREELANCER'S BUSINESS BULLETIN

August 2004

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Dear Subscriber,

Welcome to the August 2004 issue of Chris Marlow's Freelancer's Business Bulletin (FBB). This month I'm answering questions posed by FBB subscriber Pam Magnuson. A current AWAI student, Pam wanted to know what a copywriter's portfolio should look like and how it should be organized. Here's the answer to these questions, and more:

How to Assemble a Portfolio You Can Present With Confidence

Every new copywriter starts with a "lightweight" portfolio, but there are ways to build it quickly.

My own method was to write free for an organization in return for samples. In my case I wrote the press releases and monthly newsletter for the (now defunct) Oregon Direct Marketing Association.

This not only gave me samples for my portfolio, but it got my name in front of the membership and led to my first actual jobs for Norm Thompson (a local cataloger), Stash Tea, a bank, a landscaper, and other small and mid-size businesses. I also wound up on the Board as Publicity Chairman, which led to business relationships I still earn from these many years later.

Writing for "spec" assignments is another way to build a solid portfolio. Select a potential client you would love to work for and approach them with

the proposal that you'll write a package for free, and if the client likes it well enough to mail it, then you'll get paid.

Require the client to supply you with samples, and get it in writing. It's also a good idea to require feedback on the results of your mailing, so you can write a Case Study to include in your portfolio, as long as the goals were met or something was learned from testing.

Writing sales letters, press releases, brochures or other marketing materials for friends who have businesses is another method for building your portfolio. If the results are good, it can earn you "real" business and/or referrals.

Can you use work that's never been published? Absolutely. Many AWAI students have completed course work that's more extensive and impressive than what's found in many portfolios. Even ad agencies will look at concept ideas that have not been published.

In his fine book "The Well Fed Writer," Peter Bowerman advocates using any document you've ever written that illustrates your ability to write. Materials that are sales-oriented include proposals, PowerPoint presentations, published articles, and more.

Think about all of the things you've written in your life that contain an element of persuasion...such as classified ads, petitions, and oral presentations. Look through the archives of your computer to see what you can come up with. You'll probably find something you can use! It doesn't matter how old it is, as long as the writing is good.

When I first started freelancing I put my samples in a 3-ring binder that had plastic sleeves with a black paper backing. I thought the black paper would help the sample to "pop off" the page. I

didn't have a lot of exotic samples so I felt it best not to carry them in something too jazzy.

Years later I had many "beautiful" packages and I had them laminated on large poster boards so each component could be displayed. It was a dramatic presentation, and required that I have a story to tell about each piece. It worked very well and agencies, as well as corporate marketing managers, responded to the presentation in positive ways.

I also looked at many portfolios while senior copywriter for Rosen/Brown Direct, a well-known Oregon-based direct response agency. Most copywriter portfolios were unassuming, and were simply a vehicle for carrying samples. The writers organized their work in whatever way they felt best, and the agency reviewed the portfolios with an eye only toward writing quality. So the take away is to present a neat, orderly portfolio, but don't sweat the small stuff.

Physical portfolios will come in handy for local business, but you'll want to have pdfs of your best work made, so you can send samples over the Internet. I haven't shown my physical portfolio in years, as I have no local business. But since my business is national and international, it is important that I have pdfs of my work.

This is easy when you're working with a designer who can supply you with the end result. But if you wind up with a physical version and need pdfs made, you can scan them into your computer (scanners are inexpensive at about \$100), then use Acrobat or other software that resides in your computer to turn the scan into a pdf. (In my case, my new \$100 HP printer allows me to convert a document into pdf format).

If you hit roadblocks here, you can also ask a graphic designer to supply you with pdfs of your sample. Or you can have the work done at Kinko's, but I believe this method is somewhat costly.

Potential clients are not looking for flash and dazzle in terms of presentation, but they do look for neatness, logic, and good work. Be sure to have business cards on hand, and up to three physical samples to leave behind.

For the Internet, send no more than three work samples, which can come to 15 or so pdfs (individual pdfs of the letter, envelope, reply device, and other components). If you're inclined to send more, store them on a CD and mail via snail mail.

If you approach an agency, you may be asked to leave your portfolio behind. Agencies understand the value of a portfolio, so with them, you're pretty safe in leaving it behind. However, I would not advise doing so with a non-agency client. It's just not wise. And never, never send out your last sample. Seasoned copywriters know that for some unexplainable reason, you never get it back!

Other Important Stuff:

- Send this newsletter to your freelance friends! The Freelancer's Business Bulletin was conceived for copywriters, but contains the same information any business freelancer can use to build their business.

- Got a burning question about some aspect of building your freelance business? Send it to chris@chrismarlow.com and it may become a newsletter topic!

- Did a friend send you this newsletter? Get your own subscription at <http://www.TheCopywritersCoach.com> where you'll also get the valuable complimentary Report, "The Secret to Successful Projects Every Time - Guaranteed!"

To your freelance prosperity,

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Veteran freelancer and award-winning copywriter, Chris Marlow has written for the nation's leading businesses for over 20 years. She also offers business coaching and master-level copywriting to new and aspiring copywriters and other business freelancers who want to accelerate their success. Check out the benefits of coaching at <http://www.TheCopywritersCoach.com>

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