

How To Get Your First Paying Copywriting Client

13 Real World Case Studies From Real Copywriters

**© Copyright 2007 Andrew Cavanagh all rights reserved
Reproduction of any kind without the copyright holder's permission
is strictly prohibited**

How do you get your very first paying clients?

How do you get over that “hump” that most starting copywriters face.

These are real case studies of real copywriters you can learn from.

It's important to note that it's generally NOT recommended to write copy for a percentage of profits alone (if you want to get paid).

And many of the strategies here are based around getting you started. They shouldn't necessarily be considered long term money-making strategies.

1 Bob Bly – Mailing Niche Advertising Agencies And More

Bob Bly was working as an advertising manager in an industrial company when he decided to become a freelance copywriter.

He went to a directory of advertising agencies called the Red Book...

<http://www.redbooks.com/Nonsub/index.asp>

Bob sent a one page sales letter to 500 creative directors at 500 different advertising agencies who were all listed as having industrial accounts.

The letter is reprinted in full in Bob's book, *Secrets of a Freelance Writer*, but the headline was, how an engineer and an ad manager can help you write better ads and brochures.

And the letter basically said I'm a freelance copywriter, specializing in industrial advertising and I will write your ads or brochures or whatever else you need and if you'd like to get a copywriting information kit, more information about my services and some samples of my work -- and again, this is before the Web, so you couldn't send them to a website -- just mail back the enclosed reply card and I'll send it to you. That was the offer.

So I mailed out 500 letters and within four or five weeks, I had 35 people respond, which was a 7% response and I was on my way.

I had 35 people who were interested in learning to some degree about my copywriting services and I began to respond to those as best I could in my limited time because I was already employed. And they began to become clients.

My strategy, which was probably a huge mistake in retrospect, I charged a very low fee. My logic was I'm a beginner, so I will charge low fees to get the business.

I was not as sophisticated as many people who would say if you charge a low fee, people perceive you as a low value. I thought what's going to work - a low price - so I charged very little money.

It's not that I wasn't confident. I knew how to write industrial copy. I was confident I could do the work.

In the early days, for better or worse and it's probably stupid on my part, I never made a cold call.

What I did in the beginning is I did two things, only two things and that's what worked for me. I sent out sales letters.

These were one-page sales letters with a reply card in a #10 envelope and I would get lists of advertising managers and I would mail them this letter.

And the first time I did it, I mentioned I got a 7% response. Then I rewrote it a bit and got it up to 10%. So, if I had a list...and lists were easy to get and they still are...any time I needed business, I could send out just 100 letters and have ten good leads.

I sent to people I did not know with direct mail and the second thing I did is I wrote articles for trade publications.

At the time the leading trade publication for industrial marketing was actually called, Industrial Marketing, and then they became Business Marketing a year after. And I tried to get in there to write articles and finally I did.

I must have had a dozen articles published in there over a two to three year period. That combined with the direct mail is mainly how I generated business.

My articles were all on copywriting or some aspect of industrial marketing with a tagline at the end.

This is before the Internet. You couldn't put your website address, you couldn't put your email address, but you could put your tagline and say Bob Bly is a freelance copywriter in -- Dumont, New Jersey.

I can't remember if they let me put the phone number in or not.

But see that was a bug-a-boo back then. You would write these articles and you'd want to promote yourself and you'd put the phone number in and the editor wouldn't include it because he thought it smacked of self-promotion.

But in the Internet, they encourage you to put your email address and your website address. So, now articles are more effective than they were back then and you can get more business from them. But they were still very effective back then.

Choosing Profitable Niches...

Here's what I would do if I were starting today.

Number one, decide what your market is and what your specialty is. As a rule of thumb, you're better when you're starting off a specialist than to be a generalist.

There are all kinds of specialties, so if you edited the newsletter for the Cerebral Palsy Foundation or the Red Cross, maybe you should start with fund raising, non-profit and make that your specialty.

The first thing I would do is decide what niche do I want to work in and what type of

services do I want to provide.

Direct marketing is a good niche. Online marketing is a good niche...to write online copywriting.

Within those fields, information publishing is a good niche.

The highest paid niche is probably writing promotions, direct mail and online for consumer newsletters. That is basically travel, health, and investment newsletters. Those guys pay more than just about anyone.

Another good niche is writing for healthcare, particularly alternative medicine, nutritional supplements. Pharmaceutical and medical advertising is a very lucrative niche. That's another good area.

Speech writing, another non-direct marketing area, in which I've done very little work, is a very well paying niche.

Direct marketing of information products, in general, not just newsletters, which is almost a separate niche, but audiotapes, audio learning systems, seminars, conferences, that's a good niche.

High-tech direct marketing, particularly software, is a very good niche; writing about software, IT products and systems, that's a good niche. And business-to-business is a good niche today.

Pick a niche, which means what type of service or product that you are covering, what industry, and also what are you writing for them. If you pick computers, are you only writing data sheets or are you writing websites. What are you going to write for these clients?

The second thing I would do is I would go find and identify good lists of prospects in those areas. Maybe there's a trade association that has a local chapter where you live that you should go to and network at and become a member of. Maybe there's a newsletter or a magazine subscription list you should be renting.

Identify how you're going to reach these people. If you determine that my market is marketing directors of pharmaceutical companies, to reach them you need a list and there are lists. So, you've got to identify and find and get your hands on the list.

The third thing I would do is I would contact them and guess what, direct mail is still very, very effective. There are other methods that people advocate today. You will hear some people say oh it doesn't work, but it does work.

If I were starting out today, that would still be the first thing I'd do. I've composed a really good lead generating sales letter to generate inquiries from my copywriting services and

then mail 100, 200, 300, 400, 500 to a list of prospects in my market and then wait four or five weeks and see.

I do other things during those four or five weeks, but see what happens. If that letter works and you can get a 1%, 2, 3,4 5% response, you're going to be able to fill the pipeline with leads and if they're good leads that percentage of them is going to reliably convert to business and you'll be set.

If you can generate a steady flow of sales leads -- I call it a lead generating machine -- and you can create a sales letter that every time you mail 100, you get 3 good leads or 5 or 2, you're really not going to ever have to worry about having business as long as there are sufficient lists and your market is broad enough.

If you tell me I want to specialize in writing copy for people that are readers of Asian cats, then you have a problem because I don't know that those people hire copywriters and it's a pretty small list if there is one.

But if your market is newsletter publishers, it's easy for me to help you find a big directory of lots of newsletter publishers.

2 Clayton Makepeace – Set Up And Follow Up With Phone Calls

Clayton Makepeace is one of the world's highest paid copywriters making over \$2 million dollars a year.

His technique for getting clients was similar to Bob Bly's with a few subtle but important differences.

Clayton would mail to the marketing directors of 100 direct response companies every week.

He would send a package with appropriate copywriting samples and a sales letter selling his services.

He sent the package by federal express to each marketing director and he would call the day he sent them to let the marketing directors know to expect something he was sending them.

Then he'd call the day after the package was scheduled to arrive and ask the marketing director if he/she had received it.

Using this telephone follow up can multiply your response and gives you a chance to build relationships with the marketing directors who hire copywriters.

Clayton Makepeace talks about how to write up a spec assignment to get work here...
<http://www.makepeacetotalpackage.com/eazines/library/eazine46.html>

More Clayton Makepeace secrets...
<http://www.makepeacetotalpackage.com/eazines>

3 Parris Lampropoulos – Direct Response Seminars

Parris went to a direct response conference in Las Vegas boasting some of the greats of copywriting as speakers including Gary Halbert, Ted Nicholas and Dan Kennedy.

He wrote a sales letter for his own services while he was at the conference with the title “How To Hire A World Class Copywriter for Pocket Change”.

In this sales letter he explained how he'd been busy writing copy for himself and how you should hire him now because pretty soon he'll be too expensive for you to hire.

He made up a few hundred copies of this sales letter and gave them out to anyone who'd take them.

He had four clients hire him right there at the seminar.

4 Arthur Johnson – Word Of Mouth

Remember to think of all your friends, family, past workmates and who they might know when you're looking for copywriting work.

Million dollar copywriter Arthur Johnson ran into an old high school friend in a bar.

She knew he always wanted to be a writer, explained that the place she worked – Franklin Mint – was looking for writers and asked him for a resume.

Arthur was hired as a copywriter by the Franklin Mint.

5 Anonymous Copywriter – Online Articles And Your Own Website

1. How did you get your first copywriting client?

Writing articles online. I didn't find him, he found me.

We spoke by phone, I asked a bunch of questions about his target market, what he wanted to accomplish, etc (if you need help with this read Spin Selling and Spin Selling Field Book plus get Ari Galper's selling program--you need both, not just one or the other).

Here is an audio and transcripts of an interview with Ari Galper...

http://www.hardtofindseminars.com/Transcripts/HMAT_Cold_Calling_Secrets.pdf

http://www.hardtofindseminars.com/audioclips/Cold_Calling_Secrets.mp3

2. What was the job?

Web Copy

3. How much did you get paid?

Too little. I under valued myself in the beginning.

4. What did you learn from it?

To charge more and to use the phone to close prospects.

This first paid project confirmed for me not to expect a web page to do the closing. Prior to my first project all my interactions were via email.

I cry just thinking about the hundreds of thousands of potential dollars that were lost because I didn't pick up the phone to follow up with inquiries. In the beginning I was scared to death to talk to anyone by phone. I had doubts about what to say and how to handle the initial interaction.

I eventually learned you MUST pick up the phone and talk to the person you expect to get \$\$ from. Email discussions and web copy alone usually won't do the trick in shaking _your_ \$\$\$ out of their pockets.

It also drove home the importance of systematizing the selling process. I've since broken the SPIN selling process down into individual tabs in Microsoft One Note. I also have a tab for common concerns and a tab for initiating any follow up calls.

Every inquirer goes through the same basic process of telling me their needs and concerns and objectives from beginning to end. No direct, high pressure selling takes place. I talk the least, they talk the most. No other way works for me.

Oh, if they won't openly participate in the conversation I thank them for calling and tell them, 'it sounds like we're not a match. Maybe we can do something on a future project'... and then bid them farewell.

I also learned the importance of using your copy to weed out clients who don't value what you do from the onset. Don't wait until you get them on the phone to tell them what you are NOT looking for in a client. Put your requirements in your sales copy.

Don't waste time with people who withhold information. I have a list of questions I ask my prospects to submit at the bottom of my website.

I've found that folks who fill out the form with only their contact info but do not share information about their marketing objectives are not sincere. If pulling information out of them by phone or online is as tough as pulling a bone from a crazed pit bull's mouth then they are time wasters or low quality clients.

I don't get why anyone would inquire and then say stuff like, 'just tell me what you charge and I'll let you know if I'm interested in working with you or not...!'

Don't waste your time. Kick them to the curb.

I wrote several problem solving, how-to articles. Then I submitted the articles to many article submission/distribution sites.

The client read one of the articles, visited my website and completed my online questionnaire.

After reviewing his response I noticed a comment that indicated there may be a conflict of interest. So I sent him an email thanking him for contacting me and then did a take away saying if he fell into one of the specific groups that I refuse to work with, I wouldn't be able to help him.

He emailed saying he wasn't within that group. I then setup a time to talk with him by phone.

During the call I asked several questions about what he wanted to accomplish, how he found me, who's his target market and how has he verified there are enough of buyers who are already hot for what he was promoting, etc.

Many of the interview questions came from a report I bought years ago called, "How To Think Like A Marketing Genius" written by Harry Pickens (very hard to find). A few

questions came from Weiss' Million Dollar Consulting, Tepper's Become A Top Consultant, and Lewin's The Overnight Consultant.

There may be other sources but I can't recall them.

As far as payment goes, mentioning my fee came naturally as part of the conversation.

* By the way, I sent this direct because I want to avoid alerting potential clients that I use take aways.

Please don't mention that in connection with my name. It could make people cynical/skeptical.

6 John Ritz – Create A Free Mailing List Of Prospects

If you want to get paid what you're worth, you absolutely MUST get good at selling on the phone (and in person for networking).

My first paying copywriting gig was a display ad for an ad agency. I did direct mail campaign and offered a free report to both prequalify them and to get leads.

I actually went to ReferenceUSA.com and compiled my own mailing list for free (it's free to use Reference USA with a valid library card, assuming your library purchased access to their database...mine did).

I forget who I targeted, but ad agencies were just a small slice. I went after direct mail companies and niche-focused firms. Just to clarify, I don't go after ad agencies anymore. There is usually too much education involved to sell them on direct response, and they pay peanuts (generally...there are exceptions to both, but it's like trying to find that needle in the haystack).

You can sift through them and have the ones who "get it" contact you (i.e. that's what I tried to do with my pre-qualify free report) to increase the odds of finding those needles.

So while I don't target them today, it's still a good option if you're starting out and trying to build a track record.

7 Matt Tremblay – Warrior Forum Post

I made a simple, honest post on The Warrior Forum. I explained that I'm fairly new, but have skill, and am willing to work for a percentage of your profits.

I was amazed at the response I got...

Obviously, the trend I need to move in is towards free based copywriting plus the percentage/royalty.

If you have absolutely no samples, consider doing a little market research and writing copy for a potentially lucrative online niche. Even if you don't end up following through with product development you will have something to show people, and you can always come back to it later.

The results still aren't in on that one yet (I made the post about a week ago). The way I see it, if people are willing to agree to it, it's a better situation for a new copywriter like myself, as opposed to doing the work for free. Not only that but the better job I do the more money I make, so it seems to be a good motivator.

One other tip (somewhat unrelated)...

I just started doing critiques for people on a free basis as a kind of a pre-sell/lead generation/credibility builder. If you have a copy of Adobe Acrobat you can "print from web to PDF" (i.e. convert their web page to pdf format), markup the prospects copy with highlights, cross outs and sticky post it notes.

8 David Frey – A Marketing Newsletter

1. How did you get your first copywriting client?

I started a marketing newsletter. The newsletter established my credibility and ability to write copy. A lot of people on my list had copywriting needs. I simply made an offer at the end of the newsletter.

2. How did you get you first client to agree to pay you for copy?

I didn't really have to "get" my client to pay for my copy. I told them my rate and they paid it. A lot of people wanted me to do "percentage of the action" deals and I turned every one of them down.

3. What was the job?

A "get out of debt" company. They mailed the letter to millions of people a month.

4. How much did you get paid?

\$6,000 for a two page letter.

5. What did you learn from it?

Uh, not much. I did a 50/50 deal. You pay 50% up front and 50% when I'm done. They paid when I was done.

The newsletter was the key!

David Frey

<http://www.marketingbestpractices.com/22secrets.htm>

In this full audio David Frey reveals a fantastic way to market your services to clients who might be difficult to get access to...

http://www.igpc-members.org/alpha/files/david_frey.mp3

Free Report: How to get big companies to call buy and beg for your products and services...

<http://www.marketingbestpractices.com/temp/SpecialReport-PenetratingB-to-BAccounts.pdf>

9 Michael Silk – Getting Clients By Sending Emails

1. How did you get your first copywriting client?

This was about 4 years back when I was eager to get some real copywriting projects under my belt:

I would do an online search for names of Internet marketers' etc., I had read about (in a book /manual etc.) or heard interviewed (on audio tape etc.).

Andrew's note – once you have a website name you can search for that domain name at www.godaddy.com

Your search result will tell you that the domain name is already taken but in most cases you can get the contact details of the domain name owner by clicking on the “(click here for info)” link.

The contact details are usually under Administrative Contact:

Then I would send them a friendly and sincere e-mail letting them know how I really liked the information they had shared (in book / audio tape) - giving *specific* examples of what I found valuable. Also I would let them know that I was a direct response copywriter and politely let them know that I could increase their website response just by making a few simple changes.

Sometimes I wouldn't get a reply. Sometimes I would. And sometimes I would be asked what those changes were. This gave me permission to demonstrate (and prove) that I could be of value to them as a copywriter/direct response marketing strategist.

2. What was your first copywriting job?

The first person to give me a shot - (or challenged me!) - to prove that I could improve the responsiveness of their website was Jason Oman (co-author "Conversations With Millionaires").

I pretty much re-wrote Jason's website copy and through phone conversations advised him on how to reduce his (at the time) rather high refund rate. The changes I made (and advised on etc.) almost tripled his response and cut his refunds in half.

3. How much did you get paid?

From memory, I didn't get paid for this job. But, because Jason Oman had a subscriber / customer base; some of whom he consulted with on Internet marketing - he set me up with my first paying client. It was to write website copy to sell something like a \$950 treadmill. I think I got paid something like \$1,500 for my first fee paying project.

4. What did you learn from it?

Well, I think it demonstrates that anyone could have approached potential clients as I did. It didn't cost me anything in money. Just a little ingenuity and time. It grew my confidence in my abilities and I got some real world copywriting projects under my belt.

I think it's important to realise that I didn't blatantly try and "pitch" anybody. I simply struck up an email "conversation" by complimenting the person on the information they had shared. Then I politely let them know that I'm a copywriter and I'd like to have a go at increasing their website profits.

I was leading with value. Getting paid was secondary to proving my worth. Kind of give to get. Sometimes I would even create a headline they were welcome to test - without being asked to.

Like I said, a lot of people will never get back to you. Some will but are not interested in letting you go to work on their conversion ratio. But a few will to make it worth your while.

Hope that helps!

Michael Silk.

<http://www.michaelsilk.com>

10 Dan Lok – Get Paid If You Create Profits

Canadian copywriter Dan Lok started out with no money and very little command of the English language (English was his second language).

Dan gave his first copywriting prospects an offer most found it hard to refuse – they would only have to pay him if his copy produced profits for them.

To capture his first clients he asked for a set fee if he made profits for his clients.

Then he moved to a fee and a percentage if his clients made profits.

Then Dan moved to charging up front copywriting fees then upfront copywriting fees plus a percentage of turnover.

11 Kent Komae – Apply For Jobs In The Direct Response Industry

Kent Komae is one of the most in demand copywriters in the health supplement industry.

Kent left college with a BA in English and went to work as an English teacher.

He broke into the direct response industry by taking a summer job as a proofreader/editor in a direct response agency in Southern California.

After the summer he was offered a job as a copy editor and from there moved on to writing sales copy himself.

Once you're inside a direct response business it can make it much easier for you to make contact with the people who'll hire you as a copywriter.

12 Gary Benevencia – Apply For Copywriting Jobs

One of the greatest copywriting legends Gary Benevencia got his start writing copy for the Prentice Hall publishing company in their direct response department.

He started writing sales letters to for Prentice Hall books.

13 Jesse Forrest – Give Your First Clients Free Copy

Jesse Forrest is a young Australian copywriter who has written copy for marketing heavy hitters like Alex Mandossian and Jay Abraham.

If you have no copywriting portfolio you can offer to do copywriting completely free for a couple of clients to get testimonials and some copy samples you can use.

Jesse wrote a couple of online sales letters that made significant sales.

In hindsight Jesse says he should have asked for a percentage of profits or turnover.
www.jesseforrest.com