



 : EBOOK

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY

FIND, HIRE & WORK WITH FREELANCERS

By Jay Swansson

Picture this.

You’ve spent a year executing your content marketing strategy, and it’s working. Blog traffic has grown. A recent ebook resulted in hundreds of new leads. Your boss is giving you high fives. The sales team is inviting you out for drinks.

Your content marketing efforts are paying off.

Sound like a dream? It’s not. It’s happening for marketers who are leveraging freelance talent to improve and grow their content creation efforts.

Freelancers can revolutionize the way you create content. These outsourced specialists can help you create more and better content, saving you both time and money. We know — we’ve built our entire company around software that connects freelancers with marketers like you. [ClearVoice Marketplace](#) connects you with the generalists, subject matter experts and influencers who can meet all your content needs.

In this guide, we’re sharing how to successfully find, hire and work with freelancers.



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CHAPTER 1

How Freelancers Can Help Your Business

Let's kick things off with a few stats about content marketing:

- » 89 percent of B2B marketers use content marketing in their marketing mix ([Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs](#))
- » 78 percent of CMOs think custom content is the future of marketing ([DemandWare](#))
- » 70 percent of B2B marketers planned on creating more content in 2016 versus 2015 ([Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs](#))

Most digital marketers understand the benefits of content marketing. It builds trust with audiences, nurtures leads down the sales funnel and boosts your brand authority and voice. Thing is, just because you know content marketing can help you doesn't mean you can successfully execute a content marketing strategy.



One likely culprit: Lack of time and resources. Whether you were hired to work specifically on content or have a multitude of other responsibilities, today's marketers are more overwhelmed than ever. It's nearly impossible to strategize and create great content at scale while juggling distribution, analytics, email marketing, social media and everything else. How can you create high-quality content that builds brand awareness, brings in new leads and solves customers' problems?

That's where freelancers come in.

You're not alone

Freelance writers and content strategists support your content marketing efforts. Great ones make life a lot easier. Here's how freelancers can help your business:

Take work off your plate.

Not only are you expected to come up with a content strategy, but you're also expected to create and promote the actual content, connect with influencers and optimize your site. You might find yourself dedicating a little bit of time to all your tasks, rather than going deep to make sure they're done right.

Freelancers can take work off your plate, so you can focus on things only you can do. If you provide a freelancer with a blog topic or a fleshed-out outline, they can write while you focus on other things.

Complement what you're already working on.

It's easy to feel as though you're the only one who can work on a particular project. Have you ever thought things like:

- » "I'm the only one who understands our brand voice."
- » "No one else would get what we're trying to accomplish."
- » "Everything is such a mess. How could I get someone up to speed on all these tasks?"

Hire freelancers to complement what you're already working on. If you're redoing a support site, you can lay out the site architecture yourself, then pass it off to a freelancer. If you're working on an ebook, write the outline and then pass it off to a freelancer.

Freelancers specialize in finding ways to help you. Good ones can help you become more efficient, and even offer guidance on how they can help you with what you're already working on.

Offer expertise you don't have.

You were hired because of your skill set and past experience. Maybe you specialize in SEO or social media. Maybe you were able to grow blog traffic by 300 percent in your last role. Maybe you have a little bit of experience in all areas of digital marketing. Whatever the case, you're not an expert in everything.

A lot of content marketers outsource content simply because freelancers are better writers than they are. Or, maybe the topic would be better handled by a subject matter expert who can offer insights that people want to read. Take a hard look at what's most difficult for you. Is it impossible to write enough blog posts per month? Are you struggling to understand technical SEO? Whatever the case, you can find a freelancer to help.

What freelance writers can help you with

Freelancers can help with all kinds of initiatives, but here are some of the most common:

- » Blog posts
- » Audience personas
- » Blog management
- » General web copy
- » Ebooks and guides
- » Copy editing
- » Case studies
- » Social media copy
- » Customer interviews
- » Social media management
- » Landing pages
- » Content and SEO audits

More economical than full-time employees

It's pretty daunting to see that the best freelance writers are charging \$500 per blog post. You're not sure you have that kind of budget or can convince the boss to splurge.

Here's the thing: Freelance writers are a lot cheaper than full-time employees. If your company hires someone full-time, they're not only responsible for a salary, but they also have to provide benefits. There are additional taxes to pay as well. According to [CNN Money](#), companies generally pay 18 to 26 percent more than an employee's salary to have them on the team.

The beauty of freelancers is you use them whenever you need them — you're not on the hook for providing them with a full-time job. You can hire a freelancer for a few projects or a few hours a week. Use them as you need them, in an à la carte fashion.

CHAPTER 2

Finding the Right Freelancers

You wouldn't believe how many freelance writers are out there. According to a 2014 [report](#) from the Freelancers Union & Elance-oDesk, there are approximately 53 million people who do freelance work in the U.S. If you take a look on any of the large find-a-freelancer sites, you'll see thousands working from all corners of the world.

But just because there are a lot of freelancers doesn't mean they're all good. Make sure you're investing in someone who can deliver. Here's how to find the right freelancers for you:

Know what you want

Freelance writers all write, but most specialize in certain areas of writing. For example, some consider themselves editors or blog managers while others are copywriters. And of course, there are journalists, SEO specialists, content writers and a slew of others.



Here are a few of the different types of freelance writers out there:

- » **Copywriters** write promotional and advertising copy for print or online media. Because copywriters write with the intention of selling something, they're often used for landing pages and conversion-driven campaigns.
- » **Content writers** write blog posts, articles, ebooks and other types of long-form content. Sometimes content writers get a byline and sometimes they function as ghostwriters.

- » **Content strategists** are (usually) strong writers who can also build your content strategy from the ground up. They learn your audience's pain points, build your editorial calendar and generate content topics that will resonate with your audience.
- » **Influencers** are people who are well-connected and influential in a particular industry or niche. Usually the most expensive type of writer on this list to hire, they're considered authorities in the space and come with decent-sized social followings.
- » **SEO specialists** specialize in search engine marketing and have the technical know-how to get your website more visibility in search. SEO specialists use content to meet their goals, but oftentimes, they're not content writers themselves.

Determine which type of freelancer you need and how much experience they need to have to help you reach your goals. Many companies are happy to hire someone green as long as they're good with words. These freelancers are less expensive but require more time training. Other companies sell something very technical, such as software for developers, and need content writers who understand the technology inside and out. Ask yourself:

- » Does my freelance writer need to have experience in my industry, or can they learn about it?
- » Can I afford the premium, specialized freelance writers?
- » Do I need help with developing content topics, or do I just need someone who can write?
- » Do I need someone to help with SEO and keyword research?

Answering these questions will help you determine who you should hire.

Where to find freelancers

Once you've determined the type of freelance writer you need, it's time to find them. Many turn to large freelance marketplaces like [UpWork](#), [Fiverr](#) and [PeoplePerHour](#), but these sites are difficult to sift through. Yes, there are talented writers on these sites, but you'll have to do a lot of legwork to find the real deal.



These are easier routes to good freelance writers:

Ask your colleagues for referrals.

Your colleagues are the best place to start, because they understand your business and your needs. Start by asking around your office. Has anyone hired freelancers before? Do they have some go-to freelancers whom they love working with?

Ask existing freelancers for referrals.

This strategy works if you're already working with freelance writers and are simply looking to find more. The freelance community is tight-knit, and almost all freelance writers manage high demand by referring clients to other freelancers. Be specific about what and who you need — do you need a carbon copy of them, or do you need someone with a totally different skill set?

Read your favorite blogs and approach writers directly.

Look at who's writing the content on your favorite marketing and industry blogs and assess which voices you like. Many articles are written by freelance writers, and with a quick Google or social media search, you should be able to find the ones you like and contact them directly.

Post on job boards and Craigslist.

No matter what you're trying to do, Craigslist is a total mixed bag. You might be able to find a deal on a gorgeous piece of furniture, or you might find a piece of junk that belongs in a landfill. When it comes to hiring freelance writers, it's the same deal. Job boards, such as [LinkedIn](#), [Indeed](#) and [ProBlogger](#) — as well as [Craigslist](#) — can connect you with great writers. You just have to be willing to sift through the less-than-desirables to find the good stuff.

Use ClearVoice's Content Studio and Marketplace.

ClearVoice offers two tools to help you find freelance writers and influencers. First, there's [Content Studio](#), our database of the most popular writers and publishers on the web. Search by topic to identify the most-shared writers in your industry. Then there's [ClearVoice Marketplace](#), software that connects you with freelance writers looking for work. Our technology matches you with content creators who fit your budget, topic and timeline needs. You can do all this without ever leaving the ClearVoice workflow.

Reach out on social media.

The best freelancers have robust social media profiles, and some are very influential in their industries. Influential freelancers can help you promote your content, ensuring it gets seen by your target audience. You can search for freelance writers on LinkedIn, where you'll find loads of recommendations. You can also search for freelancers on Twitter, and then create Twitter lists to learn what makes target freelancers and influencers tick.

Understand you get what you pay for

As you're searching for freelance writers, it's important to remember that you usually get what you pay for. Many of the writers you'll find on sites like Craigslist and UpWork are inexpensive, but the ones who don't charge a lot for their work are unlikely to be very experienced or very good.

If you want content that shines, you should invest in writers who have the experience and writing skills you need.

CHAPTER 3

Know Your Freelancer

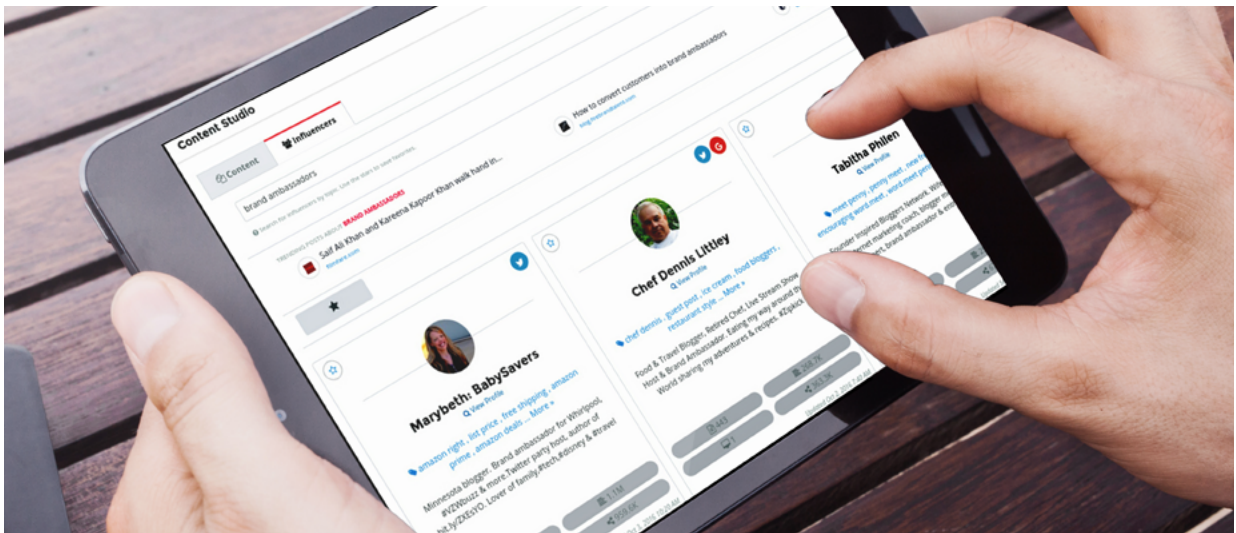
Many content managers know they need help, but they're not sure where the freelance writer fits in. It's OK to be a little unsure, but you should have an idea of how the freelance writer can help you. Do you need help writing copy for a new website? Do you need their expertise in developing a new content strategy? Before contacting, suss out what you're going to ask.

Then it's time to assess your freelancers.

Before you contact a freelance writer, you should:

Read their previously published work.

Any freelance writer who's worth hiring will have published work on the web. Read through as much of their work as you can to get a good idea of their style. What industries are they writing about? Are their articles easy to read? Do you like their voice? Reading their previously published work will help you figure out if they're worth contacting.



Check them out in ClearVoice's Content Studio.

If you're looking at hiring a particular freelancer, plug their name into [ClearVoice's Content Studio](#). You'll find a photo of the freelancer, see samples of their published work and browse through their specialties. This is a good way to make sure the writer you're thinking about is a good choice for your brand.

Check them out on social.

You don't have to Facebook friend a potential freelance writer, but it's a good idea to check out their social profiles, especially on LinkedIn. Many freelancers have recommendations, endorsements and clients listed on their profiles.

After you contact a freelance writer, you should:

Ask them the right questions.

When you're interviewing a freelancer, make sure you have answers to the following questions. Answers will help you understand what to expect from the relationship, as well as what the freelancers strengths and weaknesses are:

- » What industries do you specialize in?
- » How do you deal with writing about things you're not an expert in?
- » What kind of writing do you do most often?
- » How would you go about doing research for a new piece of content?
- » Do you have experience interviewing experts and turning them into stories?
- » What's your philosophy about what makes content great?
- » Do you incorporate SEO into your work?
- » What do you charge? Do you have any minimums?
- » Do you require a deposit?
- » How many revisions are included in your rates?
- » How much lead time do you need before completing a piece?

Jay Baer of [Convince & Convert](#) told us he likes to add two more to the mix:

- » What happens if I don't like the work you deliver?
- » What can I give you to make this job easier and give it the greatest possible chance of success?

According to [Stacy Jackson](#), a freelance writer based in the Tampa/St. Petersburg area, some clients will ask her when they can expect to see a return on investment. "This question is particularly the case when it's a writing assignment that includes search engine optimization for the purpose of improving organic traffic or when the project is for a small business," Jackson said. Remember that no freelancer can guarantee ROI.

The point of these questions is to get a feel for the writer, not to stump them. It's OK if they don't incorporate SEO into their work, and they don't need to include more than one revision in their rates either. The idea is to get a feeling for who they are, not rule them out.



Get references.

Good freelancers will be able to refer you to other clients who can tell you what it's really like working with them. The best freelancers will have a whole list of people who can vouch for them. If you contact the references, be respectful of their time. Ask them if they'd recommend the freelancer, what they think their strengths are, and if they think they're a good person to hire.

Ask for relevant samples.

Although the freelancer will have published work online, they may have ghostwritten pieces or other relevant samples they can show you. Ask them for specific samples, such as ones from your industry or directed at your target audience. This will give you a good idea of whether or not the freelancer has worked on similar stuff. Sometimes, freelancers are under nondisclosure agreements and can't show you work from particular clients.

Pay for a trial piece.

You don't have to commit to a long relationship with a freelancer, and that's the beauty of hiring freelancers over full-time employees. So when you begin the relationship, commission a trial piece. Ask them to complete a certain assignment, and see how they do. Just make sure you pay for the trial piece — the best freelancers will not do spec work and may be insulted if you ask.

Understand the nuts and bolts.

Many freelancers have their own contracts they use, while others are willing to work without contracts, or will sign one you provide. You should make sure you understand the details of your contract, such as who owns the work and what is included in the contract. Freelancers are 1099 employees, which means you'll need to collect W9s from them. Additionally, they may have their own systems — such as requiring deposits — to ensure they get paid.

CHAPTER 4

Budgeting for Freelance Writers

Hiring a freelancer, even an expensive one, is almost always cheaper than hiring a full-time employee. Even still, the costs for freelancers can get high, especially if you want a large volume of content. So, how can you effectively budget for freelance writers?

Like anything else, you'll have to balance what you want with what you can afford. In general, you tend to get what you pay for, but there are a lot of factors that go into the equation. Some freelancers offer additional services, such as social promotion and ghostwriting.

How much freelancers cost

It's difficult to get a straight answer on how much freelancers cost. That isn't because the industry is trying to keep a big secret; it's simply because there's a lot of variance. Some experienced copywriters won't do projects for less than \$3,000, while others write 500-word articles for \$50 a pop.

You're best off contacting a few different freelancers and learning about their rates. In our experience, you can expect to pay from \$200-\$400 for a 700-word blog post. If the freelancer charges by the hour, you'll see rates from \$35 to \$200 per hour (see? Large variance). In 2015, ClearVoice asked companies and freelancers what they pay/charge for content — [check out the results](#).



Some freelancers prefer to charge by project, while others like to charge by the hour. We prefer paying by project, as freelancers work at different speeds. Otherwise you may pay more for a slow writer who isn't necessarily better than someone who's fast.

You'll also pay more depending on what you want. If you need a freelancer to do heavy research, you'll probably have to shell out more cash. Many freelancers also charge more if you ask them to conduct interviews.

Are expensive freelancers really worth it?

Well, it depends. There are a lot of variables that determine whether you'll get your money's worth. Will the freelancer turn in clean drafts that barely need edits? Will the freelancer share the finished product in their social channels? Is it ghostwritten or bylined? Do you want them to conduct interviews or perform any SEO duties?

In general, there are two guiding principles here:

- » **We'll say it again: You get what you pay for.** If you want to find someone who can write an article for cheap, you can find them, but you're likely to spend a long time editing their work, and they're unlikely to have any clout on social media.
- » **Hiring (even expensive) freelancers is almost always cheaper than hiring an in-house employee.** When freelance rates seem expensive, check yourself. How much would you be paying a full-time employee? Even if a freelancer's hourly rate is high, you're not on the hook for providing benefits or long-term work.

When you see freelance writing rates, you might be surprised at the expense, but these writers can provide a ton of value to your business. Their ability to write well — and to your audience — can make your content shine.

Negotiating with freelancers

When a freelancer gives you a quote on a project, it can be tempting to negotiate. While freelancers are often willing to work with you to maximize what you can get from your budget, they're unlikely to take to much negotiation. If you can't afford a freelancer's rates, you can be honest about what you can afford. Don't negotiate just for the sake of it.

What should you do if you don't have a large content marketing budget?

If the marketing budget has already been allocated, and there isn't a huge amount of room for content marketing, you'll have to go lean. But fear not — you can accomplish a lot with a small budget.

First, take advantage of free and low-cost tools that help you strategize. Some of our favorite resources are:

- » [How Small Teams Can Build & Execute a Killer Content Marketing Strategy](#) (ClearVoice)
- » [10 Tips to Make Content Marketing Work on a Small Budget](#) (Quicksprout)
- » [Lean Content Marketing: How to Do Content Marketing on a Budget](#) (Marketo)

Second, have a documented plan. According to that same report from CMI and MarketingProfs, successful teams have their plans written down, even if it's a one-person team on a small budget. Remember that your plan needs to include your budget for freelancers as well as your budget for promotional efforts, such as paid ads.

Lastly, work with freelancers to figure out what you can get from your budget. If you only have \$1,000 to spend each month, your freelancers can offer ideas on how to best optimize that spend.

CHAPTER 5

How to Successfully Work With Freelancers

The best freelancers are not the ones you hire for a project, only to say goodbye when it's complete. The best freelancers are partners. They come to know your brand inside and out, and they feel like part of your team. They'll suggest things to you that you hadn't thought of, pitch new story ideas and share your content on social media. They care about you and your brand.

But you don't get these kinds of freelancers unless you're deliberate about how you work with them. Be careful about how you onboard freelancers, get them up to speed using a style guide, and have a process in place for effective communication.

What freelancers want from you

Just because they don't work in your office doesn't mean they don't want a lasting relationship. In fact, freelancers are much more motivated when they feel connected to the teams they're working with.

Freelancers want to feel valued and respected. They likely won't feel positively about you if you see writing as a commodity. If you start treating them as though they are suppliers, they will quickly begin to feel undervalued and overworked. For more about how to retain and reward freelance writers, [read this post from #DearMegan](#).

And if they try to negotiate a new rate or suggest a change, don't balk, even if you don't agree. In general, freelancers always prefer to talk things out to get a greater understanding of your product and company, rather than run on assumptions about what you want. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and have a conversation.

Effectively onboarding freelancers

Get organized; don't waste precious time trying to figure out what your freelancer needs from you. It starts with effectively onboarding your freelancers. Here's how to do it:

Set expectations.

The freelancer works for you, so it's your job to set expectations around what you want. Are you flexible or rigid on due dates? Do you expect to hire the freelancer for one project, or do you have ongoing work for them?

Sometimes, marketers forget to set expectations around edits and revisions. Be clear about how many rounds are a part of the price as well as how you'll give feedback. You should also let the freelancer know how long it will take to review a piece and what your payment cycle looks like.



Create a style guide.

Sometimes, marketers don't want to hire freelancers because they feel it will be impossible to get them up to speed. They have a point — freelancers aren't in the office every day. They don't have meetings with your boss. They don't have your perspective.

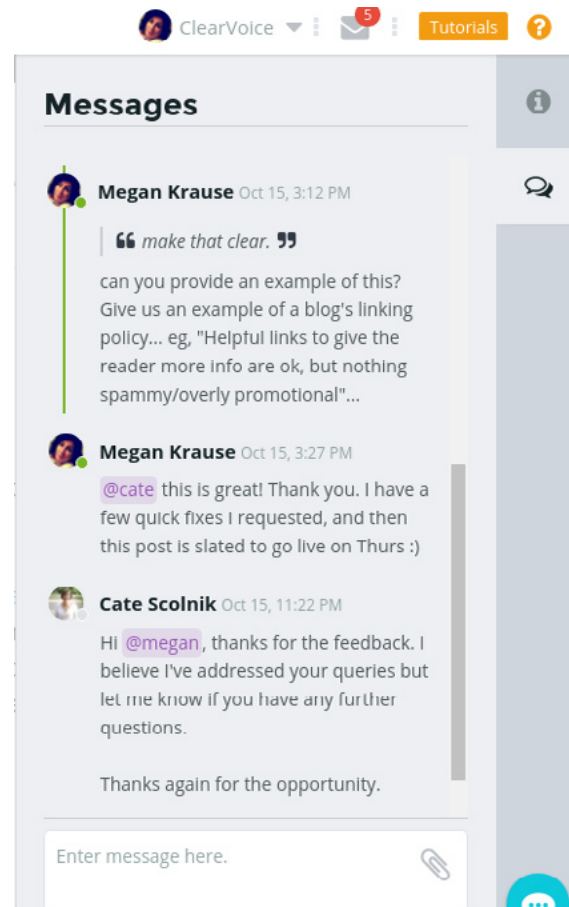
Even so, you shouldn't spend a lot of your precious time trying to onboard freelancers. Instead, you should [develop a style guide](#) that you can pass off to any new freelancer. If the freelancer reads the style guide, they'll understand your expectations, your tone and what you're looking for. Your style guide should include:

- » Info about marketing personas, target audience and customer base
- » Information on voice and tone, as well as formatting and grammatical preferences
- » Lists of competitors not to reference
- » List of favorite sources to reference
- » Any majors do's/dont's

Use a platform for communication.

No one should be trying to manage content creation and distribution via email and Google or Word docs. It's a poor, antiquated system compared to what's available today. It's unwieldy and clumsy, and you can't grow at scale. With a content marketing platform, you can scale any content initiative with ease and collaborate with the world's top freelancers.

For example, the [ClearVoice](#) content marketing platform has an integrated freelancer marketplace. You do everything from within the platform — plan, hire, collaborate and publish. You can use it manage all of your freelancer relationships.



How to deal with feedback, edits and revisions

If you're happy with a freelancer's work, make sure to tell them. You may be a great client to work with, but most freelancers have seen their fair share of difficult people. It will mean a lot to get positive feedback. If things aren't going well, you need to be honest and straightforward. Picking up the phone and talking through your concerns is always better than staying silent.

Freelancers are open and accepting of edits. Not only can they help them become a better writer, but they can help them understand exactly what you're looking for. Even so, sometimes editors change really minor things, and send it back for reviews, and then do it again, and again. The process takes forever. It's always better to simply fix small things yourself.

You can successfully find, hire and work with freelancers

You have a lot of responsibilities as a marketer. You can't do it all yourself, and freelancers can help you reach your goals. Although the process of finding, hiring and working with freelancers may seem difficult, it's actually fairly easy to manage, as long as you're deliberate about the process.

Freelancers can offer a hand when you need it most, and their individual expertise can shape the way you run your content marketing. Freelance content creators should not be seen as machines who can get some writing done, but should be considered partners as you build out an effective content marketing strategy.