

How to Start a Successful Freelance Career

A Newsletter by Inkwell Editorial

August 15, 2007

SECTION I: Interview with B2B freelance writer Meryl K. Evans

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: I wanted to interview Meryl because, quite frankly, this is where I think the most lucrative writing is in freelancing – the B2B sector.

While there are other lucrative genres like technology, medical and legal, general B2B writing doesn't require as much inside knowledge to "get going," so to speak. And, the pay is terrific, if you target the right types of B2B clients.

FYI, many types of writing make up B2B writing – eg, it could be as simple as a brochure for a small start-up, or as complicated as a corporate white paper.

Meryl was kind enough to be very detailed and forthcoming in her interview. I particularly enjoy reading interviews by professionals like her because you get concrete nuggets you can apply to your own career. The sheer amount of detail makes this possible.

So, sit back and enjoy this issue. I've sat on it for over a month and could hardly wait to share it.

Enjoy, and big thank you once again to Meryl!

Yuwanda Black, Publisher

<http://www.InkwellEditorial.com>

<http://www.InkwellEditorial.blogspot.com>

INTERVIEW WITH MERYL K. EVANS



QUESTIONS

1. I always like to give readers background info on interviewees so they can see that we freelance writers come from a variety of different jobs. So, before becoming a freelance writer, what was your 9-5 job?

I worked in Corporate USA for all but three years of my career. The first three were with the federal government. I worked in process management and tech writing in two large telecoms' software development department for most of my career.

2. Your experience is heavily geared toward tech writing, eg, *PC Today* and Editor-in-Chief of a newsletter on computer security (the 100,000 reader-strong Shavlik's *The Remediator Security Digest* <http://www.internetviz-newsletters.com/shavlik>).

In light of this, is tech writing an innate interest that you actively pursued (eg, decided to specialize in), or did you just "fall" into this type of writing and continued to do it because Projects kept coming your way?

As a freelance writer, I know that sometimes we find ourselves pigeon-holed – either by choice (we decide to specialize), or accidentally (eg, because of a body of work we've built up, or because we have experience within a certain field).

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I look at my tech-related background in two parts: Tech and Web Development.

Initially, I thought I wanted to do Web design and completed a certificate in Internet Technologies at NYU in 2000 (height of dot com era). But as I started doing the work, I found it didn't come naturally and was more frustrating than enjoyable. Tried to keep practicing figuring experience would change that, but it didn't.

I wrote an article and submitted it to a newsletter that gave away PhotoShop for published articles. That was the first step into the writing career.

I've been trying to move away from Web Design, but keep getting nice offers and work that I enjoy. As for the tech part, I love writing about technology for customers as opposed to hard core technology. But it's harder to find opportunities in customer technology, so I do more business-focused technology to stay busy.

INTERVIEW CONTINUED BELOW

Want to make \$100-\$200/day as a freelance writer? Our freelance writing seminar, coming in October, will feature employers who tell you exactly what they're looking for in freelancers -- and more! Details at <http://inkwelleditorial.blogspot.com/2007/05/want-face-time-wemployers-who-hire.html>.

SPECIAL rate only for newsletter subscribers! Get Inkwell Editorial ebooks on making money *writing from home for as little as \$2.99*. Limited time offer! Go to <http://www.inkwelleditorial.com/bizguides-sub.htm>.

3. Do you think that freelance writers should specialize in a niche? If so, why? If not, why not?

It makes marketing and finding clients easier when you specialize in an industry or area. But it won't work for me because I love the diversity of the work I do. It is a problem, although I'm fortunate that it hasn't affected my business.

My blog and little e-mail newsletters are the ones stung by the non-niche thing. They target three distinct audiences. Maybe I would have a larger following if I pick one. For example, other blogs and e-mail newsletters would put together a list of "best resources in x topic." Mine won't make such a list because it doesn't focus on just x topic.

Maybe it's my nature that I do diverse work that prevents me from working toward a niche. Thankfully, it works for me.

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4. You've worked for some pretty impressive companies, eg, Pearson, Wiley and NYU (as an educator with New York University's online graduate program <<http://scps.nyu.edu/>>). How have you gone about landing "big name" clients?

Remember the certificate I got from NYU? A professor asked if I would be his assistant in a Web design class. Eventually, the certificate program didn't have enough students to keep me on (dot com thing again). An admin there remembered me and recommended me to the Dean of the online MS programs.

Most jobs with publishers came from knowing someone. Jeffrey Zeldman recommended me to New Riders, a publisher of tech books. I started writing a book, but it was canceled. This eventually led to a gig with Pearson because the people involved in the book remembered me and the chain events continued from there.

5. Piggybacking off the previous question, what are the two most effective marketing methods you've used as a freelance writer?

Even if you do just a project that is a one time thing, always keep in mind to do the best work possible so people keep coming back or think of you for future projects.

An example: I'm still in touch with someone from New Riders who went to work for two other publishers where we ran into each other again. I did work for him while he was at those two companies, thus expanding the publishers I've worked with.

I believe 95% of my business is repeat business. New business is always exciting and scary. It takes time to learn about the client, get a feel for the process and perform to standards or beyond. I admit that I have less confidence in my work with new assignments and feel nervous because I want to make the client happy.

So far, I've only had one assignment that didn't work out. I had a pit in my stomach every time the editor assigned articles and every time I turned it in. Though it was not the right assignment for me, it was a great experience and taught me a few lessons.

6. What advice would you give to those who want to crack the B2B writing niche?

Network. If you're comfortable with cold calling, that works too. Another way to break in is to look for Web sites and e-mail newsletters targeting the B2B and see if you can contribute an article to build up your portfolio. Of course, make sure your article proposal fits that audience.

I've gotten numerous article proposals for articles about making tons of money for a newsletter targeting e-mail publishers. These writers obviously didn't bother reading one issue of the

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newsletter. We never write about making money -- it's off the mark.

7. As a “techie,” (I think I can get away with calling you that) what software do you think freelancer writers should be aware and stay abreast of?

:) Nowadays, we have many options especially with online applications from reputable companies stepping on Microsoft's software toes. It's always good to have an application that can open and save files compatible with .doc (Word), .xls (Excel) and .ppt (PowerPoint).

Office 2007, however, saves these files with an x on the end of the extension, i.e. .docx, .xlsx and .pptx.

Those with earlier versions of Office and these applications won't be able to open these files unless they install the file converter. Details here:

<http://meryl.net/2007/07/03/microsoft-office-2007-file-formats/>

Other software depends on the freelancer's clients and industry. If the freelancer works with Web sites, it may help to have Visio for flowcharting or visually showing where content should appear on a Web page.

Overall, I use Word, Excel, FireFox, Thunderbird and Internet Explorer the most. I do use Outlook (after all, I wrote a book on the software) for working with one of my clients since we use the Exchange server by setting up a VPN. I also rely on a Palm PDA and Palm Desktop to manage tasks, contacts and calendar.

Having browsers other than Internet Explorer helps, too. You learn how content appears differently in different browsers. FireFox is my first choice, but some sites don't play nice with FireFox, so I fire up Internet Explorer.

<http://www.mail2web.com> is a good resource that lets you check e-mail from anywhere and any computer.

8. How long did it take you to feel “established” as a freelancer (ie, I feel confident that I can make a real go of this career choice without going back to a 9-5)?

About five years. I think too many people have unrealistic expectations that they should succeed within a year or two.

I started writing on the side while still working my "day job." I probably could've made the switch to freelancing full-time earlier, but I had to ensure that my family had health insurance coverage in place.

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While some freelancers -- especially those who are single -- find self-insurance, my spouse and I didn't want to go that route for medical reasons plus we have three kids.

It worked out well as soon as I started full-time freelancing because all the pieces were in place. I've been fortunate to stay busy, and have the flexibility to help my kids and rest when I don't feel well.

9. Anything you're working on now you want to tell us about?

I just finished my first book, *Brilliant Outlook Pocketbook*, which comes out at the end of August. I never dreamed my first book would be completed in three weeks with my dad having a stroke about a week before it was due.

I knew the publisher would never give me an extension because an author of another book in the series was hospitalized and the publisher wouldn't budge on the date. Still, it was nice getting it done quickly.

Publisher Note: You can get Meryl's book, for the moment, from Amazon.co.uk (yes, UK) at <http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0132059711?ie=UTF8&tag=merylnet-21&linkCode=as2&camp=1634&creative=6738&creativeASIN=0132059711>

[Cut/paste link into your browser if you can't click it and open.]

Meryl writes, "I'm working with the publisher in hopes of seeing it released in the US as not everyone wants to buy books from UK."

10. Any parting thoughts you want to share that I didn't ask you about?

Blogging can be a useful tool for writers because it forces you to constantly come up with topics to write about. It's also great writing practice.

Or, you can use a journal for this practice, if you prefer. I've kept a journal since 1989 and have filled over 10 books. You can create a private blog, if you'd rather no one reads it.

If you don't have a Web site, blogging can fill the void -- but make sure you have an "About" page that tells about you and your writing experience.

At the least, have a Web presence. It can be through your own Web site, a blog or even having a profile on a social networking site like LinkedIn. Blogging isn't for everyone or a must, aside from the writing practice -- blogs also keeps your Web site fresh and search engines love it.

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<<http://meryl.net/2007/07/10/the-blog-is-the-new-resume/>>

Don't forget to provide your complete bio, and once again, thank you for sharing your insight.

MERYL K. EVANS: BIO

Meryl K. Evans, Content Maven behind meryl.net, has written and edited for AbsoluteWrite, The Dallas Morning News, Digital Web, InformIT, MarketingProfs, PC Today, O'Reilly, Pearson, Sams, Wiley, and WROX. Her first book, *Brilliant Outlook Pocketbooks*, comes out in August 2007. She has written copy for businesses as well as Fib-or-Not? and Meet, Mix, and Mingle games.

Meryl writes and edits content for businesses and publications. She helps business build and maintain relationships with clients and prospects.

A native Texan, she lives a heartbeat north of Dallas in Plano, Texas with her husband and three kiddos.

Yuwanda, thank you for asking! I'm honored!



SECTION II: FREELANCE JOBS



Freelance Writer for Photography Newsletter

Are you a superb writer, editor & DIYer who loves photography?

You'll be involved in all aspects of the creation of the Photojojo newsletter: finding awesome photo stuff, writing and editing, finding and working with contributors, taking and editing photos, writing simple HTML, and publishing emails.

This is a freelance, part-time position.

We want a creative writer who loves loves loves photography and isn't afraid to get some glue on his/her hands. Someone who can write friendly, fun, and efficient prose that makes people smile.

To read the rest of the job description and to apply, go here:

http://photojojo.com/help_wanted.html

Freelance Writers Wanted for Technology Magazine

Make is a do-it-yourself technology magazine written by makers. When you write something for *Make*, use your voice. Tell us the story behind your project.

There are four types of content in *Make*: Projects, Features, Reviews, and Everything Else. (If you have an idea for something that doesn't fit in one of the first three areas but is still related to do-it-yourself technology, we'd like to hear about it, too – hence the Everything Else category.)

We pay \$25 to \$100 for a review. Payment for other types of content will be negotiated.

For full details on how to submit to *Make*, click here:

<http://admin.makezine.com/submissions.csp>



SECTION III: My Freelance Writing Life (aka Yuwanda's Corner)



Here, I post ramblings about my freelance life and my personal life (a little). My hope is that it will shed some light on what goes on in the life of a freelancer.

I've been a lazy bum since I got back from vacation. My fiancé and I went on a beach vacation with some friends, as I told you in the last issue.

The wonderful thing about friends – good friends – is that seeing them is a vacation in and of itself. We got a chance to laugh, talk and kvetch without the worries of business, bills and all the other stuff life throws your way on a daily basis.

Hanging with friends is one of my absolute favorite things to do – especially over a nice cocktail with the ocean breeze at my back. And, since I left a chunk of buddies in Manhattan three years ago, and others have moved on to other cities, it's hard keeping up with the lot of them.

As soon as we came back from vacationing with the New York crew, one of my best girlfriends from Chicago came to visit with her six-year-old son. I hadn't seen her in three years, so that was a real treat. While it was challenging to fit three years worth of unfettered girl talk in with a bored six-year-old in tow – we did manage!

My fiancée just shook his head and did his best to stay out of the way for the few days she was here.

You always want your clients to feel that you gave them more than they paid for. What precipitated this comment?

While on vacation, as my friends and I sat having drinks at this overpriced restaurant on the beach, we were shocked when we got the bill because it was more than double what we expected.

You see, we mosied into the establishment because they beckoned us in with “Drinks are half price; it's Happy Hour.” We perused the drink menu and 3 out of 4 of us ordered drinks that turned out to be \$32 (regular price); that made the 50% discount \$16. Follow?

The problem with this? We were led to believe that the drinks were regularly \$12; hence, with our 50% discount, we thought we would be paying \$6.

There were no prices on the drink portion of the menu at all. To top it off, only certain drinks listed were \$12. The others were \$32. But, nowhere did it say this and there were no specified categories that would lead you to believe that one cocktail was priced differently than another.

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We paid the bill and left the restaurant vowing never to return. And, we told everyone we knew what a “scam” that place was.

Lesson here: Never let your clients leave feeling like that. Some will complain upfront – most will not. They’ll just pay what they owe and vow to never use you again – and tell their friends and professional associates not to do so as well.

Doggy Notes: Blacky, our dog (don’t really feel comfortable calling her a puppy anymore cuz she’s so big), needs doggy training school.

She got a new, outside cage that’s much larger so she can run around freely all the time, but she jumps on you every chance she gets – which drives me bonkers. Pretty soon, she’s going to be big enough to literally knock me down (remember, she’s a Siberian Husky/Pit Bull-mixed mutt).

I told my fiancé – she’s going to doggy school because I like my whites, white, and all of my clothes paw-free!



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SECTION IV: PREVIOUS ISSUES

Issue 1: June 6, 2007 can be found at <http://www.inkwelleditorial.com/newsletter.pdf>

Issue 2: June 20, 2007 can be found at <http://www.inkwelleditorial.com/Newsletter/6-20-07.pdf>

Issue 3: July 18, 2007 can be found at <http://www.inkwelleditorial.com/Newsletter/7-18-07-freelance-writing-newsletter.pdf>

Always editorially yours,
Yuwanda

P.S.: How'd you like to make \$90/hour editing text? How about \$4,000 to produce a six-page document?

In the Next Issue (September 12th): We ring in the “editorial season” (which unofficially starts after Labor Day) by interviewing Gordon Graham, aka “that white paper guy.” Gordon writes and edits white papers and case studies. He charges \$90/hour just to edit a white paper and a *minimum* of \$4,000 to produce a white paper from scratch.

Most freelancers don't dream of ever making this type of money. I can't wait to bring you this interview!

NOTE: Editorial is notoriously slow during the summer, so the newsletter will be published once during July and August. We'll go back to publishing twice a month in September.

P.P.S.: Don't forget, as a subscriber you get special deals on our e-books and seminars via a secret page on InkwellEditorial.com. **Ebooks for \$2.99 – regularly \$9.95!** It's my gift for being a subscriber. The secret page is at <http://www.InkwellEditorial.com/bizguides-sub.htm>.

P.P.P.S.: Want to make \$100-\$200/day writing from home? Details in Inkwell's upcoming Freelance Writing Seminar at <http://inkwelleditorial.blogspot.com/2007/05/want-face-time-wemployers-who-hire.html>

Your Ideas Count! Send in your comments/questions/suggestions, etc. Have a freelancing issue you'd like to see covered? Email me at info@inkwelleditorial.com. I'll do my best to cover it.

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