

The freedom of using a freelancer

By [David Gimpel](#)

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There are a number of very good reasons that ad agencies, design studios, and new media companies are starting to use freelance copywriters more than ever before.

1. Cost to company

Retaining a good copywriter full-time doesn't come cheap.

While a freelancer's hourly rate may be a little higher than a full-timer, freelancers are only brought on board when there's paying work to be done. And once the job's done, the meter stops ticking.

Also, their cost to company is totally transparent, quantifiable and recoverable. They don't sit around drinking coffee, or chewing up your bandwidth on company time. (And you don't have to keep haranguing them to fill in their time sheets!)



2. The right writer for the job

The diversified media channels available today call for a broader skill set than ever before.

Copywriters need to be able to know a lot more about the specifics of writing for a whole new set of parameters, markets and applications - from search optimisation techniques on the web to streamlined content for phone apps. (While still keeping up to date with conventional advertising skills and scenarios).

Most agency jobs can be successfully done in-house by whichever writer is available; other jobs may require specific skills - or sufficient experience - to get the job done accurately in the time available.

Writing for specialised markets such as finance, fashion, or wine, for example, may require a certain degree of understanding, background, lingo and familiarity that the available in-house writers might not possess. Instead of going off half-cocked, and risk compromising the client relationship, it will always be easier, safer and quicker to call in a specialist writer.

3. Golden handshakes

With the current levels of uncertainty, upheavals and account movements in the market, costly staff retrenchments are often inevitable.

Even when the process is uncontested and perfectly civil, the unproductive severance cost is a bitter pill to swallow. Moreover, the dip in staff morale, and the resultant water-fountain gossip are never easy to deal with.

4. Flexibility

Spikes in demand for in-house writing services shouldn't necessarily lead to immediate appointments.

Until the agency gets to the point where it can confirm a steady increase in consistent demand for writing services, it will be well advised to satisfy its short-term needs with freelancers.

Pitching for new accounts, for example, can be an expensive and disruptive business for an agency. So, instead of pulling their in-house writers off live/paying briefs for clients, it often makes more sense to bring in a dedicated writer, or creative team, to work on the irregular and inconsistent jobs such as pitches, special projects etc.

5. Candidate availability

An agency shouldn't have to compromise its staff complement just because it can't immediately find the right person for the job.

It shouldn't be rushed or pushed into employing over-priced or second-rate staff just because it has a backlog of briefs waiting to be tackled. It's far better to bring in a freelancer, if necessary, until a suitable candidate becomes available.

6. Scale

Smaller agencies may be able to keep a lesser-experienced writer, or team of writers, who are more than adequate for 90% of the agency's needs.

But when the additional skills or experience of a more senior writer are required, it is always easy to find a suitable freelancer to fill in.

The bigger picture

This is not only a local phenomenon. International agencies and clients alike are starting to look towards freelance writers from English-speaking developing countries to fulfil their writing needs.

English has become the lingua franca of global trade, and the online world. Sourcing native-tongue English writers from South Africa is a lot cheaper than their compatriots in England, Australia or Canada etc.

I have found that even with my local clients, most of my work is done via email anyway, so it makes little difference if the client is a block away, or the other side of the globe. I recently wrote a website for a Finnish financial institution, but the whole process was so seamless and effortless they could easily have been next door.

Not only was my quote less than a third of the UK copywriter previously used, but he wanted two weeks to write it. I did the job in two and a half days, and the site was up and running within a week.

The cheese may have moved

A lot of copywriters complain how difficult it is to crack it in the local agency network, but they haven't realised that their cheese may have been moved - perhaps on-line and off-shore.

What I love most about my vocation is how mobile and exportable the skills are - without having to worry about visas or work permits. I recently did a job for a London client on my Blackberry while on holiday in the Transkei.

That, to me, is Living the Dream: being where I want to be, and earning foreign currency.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Gimpel is an award-winning copywriter with over 23 years experience - eight of them as a dedicated freelancer servicing local and international ad agencies. He graduated with an Industrial Psychology and Economics degree from VU University, followed by a post-graduate Higher Diploma in Journalism at Rhodes University. He operates his freelance copywriting service under the name Copy on Tap ([www.copyontap.co.za]); [www.facebook.com/pages/Copy-on-Tap/108202865916075 Facebook]]. Contact David via email [david@copyontap.co.za] or tel +27 (0)21 424 7771.

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