

A Guide to Building a Professional Copywriting Portfolio and Establishing Your **Credibility** at the Same Time



Stacey Mathis
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As a beginning copywriter you will want to demonstrate to your prospective customers that you have the talent to complete an effective marketing or promotional copywriting project for them. We do this by providing them with a portfolio of the work we've done for others. At the same time, they also need to be assured that you can be trusted to carry out the assignment in a professional and timely manner. You prove this by providing them with the names of hugely credible sources. In other words, give them the names of recognized companies or organizations that can vouch for you.

"But I Don't Have Any Credible Sources Yet!"

The Self-Employed Copywriter's Advantage

Large corporations and organizations are still reeling from the tumult of the economic downturn. As a result, like everybody else, they're looking for ways to cut expenses and save money. This is where copywriters, who are trying to make a name for themselves, have an advantage. One of the best ways to get work from the large companies and organizations, when you are starting out, is to offer your services pro bono. This is not to say that your services will be offered to them on a complimentary basis forever. It's just that first assignment. This has a three-fold benefit:

- (1) They now know you exist and know the quality of your work should they need a self-employed copywriter in the future (and many large companies hire self-employed copywriters regularly).
- (2) It gives you practice, preparation and confidence for working with the next big company.

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(3) You can add this sample to your professional copywriting portfolio.

*Remember to ask them to send you a copy once it is in final (after the designer's work is added).

(4) Because your client is a reputable entity, it lends you credibility of great magnitude.

There Are Over 14 Million Companies - and They All Use Writers

So, here's what you do. If you have a niche already (and it's more advantageous if you have a niche), make a list of top companies in your niche market that you would like to work with. To speed things up, you can visit allbusiness.com, a business search site which has profiles of over 14,000,000 companies in the United States and narrows them down for you by industry. The site offers resources including how-to articles, business forms, expert advice, business guides, and more.

If you haven't decided on a niche yet, that's okay for now. Simply create a list of the ideal companies that you'd like to write for regardless of the niche. You can find the top companies in your City or State, by Googling "top companies in _____" and in place of the line, you will fill in the name of your City or State.

Non-Profit Organizations are a Great Place to Start

Don't sleep on non-profits. Non-profits and other (non-corporate) organizations can provide some of the most exciting copywriting assignments out there. The older or well-known (and even some smaller local ones) have name recognition that gets your foot in the next guy's door a lot faster than some of the for-profit companies. [Melissa Data](#), a website that has direct marketing insights and practical information that helps companies sell products/services, generate leads and retain customers, can provide you with the names of organizations in any zip code.

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Yahoo also has a list of professional organizations by category at :

http://dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Organizations/Professional/

[DMOZ](#), the open directory project, also has a variety of listings for organizations in every imaginable category. On their Home page, you click on a category (e.g., Sports), then scroll until you see "organizations."

Leverage LinkedIn to Find the Names of Corporate Contact People

By now, I'm sure you have an account with the leading online social media site linkedin.com. If not, it behooves you to join. Just click on the link. Although it is known for facilitating job searches for people looking for employment, it also serves many functions for the business owner. From their Home page, go into the "Search Companies" feature on the dropdown box. Then type in your desired company's name. The first thing you want to ascertain is your connection with someone who has a connection with someone at the company. Your profile will immediately bring up that information the moment you click the company's name if there is a connection between you and the company.

You also can begin your search on linkedin by typing your industry in the box and clicking on the companies that come up to see if you have a connection to someone. Hopefully, and in all likelihood, if you have many linkedin connections, you will have someone you know who may be able to facilitate a meeting or who can get you the name of the person who hires copywriters.

If you don't have a connection with someone at the company or if you don't have a linkedin account, that's okay. We just have to be a little more creative. Go to the website of your desired

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company and click on their "About" pages (which are sometimes hidden in other pages). Look for links to pages including, but not limited to: "Corporate Governance," "Leadership," "Executive Team," "Marketing Department," or even "Employment Opportunities." These pages are likely to have the names of decision makers or people who can steer your sales letter to the person who handles copywriting "hiring."

Show Off Your Talent by Writing a Dynamic Sales Letter

Take an hour or two and sit down and draft the strongest sales letter you can write, offering your copywriting services pro bono. Writer, [Alan Sharpe](#), provides some useful tips to keep your sales letter lively and your reader awake.

Emailing the Contact Person

If you are lucky enough to be given the email address of a contact person, by all means, use it. However, remember we live in a spam-conscious world! Emailing has its own set of stringent rules and expectations that your email must comply with or it will die and never reach the box of your contact person.

Taboo Email Words and Phrases

Certain words and phrases are absolute no-no's when it comes to email. In other words, they won't pass the Spam filter. I have listed some of the more common ones that can be "deadly" whether they are in your subject line or the body of your email. They include:

Free

Winner

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Bonus

Call Now

Great Offer/Deal Amazing

Visit our website

Opportunity

50% Off

Call Now

Subscribe

Information you requested

Bonus

Really

Discount

Click Here

One time

Save up to

Winner

Prizes All New

Order Now

Special Promotion

Important information regarding

Guarantee, Guaranteed

Very

If you have any questions, you can always reach out to me.

"Work smart, not hard," someone once said. And I try to hold that idea in the front of my mind in everything I do. This does not mean I forgo being a consummate professional. It just means if there is a way, with fewer steps to accomplish the same goal with the same or higher quality level, without stressing or burning myself out, I go for it! And you should too.

Bonus

I wrote and sent this [simple letter](#) (in the form of an email) which got me many return calls and assignments from some of the top local and national non-profit organizations. I went with a very personal approach. You can use whatever works for you. I used a similar structure and layout for all the non-profits and tailored each email according to the relationship I had with the organization or according to what they stood for in my life.

I came up with the list by writing down everything that represents who I am and found organizations that I either belonged to or had a reason to care about. For example: I have glaucoma, I play golf, I invest in the stock market, my mother was on dialysis, I am a single mother, I attended summer camp as a child, I am a woman, I have an intellectually gifted son, I live in New York City, I worked in the field of law - you get the idea. There's an organization for whatever you are, whatever you relate to or for whatever you want to be a part of.

Good luck to you!