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## **The Freelance Writer By Herman Holtz**

### **The Freelance Writer as an Independent Consultant**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

##### **Why This Book?**

I have had two main career interests in my life, and been fortunate enough to be successful in both: They are writing (and I use that word to refer to and include the whole spectrum of publications activities) and consulting. In fact, I consulted as a proposal writer and of all the more than 60 books I wrote for publication, the best-selling ones were books on consulting. So it is hardly strange that I associate the two careers, writing and consulting, quite closely with each other. In the pages that follow, you will find frequent observations that certain kinds of writing work and writing projects are consulting tasks at least as much as they are writing projects. Having made that observation over and over again in my writings, spontaneously and without contemplation, it has finally come home to me that many writers are actual consulting, and doing so at far lower rates than they are entitled to earn. As you read on, I think you will see the truth of this. My intention here is to encourage all writers to get a more accurate look at what they do, and start seeing that they are and should be paid as consultants.

##### **History of This Book**

This book is based on and is largely a compilation (supplemented with new material) of many how-to articles and reports I wrote and published (with periodic updates, as necessary), over the past 20-odd years. About one-half of those pieces were on the subject of writing, on some of the many aspects of writing as a career profession or sideline activity. The remaining one-half were on the subject of independent consulting and sundry business subjects, such as public speaking, marketing, and contract negotiation, but also touching frequently on writing.

I have presented these articles and reports here in a rather random order, with some revisions and additional new material to round out and focus the main emphasis of this book, which is this: Freelance writing and consulting are both ancient and honorable professions, and the pages of this book will guide the reader to many markets for writing and consulting functions, explaining their needs and opportunities. In today's complex world, the modern freelance writer often functions much more as a consultant than as writer or editor in writing and publications matters. I hope to inspire and guide you to upgrade your skills and knowledge to the status of consultant in some editorial specialty.

**Whether your own greatest interest lies entirely in writing per se, part-time or full-time, as a freelance or to supplement your job skills, or for the higher purpose of becoming an independent editorial consultant, there is useful information and guidance for you in the pages ahead. It is my hope in writing this book, however, that I will inspire you to become a dedicated, independent consultant, to the enrichment of yourself and your clients. Or, if you are already an independent consultant of some kind, I hope that you will use the information in these pages to supplement your consulting skills and the services you provide your clients.**

### **What is an Editorial Consultant?**

**The term editorial consultant is my own coinage, as far as I know. At least, I do not recall encountering it elsewhere than in my own writings. I define it as one who offers consulting services in writing, editing, or other related skill, including publishing. Of course, that raises two questions:**

**What is an independent consultant?**

**What are some examples of an editorial consultant?**

**Both questions will be answered in these pages, answered abundantly, in fact, as we explore the many ways and byways of writing and related career specialties.**

### **How Does One Become an Independent Consultant?**

**At one time, hardly anyone ever planned to be a consultant (although universities now offer courses in the art of consulting). Most of us stumbled into consulting, somehow, as I did. I became a proposal consultant by chance, because many of the proposals I wrote as a staff tech writer were successful in winning contracts. That inspired friends and acquaintances (and ultimately, strangers) to call to ask for my advice, and then my writing help, until it became too much and I began to say no. Then they offered to retain me as a paid consultant. That put things into a new light, and I began to charge for helping people write proposals, and soon expanded into marketing in general, especially marketing to the federal government and its many agencies. I found, soon enough, that I was also in demand as a lecturer on the subject, and conducted many lectures and seminars at my then daily fee of \$1,000.**

### **Why Make the Change?**

**Almost any kind of writing/editing/illustrating or other publication experience and skill can become the basis for and be developed into an independent consulting specialty: Skills in general in writing and/or editing, illustrating, training systems development, speech writing, public relations, technical writing, medical writing, news writing, and other skills within or related to editorial and publications work have been so translated successfully by others. Moreover, the metamorphosis need not stop with the initial upgrade: A gentleman named Howard Penn Hudson became one of the (if not the) leading authority on newsletters, and has written**

widely on the subject in books and his own newsletter about newsletters. Open to the advertising sections of direct-marketing periodicals, such as DM News and Target magazine, and see how many writers are today high-paid consultants in writing sales letters and other elements of direct mail.

Hubert Bermont, founded his own independent consulting career as consultant on book publishing, ultimately becoming a publisher himself (The Consultant's Library) and founder of an association of independent consultants. Subscribe to some of the mailing lists and news groups on the Internet and read the posts of technical writers who became independent consultants in technical publications. The list of examples is almost end-less in its size overall and in its diversity of independent consulting specialties. I first expressed this basic idea of growth from writing and related skills to independent consulting in my writings of some 20 years ago, after I had applied this idea successfully to my own career. I know now how prophetic my words were. But not only are those words as true today as they were then, but they were much more significant than I knew.

I could certainly not have predicted how much both writers' specialties and independent consulting itself would burgeon, although I suspected that they would continue to grow. Much less could I have foreseen the many new opportunities for independent consulting that would be created almost overnight by the many new specialties that have overtaken us and made old methods and systems obsolete. Revolutionary change has come about far more rapidly than any of us could have foreseen, and the change has affected writing and related functions as much as it has any other activity of our society:

Typewriters and typesetting machines are almost museum pieces today, as are the big, mainframe computers. They are being replaced by personal computers with word processors, desktop publishing programs, and laser printers. Fax machines and fax boards in computers have largely replaced clumsy older systems of rapid written communication. Fax and email are cutting sharply into surface mail and may soon obsolete it.

More and more commonly, advertising or publicity notices and business cards and letterheads include the address of an Internet Web site. The personal computer and the advances it has inspired, e. g., the fax, the electronic bulletin boards and commercial online services, and the Internet and Web alone have inspired many new independent consulting specialties. Among today's newer breed of independent consultants are the designers and creators of Web sites for clients, the developers of materials to train people in the new technologies and method-, writers of manuals for users of new equipment, and those who write the new direct mail of online advertising for clients.

Of course, writers can also upgrade to the older, conventional consulting specialties, such as conventional direct mail, speech writing, public relations, proposal writing, sales promotions, broadcasting, copywriting, and publishing, to name a few. Money—the higher fees you can and should command as a consulting specialist—is

alone a perfectly valid reason to choose independent consulting over freelance writing as a career. But it is not necessarily the only reason. One other reason many consultants have reported to me is that consulting gives them greater satisfaction, a greater sense of achievement, than writing did. Their work has greater significance for them. Too, consulting means working with others, clients and often clients' staff people, whereas freelance writing is often a completely lonely activity. Some writers handle the loneliness well, but others find it depressing and have great trouble enduring it.

### **Consultant or Writer?**

One other factor is more subtle, although equally significant: There is much more prestige in being a consultant than in being a writer. Unfortunately, people in our society may be impressed by a writer who is published between book covers, but in general, a writer, as such, rarely commands equal respect. Here is a case in point: As a freelance proposal writer, a number of years ago, I was able to charge and get fees of \$1,000 per day, a sizable daily rate even in today's highly inflated marketplace.

Of course, I did not represent myself as a proposal writer, although that was the major service I provided my clients. I presented myself as a proposal consultant, for I delivered far more in services and results than would be expected of a writer. Once (but only once), a prospective client balked at my fee: "That's too much money to pay a writer!" she exclaimed indignantly. "But writing is only incidental to what I provide you," I explained. "I am a consultant, an expert in winning contracts, especially government contracts. I analyze the requirement, lead your proposal effort and write some or all of it, as necessary. I devise strategies for you. I solve the problems that inevitably crop up." My prospective client was unmoved. "No writer is worth that much," she insisted.

After a few more minutes of this kind of exchange, I gave it up. I was obviously not going to prevail, and there was no point in wasting more time. Anyway, it was the first and proved to be the only time I ran into this problem. The fact that it happened at all is significant in that it illustrated, as much as any experience could, the dramatic effects of turning your writing know-how into consulting know-how, and the difference between the two know-hows.

Note that this client insisted that I was "only" a writer to support her unwillingness to pay my fee, but did not dispute that a consultant offered services of greater value than one would expect of a writer. But more than a title is required. Even as the most expert of freelance writers, you do not become a consultant simply by calling yourself a consultant.

What I told this woman was entirely true: A proposal consultant, or any consultant, is more, much more, than simply a freelance practitioner of some skill or craft that

is the basis for the enterprise. The consultant is not only expert at whatever he or she does, writing or any other skill, but is also able to design, advise, solve problems, and otherwise cover the entire waterfront for the client.

In the case of editorial services, you can decide to offer your services as a general editorial consultant, a consultant in all matters and kinds of writing an publications, but in today's world that is biting off quite a lot. It's pretty difficult to be knowledgeable in all fields, and even more difficult to be credible as that far-ranging an expert. Here are a few ideas, however, covering some of the kinds of activity in which many writers have chosen to become specialists and offer consulting services:

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