

# The perfect fit

How to outsource  
great writing



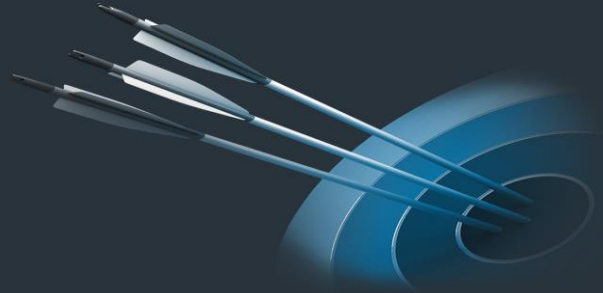
An AR  
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# Keeping up and standing out



As content marketing continues to pick up steam, high quality, helpful and engaging content is no longer seen as a nice-to-have—it’s something your clients expect. And this fact couldn’t be truer than in the b2b space.

After all, if you were a client researching potential vendors for your next big purchase, who would you trust with your investment: a company whose website features a blog post that is uncannily able to pinpoint and dispel your greatest concerns—along with a provoking thought leadership piece that convincingly settles a heated in-house debate—or the company that boasts a static website featuring its name, address and an overly-promotional (and meaningless) blurb in the “about us” section?

Thought so.

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Yet while this informational shift is making decision-making easier for buyers, it can be difficult for knowledgeable vendors to keep up—and stand out. Let's face it—feeding the content beast ain't easy, which is why many companies are paying professional writers to do it for them.



Check out our companion piece, "Feeding the content beast" at [www.ar-com.com](http://www.ar-com.com)

Outsourcing your content generation allows you to both satisfy your ever-growing workload and take your content to the next level—provided you find the right copywriter. And that's where things get tricky, because finding a great writer is harder than it sounds.

While a simple Google search reveals writers are undoubtedly out there, finding out if they're good requires significant legwork. Even if they're good writers—you know, in the sense that they have a strong grasp on grammar, spelling and sentence structure—there's no guarantee they'll be good in the b2b space, or at producing the types of collateral you require.

Taking the time and effort to sift through that proverbial haystack to find your ideal writer can seem daunting—especially since, if you're thinking about outsourcing, your time is probably already at a premium. To help you, we've simplified the process and broken it down into four fool-proof steps. You can thank us later.



# Step 1: Recognize you can't do it all

Let's face it, everyone can write. It's a skill the majority of the population learned in the early days of grade school and one that you practice every day, as you write emails and notes and LinkedIn status updates. Heck, you might even enjoy writing and pen fiction in your spare time.

There's a difference, however, between writing an email—or the next Stephen King-rivalling horror novel—and writing marketing material for a b2b audience. As the old adage goes, you only have one chance to make a first impression. And in today's web-focused world, that first impression is likely going to be made in writing—in a matter of seconds.

The clients who come across your content—whether directly or through a search engine—aren't doing it for fun. They want to know if your company has what it takes to win their business. They not only want to know that you're professional (and an authority in your particular area), but that you fully understand their needs and the issues that are important to them. Web content laden with typos and grammatical errors, or that lulls your visitors to sleep with marketing speak devoid of any meaning, isn't going to convey that message.



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The best way to spot the difference between okay writing and great writing is by witnessing what the power of words can do, first-hand. So consider these examples:

### **Example 1:**

Over a decade has passed since a number of high profile corporate frauds drove new regulatory and legislative changes that have led to the strengthening of corporate governance and internal control structures. One of the objectives of these changes was to mitigate the risk of internal and external fraud. However, in light of the recent economic downturn, fraud management programs are being overshadowed by other issues that are keeping the attention of senior executives. Yet the Retail Industry Leaders Association 2011 annual Crime Trends and Leading Practices survey indicates categories of fraud, such as internal theft, are on the rise.

### **Example 2:**

Over a decade ago, a number of high profile corporate frauds drove new regulatory and legislative changes, leading to stronger corporate governance and internal control structures. One goal of these changes was to mitigate the risk of internal and external fraud. Yet today, certain categories of fraud, like internal theft, are on the rise.



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Can you guess which paragraph was written by a professional writer? If you guessed the latter one—the one that is more concise, interesting and instantly boosts Company X's credibility—you're right! As you can see, professional writers that specialize in the b2b space aren't just good at crafting sentences—they're capable of much, much more.

The best ones approach business writing from all angles, seeking to understand the industry, particular business and audience for which they're writing. They ask the right questions, conduct additional research and offer suggestions to transform the writing you require into words your clients want to read. In short? They put in the time you don't have, combine it with years of corporate writing experience (you also don't have), to produce a seemingly-effortless finished product that takes the words right out of your mouth.

### **Benefits of hiring a professional writer**

- Improved quality of content
- Faster production of content
- More time for you/your team to focus on the business
- Access to professional writer's experience and insight
- Introduction to new content marketing trends and ideas



## Step 2: Define what you're looking for

Now that you know what the highest calibre of b2b writer is capable of, it's time to start your search for one. (Deep breaths. It's going to be okay.)

Like all relationships, the one you'll eventually foster with an external writer will be unique—and, in many ways, the process of finding one is a lot like dating. Your ideal working relationship will reflect your business and communication styles, your desired level of involvement, the habits and preferences of your internal team and the individual nuances of the writer. And as with dating, a bit of inner-reflection can go a long way here—the better you know yourself, the better you can define your preferred working arrangement ahead of time, and thus increase the odds of finding your writing soul mate.

So, first things first. Since writing is just one component of a strong content marketing strategy, it's helpful to have your strategy defined and well-documented before asking someone to hit the ground running. This means your tone, style and voice—as well as your preferred distribution channels—should all be outlined by your marketing team ahead of time.





Second, sit down and really think about what you want in a writing partner—and be honest. If delegating isn't one of your strong suits, you may want to let the writer know this upfront, and outline how you expect the relationship to work. If you're just coming around to the notion that professional writing is actually a wise business investment (and would prefer to be more hands-off), you need to find someone who is independent enough to take your initial thoughts or directions and run with them.

### **What does your ideal writing relationship look like?**

Here are a few helpful questions to consider when crafting a job description for your future external writer:

- What processes are in place to work with an external writer? (Will you simply send them an email with instructions of the content you'd like created, or will you include a more detailed creative brief? What turnaround time do you expect? How will edits be handled?)
- Will the writer need to be a researcher too, or will you provide them with the necessary information (previously-written collateral, interviews with subject matter experts, etc.)?
- How hands-on are you going to be? Will you write something first and simply ask them to fix it up—or will they be expected to pitch ideas?
- Will you be conducting the final edits from your end or should they expect a multitude of edits to get the final version "just right"?
- If you have a larger team, who will have access to the external writer and how will the process work?



# Step 3: Develop 'good writer' radar

With your future writer's job description in hand, it's time to find someone to fit the bill. Google is a great place to start, but you might also want to ask around for word-of-mouth referrals, search b2b content marketing websites (like [The Content Marketing Institute](#) or [Hubspot](#)), or your favourite industry publication (if you're not sure which bylines are freelancers, you could contact the magazine directly to gain access to their list of go-to writers).

Once you have a few names in hand, check out their website—paying particular attention to how it's written, as well as the type of work they do. You're look for someone who has experience writing for your industry, offers strong examples of similar work to that which you require, and/or boasts really great testimonials.

When you find someone who might fit the bill, contact them to get a better understanding of their experience, how they can help you and their typical writing process. If you still like what you hear, start them on a small assignment (think of it as a combination compatibility and writing test).



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Now, it's important to note that this test isn't a freebie (you'd be amazed by the number of companies that think otherwise). Unless the work is completely unusable—and the writer refuses to edit it to a workable standard—you're going to have to pay for it. That said, by requesting a quote, and gaining an understanding of your writer's pricing, you'll also glean invaluable information about their professionalism.

A good writer knows their worth. If you need a full-service writer—one who pitches ideas, conducts additional research, offers insight and suggestions and provides exceptionally well-written content on tight deadlines—you're going to pay a premium, and their quote should reflect that. If you're going to be more hands-on—say, you're going to write the first draft and simply require them to beef it up—you should get away with paying less. By the same token, experienced writers will likely charge more for a one-off project, and offer a discount for contracts or more frequent work.



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If the quote sounds good, and you opt to go ahead, pay close attention to the entire experience—particularly how you work together and whether their preferred process works for you. Expect some edits on the first draft and observe how they respond to your edits/suggestions. When you receive the final product, evaluate it for its potential. It might not be perfect, but if it's something you're comfortable using, keep in mind the work will likely only improve as the relationship evolves—particularly if you're offering constructive feedback and the writer is open to using it.

If it doesn't work out the first time, don't be discouraged. Finding someone who not only meets your company's writing needs but also meshes well with your company culture can take time. Hopefully, though, by implementing these different checkpoints, you'll be able to increase your odds of finding a worthwhile candidate in a shorter amount of time.



# Step 4: Work at the relationship

While there may come a day when your writer will be able to read your mind, that typically won't be the case at first. To make that day come a little sooner, it helps to invest some time upfront and give your writers the tools they need to succeed. These can include:

## **A good creative brief**

Injecting your instructions into a standard creative brief template can greatly increase your chances of receiving the finished project you had in mind. A creative brief typically outlines:

- The audience (who is this project for?)
- The tone (will it be informative, informal, enthusiastic?)
- Important information to be highlighted in the project
- Additional resources (to fill in missing information, offer examples or illustrate a preferred format/style)
- The deadline

### **Precedents and back-up materials**

Nobody knows as much about your business as you do. To make sure your writer is on point—and reflecting the proper language, style and tone—it helps to offer examples of previous work or materials that will help them wrap their head around the topic. While you don't want to drown them in information, a few key reference pieces can go a long way.

### **Constructive edits**

One of the wonderful things about writing is that it's always fixable. If you don't like the way a piece looks—you're averse to a certain turn-of-phrase, you don't like the tone the writer chose or you want the piece broken down into more sizeable chunks—use the editing process to get these nuances out in the open. This means letting the writer see your changes—even if the piece in question is ready to go to print—so they can learn your preferred writing style. And, as always, the more specific you can be with your feedback, the better.

### **An open mind**

Sometimes different isn't a bad thing. The best writing usually evolves when both parties learn to keep an open mind. Just as the writer needs to consider your preferences and feedback, it's important to listen to theirs. Because they've worked with countless other businesses, they've likely developed a good instinct for what works and what doesn't, as far as b2b writing is concerned. Take the time to listen to their reasoning before rejecting a new or different way of doing things.



# Try it for yourself

Finding a good writer can help alleviate some of the work from your already-full plate. Finding a great one can dramatically improve how you communicate with your target audiences and, potentially, boost your bottom line. While the process required to uncover greatness might seem tedious, many will argue that it's well worth the effort—and, in this fast-paced era of content marketing, it's nothing compared to the alternative.

If you're ready to call in the reinforcements and recruit some outside help, be sure to [sign up](#) for AR Communications Inc.'s monthly e-newsletter, *The Communication Breakdown*. It's full of additional tips and tricks to improve your company's content generation.



Got  
questions?  
Ask us:

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