FREELANCE WRITER'S
SPECIAL REPORT

#C-253 **A Business Plan For Writers**

A writer without a plan is like a traveler without a map. They will each end up someplace, but heaven knows where; it might even be right back where they started.

If you haven't yet mapped out your writing business plan, use the following as a guide. Feel free to add and delete sections to customize it to your own particular needs.

1. Why am I in the writing business?

Do you basically want to make enough money writing to support yourself and your family? Or do you want to develop a "name" and become a "famous writer?" Or do you mainly want to see your byline in certain publications? Or would you prefer establishing a solid part-time income of X number of dollars per month? Or do you want to establish yourself as an expert in some field in order to promote another business or profession, such as consulting? Or do you really want to write book-length projects?

As you can see, people have many reasons for wanting to write. Your real reason may not even be listed in the above paragraph. But the way you answer this question is critical to your eventual success. It will have direct bearing on the marketing, production, and research areas of your plan. (When you've come up with your real reason for writing, you may realize immediately that you've been wasting time by marketing and producing in the wrong directions.) So consider your answer carefully; then write it down on the following lines.

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2. What Business Am I In?

Before you dismiss this with a "why, the writing business, of course" reply, remember that most writers give up simply because they are confused about the business they are really in. Generalizing that you are a writer is like the hardware dealer who advertises simply that he is a retailer. What do you write? Even the few department stores that survive today have one or two departments that stand out above the others.

And even successful writers who cover a wide range of subject matter have one or two areas in which they are considered experts. You would be wise to choose your own area(s) of concentration. This does not mean that you can *never* write about anything else; it merely means that much of your time will be devoted to this area. By doing this, editors will soon recognize your name as a professional in that field, which will lead to assignments. Also, you will increase your productivity by making maximum use of your research material by spinning it off into other articles, columns, and books. If you don't already have an area of concentration, you might want to consider the following:

Nonfiction: business, medical, science, parenting, automotive, green living, education, history, technology, hobby/crafts, sports, the outdoors, agriculture.
Fiction: historical, mysteries, cozies, sagas, literary, science fiction, women's, adventure.

Now answer the question as to what writing business you're really in:

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3. Marketing

When you have decided what business you're really in, you have just made your first marketing decision. Now you must face other marketing considerations. Before you plan production, you have to decide who and where your market is and why they will buy your manuscripts. Your production goals and plans must be based on and be responsive to this kind of fact-finding (market feasibility and research).

a. Market Area. Where and to whom are you going to sell your manuscripts? List the markets that publish articles or stories in your area(s) of concentration. Be sure to go beyond the obvious markets. For example, *Writer's Market* includes a section of travel publications, yet many other magazines listed in other sections also buy articles on travel topics.

Because your personal market list will change constantly and will continue to grow as you discover new markets and new market directories, you'll want to keep it in a file that is easy to update; ideally in a computer database, possibly in a three-ring binder or on file cards. Include in your daily/weekly planning a specific period of time to search for new markets, write for sample copies, and study these publications.

b. Who Are Your Competitors? List the names of those writers who (a) appear over and over again in the magazines you're trying to crack, and who (b) concentrate in the same subject area as you do:

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Study the articles/stories these writers have published. You can search for their material in past issues or watch for them in upcoming ones, search for their bylines on the internet, or look them up in such directories as *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* (see if your library subscribes online) or Muck Rack. Analyze their styles, topics, research methods, beginnings, and endings. Compare to yours. Where do you need to put in more study and practice?

c. Distribution. Do you plan to submit query (pitch) letters via email? Or via social media DMs? or telephone or visit editors in person (rarely done today)? or submit completed manuscripts cold turkey? or use some other marketing approach? What method(s) do your target markets prefer? Write your answer:

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d. Sales Volume. What sales volume do you realistically expect to reach with your articles/stories? Complete the chart below:

		Total Sales	Specialty #1	Specialty #2	Specialty #3
First Year		$________	$________	$________	$________
	units	________	________	________	________
Second Year		$________	$________	$________	$________
	units	________	________	________	________
Third Year		$________	$________	$________	$________
	units	________	________	________	________

4. Production

Your first step in this section is to determine how much production (both ideas and completed projects) you need to meet the above sales projections. You can do this by reviewing your past writing history. (If you're a beginner without sales or with very few submissions, you'll have to guesstimate at first, then update your figures as actual results come in.)

Review your submission records for the past year and list the following figures:

Total number of queries (pitches) submitted: __________

Total number of go-aheads from editors: __________

Total number of manuscripts mailed: __________

Total number of sales: __________

Total dollar volume: __________

Dividing your dollar volume by number of sales will give you your average income per sale: __________

Dividing your number of queries submitted by the number of go-aheads will give you the average number of queries you need to submit in order to receive one go-ahead: __________

Dividing your number of manuscripts submitted by number of sales will give you the number of manuscript submissions you need to submit in order to make one sale: __________

Using these figures, you can now go back to your projected sales volume (under **Marketing**) and determine how many query letters and how many completed manuscripts you'll need to submit during the next year in order to meet your projections: __________ queries, __________ manuscripts

Dividing these numbers by 12 and by 50 (to allow for a two-week vacation), you can now set production goals for the upcoming year:

Submit _____ query letters each month; or _____ query letters each week.

Submit _____ manuscripts each month; or _____ manuscripts each week.

If your numbers are forcing you to set unrealistic goals, you can concentrate on improving some area of your business. For example, you may need to improve your query letters or put more study into where you send them. If your ratio of sales to number of manuscripts submitted is extremely low, you may want to spend more time studying published articles to find out where yours are weak. Or if your dollar volume is too low, you may want to upgrade the markets you're submitting too.

After analyzing your numbers in this section, list any areas in which you need to make improvements or study further:

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5. Put Your Plan Into Action

When your plan is as near on target as possible, you are ready to put it into action. Keep in mind that action is the difference between a plan and a dream. If a plan is not acted upon, it is of no more value than a pleasant dream that evaporates over the breakfast coffee.

At this point, look back over your entire plan, beginning with Section 1. Look for things that must be done to put your plan into action. For example, if you don't have a copy of *Writer's Market* or some other market guide, one action step may be to take (or save) the money and buy one. Another action step might be to clip or download and dissect published articles for future study. Or to search newspapers at the library or online for article ideas.

In the spaces that follow, list things that must be done to put your plan into action. Give each item a date so it can be done at the appropriate time. You may want to continue onto another sheet of paper.

To put my plan into action, I must do the following:

Action	Start Date	Other Action Dates	Completion Date

6. Keeping Your Plan Up To Date

Once you put your plan into action, keep a constant look out for possible changes. Editorial needs change, the popularity of subjects changes, and your own interests will change.

Set some time - two hours, three hours, whatever is necessary - to review your plan periodically. Go over your plan at least four times a year to see whether it needs adjusting. If revisions are needed, make them and put them into action. Ask yourself:

a. How can my productivity be increased? ____________________

b. Where can I save time? ____________________

c. Where can I save money? ____________________

Brainstorm new avenues through which your writing business may pass. Decide which areas are feasible and proceed.

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