



# **How to Land Your First Paying Client**

**10 Real-Life Examples of Writers and  
Bloggers and How They Landed Work for  
the First Time**

There's a saying in the journalism world: you need clips to get clips. It's a vicious circle where the only way to gain experience is to have experience. **So how do you find that first client who will help you break into the circle, build your portfolio and land more work?**

Even the most widely read writers and bloggers were once in that very same place. The Write Life asked some of our favorite creatives to share their advice for new freelancers.

In this ebook, they share their stories of how they found that first client—and then used that experience to grow their businesses to their current levels of awesomeness.

**Ready, set, get inspired—and then get writing!**

### **Andy Hayes, Creative Web Producer**

**His story:** Since I didn't have any experience in the work I wanted to do, I built up a writing profile by sprucing up my website and doing a few freebies.



Then I found some ideal clients via Google and created rockstar pitches. A cold pitch is an art form, and I don't remember if mine were very good at the time, but I landed the gig!

**Advice for new freelancers:** As Melody Biringer once told me, fail fast. As my story proves, sometimes it's a bit of luck and good timing. But you need to move quickly and find out what you're doing wrong: why people say no, who is NOT your ideal client, what's wrong with your offer. And remember, it can take tons of no's before getting a single yes!

### **Dana Sitar, Freelance Blogger and Author**



**Her story:** I found my first writing job as an unpaid intern through Craigslist (*gasp*—I know) when I was a brand-new writer with no experience. I took the internship to gain clips and credits, and after a few months, they offered me pay and more work. The work slowly built into my core income as I started my freelancing business and lasted for over two years!

**Advice for new freelancers:** Working for free can be a good in with a client, but know EXACTLY what you want to gain from it. If you only need experience and clips and don't expect it to turn into paid work, be clear about when you plan to end the internship.

However, if you're hoping to transition to paid work, find out what they have available and let them know from the start that you're interested. Not planning ahead can easily cause you to be stuck with unpaid work far longer than it's beneficial to you.

## **Carol Tice, CEO and Janitor, TiceWrites LLC**

**Her story:** After leaving my staff writing job, I called some of my best sources, the people I'd really enjoyed talking to over the years. I didn't really want anything from them except to say, "Thanks for the memories," and to let them know I had left the paper and would be freelancing, but hoped to maybe talk again in the future.



One of the startups I covered immediately asked me to ghostwrite his blog and write some advertorial articles for his website. He was my first business writing client, and that work opened up a whole new world to me. My next client was a billion-dollar global consulting firm, which I probably never would have landed without that smattering of initial business writing work.

**Advice for new freelancers:** Make sure you connect with everyone you know who likes your work and knows you're a good freelancer!

Step one is reconnecting on LinkedIn with everyone for whom you've ever done any freelance work: catch up with them and let them know what you're doing now. Mention that you're looking to add a few new clients to your stable and would appreciate their referrals.

This is the low-hanging fruit of marketing! It will never get easier to market yourself as a freelancer than by telling people who already know and love your work that you need them to keep an ear out for referrals. We often feel awkward asking for assistance, but in fact most people love to help with referrals.

Plus, being busy on LinkedIn will help you be found there—it's the phone book for freelancers and companies, and publications are always searching the platform, looking at profiles and reaching out to freelancers they want to hire.

## **Mindy Long, Journalist**



**Her story:** I wrote my first paid freelance feature after replying to a post on my alumni listserv. When I replied, I thought I was writing a free essay for my alumni magazine, but it turned out that they were paying \$700 for the story!

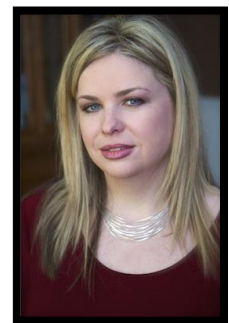
When I decided to take my freelance business full time, I talked with my then employer and told her I was going solo. At the same time I unveiled a proposal I had prepared on how I could take my favorite parts of my job with me. She liked my ideas and became my first core client. Five years later, the company is still one of my primary clients.

**Advice for new freelancers:** Say yes to opportunities when they come your way, even if it means doing interviews in your car on your lunch break, which is what I did for years.

## **Jennifer Dunn, Social Director, Social Street Media**

**Her story:** I went about landing my first freelance writing job the wrong way.

Instead of telling everyone I knew that I was now freelance writing, or making use of my network, I Googled around until I came across a freelance bid site called BizReef. I quickly landed a job writing about identity theft for \$25 per page of double spaced text. I had no idea what I was doing and made up a price on the fly!



The funniest thing? Five years later, I still work with that client from time to time!

**Advice for new freelancers:** Tell your mom, dad, aunts, uncles, former bosses, co-workers, and your barista what you're doing. You are much more connected than you realize and a passionate word-of-mouth referral is way more powerful than a cold email to a random Craigslist posting.

## **Jenny Blake, Chief Amazingness Officer**



**Her story:** I created my Life After College website in 2005, but there wasn't much to it until I decided to add a blog in late 2007. When I started to share my own personal experiences, readers began to find me and could relate to my stories.

When I added a coaching page in 2008, my readership was small so at first I didn't have many takers. I'll never forget when my very first client Kristi reached out. She lived in Chicago and I lived in California, but we were a perfect fit for one another.

As soon as I connected with Kristi, I knew that my website could be a great platform for a business one day, as long as I committed to being authentic, transparent, and insanely helpful.

**Advice for new freelancers:** Be you. Don't try to fit into a specific "marketing" box or strategy if it doesn't feel right to you. Where do you hang out? Who do you enjoy working with?

Before you do any marketing at all, get incredibly clear on exactly who you want to work with, and why you are the perfect fit to serve them.

I love Michael Port's *Book Yourself Solid* for getting crystal clear on these things, *Get Clients Now* for setting up regular outreach habits, and *The Referral Engine* for learning how to systematize your referral process.

## Thursday Bram, Entrepreneur



**Her story:** My very first “client” was my mother; she ran a magazine and offered writing articles as an alternative to doing chores. I've always liked writing more than washing dishes, so it was an easy decision.

From there, it was just a matter of word-of-mouth: a few other editors heard that I was available and, more importantly, inexpensive—as a high school student often is. I didn't get paid a lot, but I did make a little more than my friends made babysitting.

**Advice for new freelancers:** Use the networks you already have. You're going to want to break into much bigger markets, but your existing connections will help you build the portfolio necessary to do so. It's only after you can show your value that landing those bigger clients becomes easier.

## Shawndra Russell, Digital Strategist

**Her story:** While flipping through the latest issue of a regional magazine, I saw a piece about up-and-coming entrepreneurs in Savannah. I loved one business in particular, so I reached out via email and congratulated the owner on the idea and coverage. I also told him that I'd love to help him with his social media.



I worked for a low rate but it was a great experience and paved the way for lots of opportunities and learning.

**Advice for new freelancers:** Reach out to a new local business owner whose idea you love and offer to help them. They have so much going on that they'll be grateful to have something taken off their plate! Plus, it's nice to start from the beginning with someone and get their website and social media pages set up nicely.

Don't give up—there are people out there who need your help!

## **Alexis Grant, Writer and Digital Strategist**



**Her story:** Some of my first freelance writing pieces were for a newspaper I'd previously worked for full time. Because I had contacts there, I knew exactly what they wanted and how to make an appealing offer.

Those relationships helped me turn a backpacking trip through Africa into a portfolio-building opportunity, and I now have a story with a dateline from Burkina Faso to show for it.

**Advice for new freelancers:** While this approach won't work for everyone—because not every freelancer has previously held full-time jobs—it *can* be helpful to remember that even if you're no longer a full-time employee, a previous employer might want to hire you for work.

When you're leaving your job, keep your eyes out for opportunities for contract work there. Hiring you as a freelancer might even mean savings for the company, since it's so much cheaper than bringing on a full-time employee. And keep those relationships warm, because even if that former employer doesn't have work for you now, they might think of you down the line.

## **Tom Ewer, Professional Blogger**

**His story:** I submitted 5-10 pitches to the ProBlogger Job Board. I received a couple of responses of which one was from the popular WordPress site, WPMU.org. They offered me a paid trial and were happy enough with my work to give me an ongoing gig!



**Advice for new freelancers:** There are essentially two things you need to get right: your pitch and your samples. If you create a concise, relevant pitch that includes quality, relevant samples, you'll be



golden. Send enough good pitches to enough prospects and you *will* get work.

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After reading the stories and advice shared by these popular writers and bloggers, chances are you have a few new ideas for your business.

Whether it's buckling down and practicing your pitch, or finally declaring yourself a writer-for-hire to family, friends, and anyone else who will listen, it's time to take that first step.

Take a deep breath. Making that first cold call, asking former colleagues about opportunities for freelance assignments, and telling your family about your new side hustle can all be daunting tasks. But as you've learned from the stories shared in this ebook, they're all possible.

**Once you've take the first step, guess what? It becomes much easier to take the next one.**

After you have your first client—and have knocked their socks off, of course—it's not nearly as intimidating to ask if they can refer you to anyone else. And each piece of work you complete for that client is another building block in your portfolio, which makes it easier to land your next client.

As you're building your business, check out [The Write Life](#) for helpful advice, strategies for scaling up, and a supportive community of writers and bloggers. We're here to help writers create, connect, and earn.

You've heard how these successful writers and bloggers got started, and now it's your turn. **We can't wait to hear your story!**

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