

# How to Work with an Outside Writer

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Writing is an activity many people dislike, often intensely. This is especially true for writing in a business context, where the stakes can be high. So it is no wonder that people often turn to outside experts for help in creating material for investor relations, marketing, public relations, sales and other purposes.

Even if you like writing, you might occasionally want to use outside help to create clearer, livelier, more creative communications with less effort. This can be a smart investment.

Widespread as the practice of retaining outside help is, however, many smart business people do not have a clear understanding of what to expect when working with a writer or marketing consultant.

Here are seven tips and observations that can help you get the most from your working relationship with an outside writer.

## *1. Working with a writer or consultant is a collaborative process.*

So, while getting qualified outside help may save you time and effort, it won't get you off the hook entirely. You should probably plan on spending about one hour for every four or five the consultant puts in. The more critical the project, the more of your attention is likely to be required.

## *2. Good writers ask a lot of questions.*

*Good marketing consultants ask even more.*

Don't be surprised if you're asked things that are beyond the scope of the immediate project – or that go over territory you think is already covered elsewhere in writing. Your consultant is looking for context and fresh angles.

## *3. Don't expect perfection in the first draft.*

The initial draft is often a bit of a shock, since it's the first time you get to see someone else's view on your organization or the particular problem you're dealing with. Your consultant may well have misunderstood one or two things. You might also see some language you're not comfortable with or a structure you don't particularly like.

## *4. Early drafts are nearly always too long.*

Your consultant will probably want to present you with a range of possibilities for communicating what you have to say. This will lead to too much copy in the first and second drafts until you and your consultant nail down the final approach.

## *5. Your comments are essential.*

The consultant or writer is going to be able to give things a clarity and creative spin that you probably wouldn't have been able to achieve alone. But you're still the custodian of the facts, of the tone you want and of the personality of your organization. Make sure you try to express all your concerns – even those you don't think you can fully articulate.

## *6. You don't have to "take it or leave it."*

Most people who do business or organizational writing as a profession can change styles pretty readily. So it makes sense to work with your consultant until your piece feels

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right to you. Note any issues you have with the style and tone of the piece, and get the consultant to help you define the style you're looking for. If he or she won't, you may not be working with the right person.

### *7. Putting ideas into language takes time.*

Everyone is always in a hurry, and most organizations tend not to act on things until the last possible moment. But it usually takes time to produce something that is truly creative and original, and nobody can consistently do their best work under pressure. Also bear in mind that it's usually more expensive – twice as much or more – to complete jobs on a “rush” basis. As a wise printer once observed, “There's never time to do it right, but there's always time to do it over.”

### ***Recap***

Working with an outside consultant or writer can help you get a clarity and liveliness that's difficult to achieve on your own. It can also save you some time and effort. But you'll still need to be involved – and be ready to offer your input. These tips can help you define your own expectations so that your consulting relationship can be more successful and get you the results you need with less effort.

Remember, though, that even the best consultant has some limitations. Here's a reminder checklist. Your consultant...

#### *Can:*

- Help you define your expectations.
- Elicit your best attributes and ideas.
- Develop compelling language around them.
- Invent a strategy for connecting your information with your audience.
- Provide structure for your thoughts.
- Give you some creative options to think about.
- Keep your final presentation clear and concise.

#### *Is not likely to:*

- Understand what you're thinking when you haven't expressed it.
- Give you something “perfect” the first time out.
- Produce excellent work for you without your input.
- Transform your ideas into something they are not.
- Turn every project around immediately.



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