



Umbach Consulting

A writing and research service

Tips on Writing

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How Can a Professional Writer Help Your Business?

Your business provides products or services. You are an expert on *those* products or services, but your business needs other businesses to supply supporting goods and services. Those range from the simple and concrete, like office supplies, to the complex and intangible, like payroll processing.

Writing services are among the kinds of support a business — especially a small business — needs from an outside provider.

Writing services include three basic categories:

- **Writing:** crafting new documents, from office procedure manuals to sales letters
- **Editing:** improving the readability and effectiveness of existing documents
- **Research:** from fact-finding and fact-checking to full-scale inquiry and analysis

Some projects require all of these categories of service, and others only one or two.

For specialized needs, such as technical documentation, advertising copy, or a research-based “white paper,” the business will need an expert in that kind of writing. For more general needs, such as a business profile or basic editing of a business plan, a generalist with broad writing experience will be appropriate.

Large, complex projects require not only writers, but also editors, researchers, graphic artists, document design specialists, indexers, and others. Smaller and simpler projects call for the a single general-purpose writer. Even simple products will be improved by a second look by an editor who can focus on readability and on the mechanics of grammar, editing, and word selection.

What kinds of writing does a business need?

Businesses communicate with audiences inside and outside the company. Communications include memos and correspondence as well as technical documents and business proposals. Here are a few examples:

Internal

- Employee handbooks
- Memos
- Newsletters (internal)

- Procedure manuals
- Reports and analyses
- Style guides

External

- Advertising copy
- Business plans
- Business proposals
- Company profiles
- Fliers and brochures
- Newsletters (external)
- Opinion and commentary pieces
- Press releases
- Product descriptions and explanations
- Sales letters
- White papers

Let's take a closer look at a few of those kinds of business writing.

Newsletters. An internal newsletter tells employees about personnel, products, schedules, and policies. A good company newsletter can help to maintain staff morale while keeping employees informed about matters that affect their jobs.

Likewise, a newsletter can inform current and potential clients about your business, its products, and related developments. An external newsletter is a marketing tool to maintain awareness of and positive view of your company. The newsletter should inform the reader about the company and about its services or products.

Company profiles. You are not only selling your company's products, but also its image. Image encompasses qualifications, reliability, scope, accomplishments, and background. An effective company profile help potential clients choose to buy from your company.

White papers. A white paper is a formal report on an issue. The term originally referred to government reports, but now includes background and technical reports prepared by businesses or by teams of journalists. A business can use a white paper to provide background information related to its products.

A white paper both informs potential clients about a specific topic and establishes the company's expertise on that topic. A white paper calls for research, writing, and editing. It requires understanding of the subject *and* understanding of the company. For companies that do not have the expertise in house to prepare an effective white paper, a professional writer can integrate information from inside and outside the company.

Opinion and commentary pieces. Often called "op-ed" columns, opinion and commentary articles appear in newspapers and magazines on or opposite the editorial page. Op-ed pieces enable a business, usually under the byline of a company executive, to comment on a public issue while also subtly marketing the company itself. Such articles are commonly ghost written either by company staff writers or by freelance writers.

What does a professional writer bring to the process?

A professional writer brings experience and resources to researching, writing, and editing business documents. Experience is the obvious part. An established writer has done those sorts of things before and is comfortable with the processes, from concept development to outline and from first draft to final copy.

Less obvious are the kinds of resources a professional writer typically will have at hand that the occasional or in-house writer might not. Those resources include such writing and editing tools as:

- Standard, reverse, visual, specialized, and foreign language dictionaries
- Thesauruses
- Style manuals
- Usage guides
- Quotation dictionaries

An experienced writer and researcher will also have quick access to technical and reference works, both print and electronic, from general encyclopedias and almanacs to government data compilations. Those kinds of resources help to assure accuracy and help to polish reports, articles, company profiles, newsletters, and other documents.

The professional writer will know the way around databases of periodical articles as well as the vast but often difficult-to-navigate resources of the Internet. This kind of information access is a key to writing publishable opinion pieces and crafting reports, white papers, and articles that are worth reading.

Which makes more sense, to keep the writing in house or to buy writing services from outside? The answer depends on your company's resources and on the best use of those resources. How much is *your* time worth, and how is it best spent? What staff resources do you have? Discuss your company's writing needs and opportunities with a professional to learn about costs and benefits of contracting out writing services and to explore new opportunities for improving communications.

For specialized projects, such as advertising copy or documentation of proprietary computer software, consult a specialist. For less specialized kinds of writing, such as a company profile, background-oriented marketing piece, or an op-ed column for a local newspaper, talk with a generalist.

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