

I was new to freelance writing, but had been wanting to make a go of it for a while and knew that my corporate contract was winding up soon. In anticipation of this I joined a few sites that comb through ads for relevant work and consolidate the results. One job board in particular, WriteJobsPlus.net, tends to have enough good leads that it's worth the paltry fee for a few months of access to their results. They include the original job posting when they have a result, making it easy to inquire and apply.

I noticed that a lot of the juicier leads were coming from, of all places, Craigslist. I promptly searched for "writer wanted", "copywriter wanted", and similar terms on my local Craigslist board. There wasn't much locally, and I started to get discouraged until I had a brainstorm. Why not search the listings in areas I would like to visit or move to?

As luck would have it, a city I already planned a trip to had a post seeking a "Writer for web pages". I emailed:

*Dear Madam/Sir:*

*I would like to discuss the web page writer position you're advertising on Craigslist. From your description it sounds like you are specifically looking for someone who can produce writing that is both technical and accessible, which is a particular specialty of mine.*

*I've included a link to my LinkedIn profile in my signature; a lot of my current day job is nearly exactly what you describe, and I'd love to expand a bit and am not bound by any noncompete agreements that would inhibit my ability to produce endless amounts of material for a client.*

*A primary caveat is that I would need to work remotely, as my physical location is not in Dayton; however, I am near enough that face to face meetings would not be impossible with enough notice.*

*I look forward to discussing this position with you soon, and producing material for you shortly thereafter.*

*Warm regards,*

*\*Name\**

*\*redacted email\**

*[\\*redacted LinkedIn profile\\*](#)*

Of note: I have a program that lets me track when someone opens an email I've sent. It showed that the email was opened shortly after I sent it, then again the next morning, multiple times. That afternoon I got a reply:

*Hello \*Name\*,*

*Thank you for your reply to our Craigslist ad. You do have an interesting background, and I would like to speak with you.*

*Would you be available one day this week, evenings are ok too, for a short talk?*

*My skype is \*redacted\*.*

*Thank you,*

*\*Client Name\**

Well, of course I would. I didn't have a portfolio due to most of my prior writing being bound by nondisclosure agreements, so my LinkedIn profile was my main hope of hooking the potential client into giving me a chance. We caught up on Skype and he did a screenshare to walk me through what he wanted to do with his website; I'd guessed correctly in my initial email, and it was exactly what I'd been doing with the added perk of being in a field that I want and need to learn, SEO, marketing, and website design.

We agreed on a test piece at a rate lower than I should have asked, but for a sample to see how we worked together it wasn't unreasonable. There was a bit of difficulty in getting login credentials to the site to be able to do the test piece. The client actually inquired if he'd "lost" me, then came back with:

*I was impressed by you and saved a "spot" for you in hopes we could reach an agreement on working together. I have more than 50 documents that need developed of varying complexity and could use you now.*

*So, to save time, let's cut to the chase... no need to spend time on a "pitch". I just need an estimate of time and fee to create a BP. I estimate 2-3 hours max per BP. Verbal or email is fine.*

*Assuming we agree, we work on one BP together with an upfront retainer to see how it goes. I am sure there will be a learning curve. We can adjust fees and expectations from there.*

*Do you remember the formatting for the BP? Or, would you like to see it again?*

*Your thoughts?*

This was before seeing anything but my LinkedIn profile and speaking to me voice-only over Skype! The rapport I developed over the call was a probable factor in this; the client has an Engineering background, and my previous career is heavy on that. I also mentioned that I would be in his area at the end of the month, and we agreed to set up a meeting.

I quoted a rate that was, again, too low. I have since decided that I will use that as my "sample" rate, with a cap of 2-5 hours before I go to my actual rate. (Said rate will vary depending on the services required, but will be considerably higher. We writers should not underestimate our value or our worth.) This should enable me to determine whether the client and I are a fit without wasting much time, money, or effort on either side.

And then he sent a retainer for five hours' worth of work. By this point my trip to his area was imminent, and he told me to wait to start writing until after the trip... and offered to give me a lift from the airport to my destination with a stop for a business lunch along the way. I accepted. Over lunch I found out that he has plans for two more sites after this one and was seeking not just a writer, but almost a collaborator or consultant. As I'm also a consultant, this seemed agreeable to me pending the results of writing.

Upon seeing the short piece I completed when I returned, he said that he had only one thing to say: "WOW!" He was so impressed by my work that he immediately refused all other applicants and stated that he would only work with me on this project -- and the others coming up, if I'm willing. We worked out a schedule for when the site will be populated with enough content to go live, discussed a few expansions that he will implement, and once live he is offering royalties (a percentage of membership fees) as well as periodic bonuses on top of my base rate and has every intention of continuing to work with me as long as I please.

Taking note of sources and fishing through Craigslist in cities that appealed to me certainly turned out well; my first real client is a dream client who pays invoices promptly and is as much a mentor as a client. The pay will suffice for now, and I am learning critical skills for my new freelance writing and consulting business while being able to work from home on my own schedule.