

How to Compete with the Top Pros in Freelance Copywriting

By Bob Bly

Hi. Bob Bly here for Day 2 of *The Writer's Life*. Yesterday, I boiled down the keys to freelance writing success to just three items.

Today I'm back to share some advice from my 36 years as a copywriter (33+ years working freelance).

It's important to recognize that, as a freelancer just starting out, you'll face two kinds of competitors.

The first is a large pool of other newbie copywriters with experience, training, and skill level roughly equivalent to yours. I'll address those competitors tomorrow.

The second, which we'll discuss here, are the old pros – senior copywriters, many of them A-level and the rest solid B-level, with much more experience and better credentials ... a large client list, great testimonials, good track record of results ... than you.

Here are some tips for competing with freelance copywriters who are more senior and experienced than you.

To begin with, so many newbies today focus on the highest-paying niches of health and financial – to their detriment, in my humble opinion.

Reason: health and financial are two of the most competitive copywriting niches ... perhaps the *most* competitive.

Therefore, the clients in these niches are bombarded by pitches from copywriters who want to write for them. There are simply too many writers competing for this work.

Worse, the clients in health and financial know and already work with all the top A-list senior copywriters. And, if you're just starting out, your chances of beating these senior writers are slim to none.

The solution, especially when you're first starting out, is to go with niches that are less crowded and not as flooded with senior copywriters already doing the work.

When I launched myself as a freelance copywriter in 1982, for a couple of years all I did was write sales brochures and print ads for companies in the chemical industry. Why? Because that was my background – I'm a chemical engineer.

Let me give you a few more examples of specialized niches that have proven successful ...

One of my colleagues, DH, specializes in marketing for small industrial manufacturers. It's a lucrative niche she enjoys, and there's little competition, especially from senior writers. She gets great results for her clients, and they're incredibly loyal.

PS specializes in an off-the-beaten-path niche that gives him a handsome living. He creates advertising for audiologists selling hearing aids. Not one copywriter in a hundred works in or even knows about this niche.

AD specializes in ghostwriting technical articles for pharmaceutical and biotechnology clients who place his articles in scientific and medical journals. Virtually none of the big-name A-list copywriters is qualified to do this work or would want to.

Therefore AD has the field to himself with no competition from top copywriters. But because his clients are large companies with deep pockets, he's one of the better-paid freelance copywriters working today.

That's the secret to competing with the top pros out there today, who may have more experience than you. When you're starting out, pick a niche rather than be a generalist. And, the more oddball the niche, the less competition you'll have.

So, what oddball niche will you create for yourself this year? Tell me about it here.

Coming tomorrow ... I'll show you how to gain an edge over the large pool of newbie copywriters entering the marketplace today.

Until then ...

About the Author:

Bob Bly has been a copywriter for 36 years, is the author of 85 published books, has a BS in chemical engineering, and writes both B2B and consumer direct response. McGraw-Hill calls Bob "America's Top Copywriter."

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30 Responses to "How to Compete with the Top Pros in Freelance Copywriting"

I'm a kayak fishing guide in SW Florida. I have fished the gulf coast of Florida for over 35 years. I would like to write for companies in the fishing and kayak industry. Another option for me is writing for a travel magazine that focuses on Florida. I like the idea of writing e-newsletters as well. I'm also interested in the Christian Market as a copywriter.

Bob Fraser – over a year ago

What do you think about an Oil & Gas Copywriter niche? I'm in the industry.

I'd really rather write about pets, basketball officiating, sports or home remodeling

JJOG – over a year ago

Hi Bob,

Thanks for your article. The niche I'd like to target is the Horticulture industry, working with nurseries, garden centers, and plant breeders. Do you think this would be a profitable niche? Maybe we can talk about it at bootcamp this year, it would be great to meet you in person!

Zoe Blarowski – over a year ago

Wow! Oddball niche?? Your article has definitely given me something to think about... This means that I'm forced to sit down and make my lists: what I'm interested in, what I'm good at, and trying to match them into a niche(s) for a lucrative and productive living. Thank goodness finance and health was not either of which I considered. :-)

RockyBallad – over a year ago

I, too, am a newbie and trying to find my niche. My writing interests are sports, religion, new age topics and tarot. I consider myself to be very flexible, however, and could write on just about anything. I think I have strong research skills and could become well-versed in anything I set my mind to.

Guest (john) – over a year ago

My niche business intelligence software

Emarks – over a year ago

Finding the right niche is a challenge. I have been a teacher most of my adult life, but as a children's ministry coordinator, I have written curriculum and directed musicals and historical dramas. I really enjoyed that. I love the world of storytelling and making things understandable. I am insane about dotting dots and crossing ts...I like my work to be polished. As a women's fundraiser/coordinator I have designed newsletters and organized retreats and taught seminars on personal growth. I enjoyed that too. I have been encouraged to have some of my kids' plays published but have never considered them polished enough. I am taking this course, in part, to develop the confidence to do that. I am enjoying your lectures,

Mr. Bly!

Guest (Marilyn Martin) – over a year ago

I have a rather odd niche that is small, but underserved. I am targeting companies that sell plant compounds to researchers. I have 3 plant science degrees and 20 years of research experience in the area.

Helga George – over a year ago

As always, good stuff from Bob Bly. Bob refers to, "senior copywriters, many of them A-level and the rest solid B-level,..." A definition of what constitutes the "A-level" and "B-level" copywriter would be useful here. I've been a professional copywriter for close to 30 years, but may or may not meet the definition of "A-level" as it's referred to here. Thanks!

Greg Gunter – over a year ago

Hi Bob I had considered Garden Planters and Containers as one niche or further to that Garden Structures. I have the experience of at least ten years as a professional gardener and of course like so many, have been gardening all my life(60 years+)

upmarket – over a year ago

My comment is more of a question. I am taking the copy writing course now and currently write mostly web pages, and blogs for clients in financial services. I have 10 years experience in this industry but am pretty new to the writing side. I picked this niche because that's where my expertise is. Should I look for a different niche for long term success due to the high level of competition?

BonnieA – over a year ago

Hello Bob,

Indeed I am a newbie freelance writer, a pharmacist attempting to "hang up" pharmacy for writing. Then I read your words that healthcare is one of the most if not the most difficult niche to break into. The news is a bit disheartening, but I persevere.

I have spent nearly half my career in biomedical sales to researchers so have good knowledge of scientific endeavor and b2b relationships. I am a combination of technical knowledge and sales acumen. I need to emulate AD above.

Bradley G – over a year ago

I was taken aback by your conclusion that health and financial are saturated niches. AWAI has been stressing to us in their course pitches that these niches are screaming for writers, that there is more work than there are writers. What's the truth?

Guest (MAS) – over a year ago

I am not sure if this is an oddball niche, but I chose to start by writing for companies that sell household products and for political parties. It really excites me. I think it will be very challenging.MOTTO

Guest (Amy) – over a year ago

I would probably have a choice of 2. I've worked in the meat department of a grocery store for 10 years. So I would concentrate on the food industry, specifically involved with meat and fish. Also, I would concentrate on Crafts and Hobbies, specifically with needlework and stitching, since I enjoy working on it when I have time for it.

John P – over a year ago

Hi Bob. I've looked into more specific B2B niches. After some company research I came across management consulting firms that provide employee development seminars, sales team training, etc. And many have highly developed content marketing "footprints" on their sites. Given the info-marketing style of the services they sell, I think they might have a large need for consistent copy that's hiding beneath the surface. I'm gonna give it a go! Thanks for the great advice!

Beau – over a year ago

Thank you for the info Bob. I look forward to Wednesday's blog. Question: why does AWAI constantly tell us newbies how MUCH money is to be made, and how the Copywriting Industry wants & NEEDS copywriters so badly, when YOU tell us niches like Health /Finance are overrun with all copywriters wanting to solicit for clients in those niche fields-- like there's TOO many of them(!)?

My niche will be writing on sports--"how to" Instructural oriented.. Is this a widely approached niche as well?

Guest (Coach Doug The bug) – over a year ago

Great piece! I am a health writer but when I began my career a couple years ago, I targeted integrative health doctors/clinics. They all need tons of content & marketing help, many of them develop their own product lines, and if you qualify them correctly the gigs pay well too.

Guest (Kristen) – over a year ago

Hi Bob, I've been concerned about my ability to find work in the behavioral health industry. I have focused on the health niche per se but I do not often find clients soliciting for this work. Perhaps there is another niche that provides more opportunity for behavioral health. I am hoping to find some of these clients at Bootcamp this year. The clients that have been identified as attending this year do not mention anything specifically pertaining to behavioral health. Any thoughts about this?

I work in education so I may possibly use my experience for that niche!

Guest (Rachel) – over a year ago

THANKS! You helped me recognize what I Don't want to do.

I've been "in" the Financial Niche. I trade the Forex and equities markets. Thinking - "I am my client's customer" to be an advantage - in my case, background does not matter. Frustration! I followed ALL the rules and guidelines to the letter with ZERO results! I've wasted a Lot of time and money.

Thanks for helping me to see exactly Why the financial niche is NO place for a newbie copywriter. I'll just leave this niche to the pros.

Guest (Currency Trader) – over a year ago

Is there a niche that supports the legal profession? I am a semi-retired trial attorney looking for freelance writing opportunities.

Guest (patrice dilorenzo) – over a year ago

Hi Bob,

Thank you for all of this week's posts. One thing that keeps me confused is the niche thing. I have made my mind to be a B2B copywriter, and I want to settle for enewsletters and case studies. As for the niche, I have a particular interest in alternative energy sources, especially solar energy. Do these vague ideas blend together?

Christine Muleme – over a year ago

I guess the answer to my question, yesterday, to Bob Bly (from a Leonardo da Vinci reincarnate), is that my niche needs to be an incentivizing of urban planners for more accessible "street smarts." A low-tech feel fo' much mo' info. Literary graffiti, for example, tattooing time. Yes?

Guest (Chris Morris) – over a year ago

I'd like to do something along the lines of popular science, putting technical reports into common language, or work for creation science ministries.

TrueBlave – over a year ago

My more traditional areas of interest include amateur astronomy, wilderness backpacking and the pet industry. Two of my non-traditional passions are atheism and advocacy of the separation of church and state. My concern with many of my

interests is that they may not be lucrative fields for copywriting. Ah, the hazards of being politically progressive in what appears to be, from the outside looking in, a predominantly conservative line of work!

Guest (Guest for obvious reasons) – over a year ago

I have 30 years experience in healthcare and alternative medicine, 14 in marketing where I wrote. I chose the niche of alternative healthcare because of this. After reading your posts that health and financial are saturated niches now I am confused. As another commenter said, "AWAI has been stressing ...that these niches are screaming for writers, that there is more work than there are writers." Please clarify. I do have other expertise - Art - painting sculpting; Should I change my focus?

JNeese – over a year ago

Because my background is in nonprofit, I have chosen web writing for foundations. But I would like to make a niche is probably one of the most under-funded of all - the art world. Museums, galleries. Do you think I'm too nichey? Thanks.

Guest (Judith) – over a year ago

Hi Bob, First of all, thank you so much for what you do to guide us. I have been a freelance journalist writing on a variety of topics and a public school teacher. I have already left it to turn to fulltime writing. My passion is environment-- ranging from chemical-free living, to alternative healthcare to alternative energy and even upcycling. I hope environment can be a good primary niche for me? I am now working on two curriculum development projects with moderate pay. Is this niche growing?

Balaka – over a year ago

Working in software development the past 8 years, I was thinking of specializing in copy for web software. Is that too broad? Thanks for the article!

Mark P – over a year ago

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