

# When Should You Charge for B2B Copywriting Revisions?

*By Steve Slaunwhite*



One situation you'll encounter as a copywriter is making revisions. It's a common part of copy projects. But then the question becomes whether or not you should charge for the additional work. Here are some tips on what I do ...

Let's say you're working on a website project. You've written a good draft and made the necessary revisions.

It looks like you're getting close to the end of the project when the client says to you, "You know what, we've been looking at our About page and we want to change it. We like what it says, but we want to shift it from third-person to first-person because we think that will be more personal. Can you make that change for us?"

Well, I think you'll agree it's really not a heavy revision and I suspect you would probably do that revision for free. Even if it breaks the project agreement a little bit because you've already done your round of revisions, it's not that big of a change.

But, let's look at the other extreme ...

Let's say for example, the client has hired you to write a website and you've done your revisions. You're ready to finalize the project and then they suddenly come back and say, "We want to add a brand-new product to our website. We're going to need a new product page for this new product and we want you to write the copy."

You know you'll have to research the new product. You might have to do another interview with the client to ask questions about it and flesh out all the benefits and features.

You're going to have to start from scratch to write this new product page on the website, something you did not budget for originally.

Is that a situation where you would be justified in having a discussion with your client about an extra fee for that extra work?

I think it's pretty clear you'd be justified in letting the client know there's going to be extra fee for this.

But often it's not that clear-cut. There's a lot of gray area between those two extremes where you have to make a judgment call, as to whether or not you are going to just do the extra work or charge an additional fee for this extra work.

So, how do you handle the situation without alienating your client? You don't want to create tension and disagreement between you and your client, so how do you have that discussion about charging an extra fee for extra work?

And also, you don't want to end up doing free work for a client. You shouldn't avoid the conversation and just do the extra work without charging an extra fee for it.

I think many freelancers have done that. I've done that. It seems like the easy solution, but you'll be working extra hours, and basically giving away your work and talents for free when you should have charged for the extra work.

Here's how I handle this very difficult situation ...

## #1. Make Your Rules for Revisions Clear

You need to make the rules clear as to what constitutes a normal revision within the scope of a project and what constitutes excessive revisions that involve extra work that you will charge for.

These rules need to be clear so you don't have to make a judgment call during the project.

In my project agreements, I define a revision as *changes to the copy already written to draft form*.

A revision isn't adding new pages or new components. It isn't a change of scope. A revision isn't going from five website pages to nine website pages. It's not going from a series of three emails to a series of five emails within a campaign.

Another change that's not a revision is changing the original direction of the piece as previously agreed upon between you and your client.

For example, let's say you're writing a white paper. And halfway through, the client says, "You know what, we're not entirely happy with the topic of that white paper. I realize that you've done some work on it already, but we want to change the topic a little bit. Instead of the topic being X we want the topic to be Y. And maybe you could use a little bit of X, but we want the topic to be Y."

That's not a revision. That's a change in direction, and in my book that justifies an extra fee because in a sense, you're creating a new project.

And there are other ways a client may change direction. Changing the offer in an email campaign from a free white paper to a discount will impact how you write all the emails.

Your client may also ask for a change in creative concept.

For example, if you're writing a video script, you might have agreed that the video will mainly be comprised of an off-screen narrator and PowerPoint slides.

And then halfway through the project, or after you've scripted the draft, the client comes back and says, "Hey you know what, we want to use live actors and we want to have a funny scenario involving our product."

That is not a revision — that's a change in direction of the project.

Another way you can change direction in a project is when the client changes the media or what the project is.

For example, you may be hired to write a product description for a website, then the client comes back and says, "You know what, I realize you're halfway through, but we want to change it into a two-sided printed sell sheet."

And yes, you'll be able to use some of the product description, but it's going to be extra work in molding that into the format of a sell sheet, which is very different from an online product description.

So you want to be very clear what a revision is and what a revision is not. If the client is asking you for something that is actually not a revision, then that's extra work.

You have to have a conversation with the client and say, "You've changed something major here and we need to talk about an extra fee because I didn't budget for this."

## #2. Be Clear on How You Handle Revisions

When you first talk to clients about a project, you need to be very clear about how you handle revisions. I know a lot of you have a paragraph or a line in your quotes or proposals about revisions.

You may specify you'll do one or two rounds of revisions in your written agreement. But you need to have a conversation with the client as well. The way I handle this is by discussing my process.

## Five-Step Revision Process

So let's say for example, the client wants an email campaign written and we've discussed all the particulars of the email campaign. And then I'll say, "Mr. Client, this is how it works. First, I research all the background materials on your product.

"Then I set up a one-hour interview with you to strategize and ask you questions. I'll give you some ideas and suggestions. During that interview, I'll get all the information I need to write the copy and give you some initial ideas.

"Then my third step will be to write a draft of the copy to complete draft form, as good as I can possibly make it.

"My fourth step is to go through a single round of revisions. And Mr. Client, this is your opportunity to make any big changes to the copy. We have one round of revisions."

And then I tell them my fifth step is to do a final polish. I may be able to make some minor revisions during the polishing stage but that's the final stage.

Here's a tip: if it's a large corporation and it looks like there's going to be a lot of people involved in the copy, I'll say, "Mr. Client, I budgeted for one round of revisions where we make all the big changes in that single round. Is that enough? Would you like me to budget in a second round of revisions?"

And 95% of my clients will say, "No, no. I think we can handle it in one big round of revisions." The rest know their companies quite well and know there might be a lot of revisions. And they'll say, "Yes, could you budget in a second round of revisions? This may go around a few times before we get to a final draft."

Now they know what to expect. And I'll also mention that if they change the scope of the project by making it bigger, or if they change the direction halfway through the project, then I will quote an extra fee for the extra work. But I also promise them that that fee will be reasonable.

I also tell clients that happens in less than 15% of projects I work on. We're usually able to scope it out pretty clearly at the beginning.

Then if you have to have a conversation about an extra fee with your client later on, they are not really surprised because you've had this discussion with them by up front. Most clients are very agreeable with this arrangement.

## #3. Have a Discussion with Your Client

This is where you've got to have that slightly uncomfortable conversation and say there's an extra fee. Something has happened — the client has added some pages or components or changed directions or wants an additional round of revisions you didn't budget for.

How do you have that conversation?

Let's say the client says, "We want an extra email in our follow-up sequence." And I'll say, "Okay, that's sounds like we're adding some components to the project that I didn't originally budget for."

Or if there's a change in the direction of the project, I'll say, "It sounds like we're making a change in direction. That means I'll have to go back a few steps in my process and redo some things I already thought were completed. It's going to be a lot of extra work."

So I'll just give them a friendly reminder that we're outside the budget. I'll say, "I'll need to charge an extra fee for this extra work, but I'll make sure that fee is reasonable." And I'll say it exactly like that.

Clients usually know they've gone beyond the budget, but they don't like people taking advantage of that and charging a big fee.

So I'll try to make the fee as reasonable as possible. And when I get back to them with an email or a phone call — usually the same day — to discuss the extra fee, I'll say, "Mr. Client, the extra fee for this work is going to be \$500. I tried to make this fee as reasonable as possible. Please let me know if you agree. If you do, I'll go ahead with this extra work right away."

When I've had to do this with clients, I don't run into too much resistance. Typically they know they're running over budget. They know they're asking for extras. They know they're changing what they wanted. They know it's extra work for you.

They respect you for coming to them and being business-like to let them know there's an extra fee. Just make sure the extra fee isn't a shocker.

So I hope that helps you deal with this tough situation of having to charge for extra revisions or changes in the project. It can be a touchy situation, but if you handle it the way I just outlined for you, then it should go fine.

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