



Beyond Travel: How to Expand Your Writing Opportunities

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After writing a series of pieces for a national travel publication at \$75 a pop (a 50 percent *increase* from the \$50 per weekly feature fee I earned from a top-10 national newspaper), the realization sunk in as I reviewed my 2007 year-end bank statement: I was broke. Well traveled. But broke.

Not wishing to abandon my travel writing ambitious, though unsatisfied with a grocery budget limited to private-label peanut butter and Ramen noodles, I decided to make a significant career change. I would continue taking on travel writing assignments, when available. But more importantly, I would leverage my background and skills to secure writing assignments from other industries that paid respectable, and in many cases, lucrative fees.

Once Upon a Time

Corporate America is in need of writers—good writers who know how to tell stories. Whether it's Web content, advertisements, presentations, or whitepapers, companies need writers who can tell a story that engages a targeted audience.

While your CV may not be dotted with a roster of corporate giants, as a travel writer, you no doubt have contributed to well known publications, outlets that are recognizable and serve as formidable credits as you present your experience to a prospective corporate client. Of course, that's jumping ahead just a bit.

Where to Look



They're all around you. If you're in a large metropolitan area, they're the businesses, associations, and institutions that you pass every day while driving in your car, whose employees are buying \$4 lattes at your local coffee shop. You're an experienced journalist; no doubt 15 minutes searching the Internet will turn up dozens of prospects. And another 30 minutes will help you discover the key marketing and HR executives to whom you can pitch your services.

The Pitch

This is your area to shine. Travel writing begins with the pitch, and no doubt you've honed a favorite opening and approach to gain the attention of decision makers. A corporate writing and marketing pitch is no different: You're inquiring about writing opportunities with their firm; you're a senior-level writing professional whose credits include (your list of recognizable outlets and companies goes here). All you want at this point is a five-minute in-person visit to present your capabilities and background, after which you'll send email reminders every month or so until they hire you out of exasperation. (We freelance travel writers are nothing if not persistent!)

Third-Party Assistance

In Chicago where I live (and in many other major cities), creative staffing agencies place professionals (writers, designers, producers) with businesses with whom the agencies already have secured project commitments. I registered with a dozen or so such agencies in early 2008 when I first began looking for corporate writing work, following up regularly with them to keep my name fresh in their minds in the event that an appropriate work match surfaced. While I didn't have an A- or even B-list of companies to my credits, I did have a list of major publications that instantly established writing credibility. From there, I began receiving small job offers.

I accepted every position offered to me—my first was an insultingly low-paying assignment writing a press release for a shoe store—and within a few months, I had built a modest portfolio of assignments that made me increasingly marketable to both agencies and clients.

While the majority of my new assignments strayed far from the travel writing field, I found new ways to secure travel-related writing opportunities. For instance, one trade association was involved in a global network of associations. I pitched their marketing executive a series of stories covering one of their industry's international events, leveraging my previous travel experience and language skills to secure the assignment. My trip was hosted by a tourist office (the publication paid my room and board), and the corporate assignments—four articles at \$1,500 each—paid far more than any travel writing assignment would have.

For What It's Worth

Corporate writing rates vary by area, industry, and corporate size, but nearly always exceed those paid by travel outlets. Corporate clients here in Chicago pay from \$75 to \$150 per hour, while creative agencies pay far less—\$25 to \$60 per hour.

Like any business, a freelance writing career takes time to build, but each year's successes lay a stronger foundation for the following.

I still gladly accept travel writing assignments when available, balancing the opportunities with existing corporate commitments. I wish I could accept more, as traveling and writing about my experiences is truly one of my life's passions.

But a man's gotta eat. And more than just Ramen noodles.

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