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Ghostwriters Central

This won't be your usual bullet-point exercise in how to find a ghostwriter. Below you will find several main topics, with considerable detail below each. And here we go!

REPUTATION

There's a simple way to check someone's business reputation. Do a search for their name (plus the word "writer" or "author" to eliminate dentists and mechanics with similar names). In the case of a writing services company, do a search for the company name. Or check Yelp. If that writer or business scams people, you'll quickly find out about it.

The bad guys get written up by their victims. But if the gripe is from one or two supposed customers in a sea of positive comment, it may not mean anything. Everyone, including us, has dealt with impossible or irrational customers. And sometimes competitors will post lies about others.

Ask for references. Ghostwriters are often signed to non-disclosure agreements for major projects but every writer will have references that you can check. The fact that a writer has zero or few references doesn't mean they aren't good at what they do. Everybody starts from the beginning. Here's a little story about how *this* business came to be:

I was involved with another enterprise at the time I bought the domain ghostwords.com in 2002. I constructed a quickie website and slapped on a list of services and my contact info. I figured I'd take on a few writing projects, but I got *swamped* with inquiries. I was literally turning clients away.

One day, a young book editor emailed to offer his services should I have more work than I could handle. I answered that what I need is someone to do *all* the work. We drew up a one-page contract, then I began shoveling the clients to him. He was a genius with words. He had little experience as a ghostwriter but proved to be adept at writing whatever kind of project that came his way. Some people are just brilliantly intuitive. And some meetings are serendipitous.

You've got several places to find a ghostwriter. The main one, of course, is Google. A word about using Google: It has transformed itself into a "knowledge engine" from an actual search engine. It puts articles, news items and information ahead of those websites offering services in search results, so it's a good idea to search for: ghostwriting services, or: hire a ghostwriter, if that's what you're seeking.

The next place to search for a ghostwriter is Bing, which also powers Yahoo search. Other avenues include Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Yelp. You can even peruse Craigslist in the writing services category, but caution is advised.

Compile a list of writers and writing businesses (we would like to be included). Then make inquiries. The writer will need to know what sort of project you have. Have a

conversation and answer his or her questions. Each writer should be able to give you an approximate cost and turnaround time.

The prospective client should beware of writers for whom English is a second language. A native speaker is a better choice in virtually every case. Don't choose an ESL writer because of low cost. You will almost certainly regret it.

ACCESSIBILITY & SKILL

While you're looking at a writer's website, check the contact info. Can you reach them by phone? By email? Maybe by text? Does the website just refer you to their Facebook page? What happens when you call? It's OK if you reach voicemail, but if you don't get a prompt call back, that writer is not taking care of business.

At Ghostwriters Central, we answer the phone during published business hours, and frequently afterward. Texts are usually answered anytime I'm not asleep. Emails are replied to the same way. That's common sense.

But sometimes you'll encounter a person who acts as though they can't be bothered. I've had calls where the first thing out of the client's mouth was: "Oh thank God, you actually answer the phone!" The first time that happened, I was taken aback. "You mean you've called writers who didn't answer the phone or return calls?" She had run into that problem several times.

It's not always the client unable to reach the writer. Sometimes we writers can't reach the client when we return calls, or when we've got a question while deep into their project. If that client can't be reached, the project may be shelved until contact is reestablished. Don't you be unavailable, either.

Skill matters. I'm a writer, an editor, and a reader of books. When I need to hire a writer, I may place an ad, which results in a deluge of applicants. I mention this because, like you, I need writers with excellent narrative and grammatical skills. I read the applications. The minute I stumble into a typo or a punctuation error or a badly-written paragraph, I delete the application. The work needs to go back to that client in perfect shape.

Another short story: In my last hiring round, an applicant had problems with capitalization and punctuation. Instead of deleting, I replied, said no and briefly described the reasons. He shot back that when he's under intense deadline pressure, he's perfect; no errors at all. Yeah, just what I need. In order for him to do his job correctly, I would need to apply constant, heavy pressure. I laughed, deleted and went on to the next one.

Your prospective ghostwriter should offer a free, thorough consultation. If he or she won't talk with you about your project without demanding money, keep on steppin'. You don't need that headache.

SUBJECT MATTER

If you need to have a business book written, hire a ghostwriter familiar with the subject, requirements and with the skill to execute. Match the project to the ghostwriter's expertise. You certainly wouldn't hire a poet to write an instruction sheet for the use of a hammer. It wouldn't be a suitable match:

Success depends on
reading a primer

So here's how to use
the wood-handled hammer

You grab the handle
it's not a nail gun

But hammer your fingers
soon you'll have none!

It is, some say,
the most basic of tools

Yet, alas, dangerous
when in the hand of a fool!

Nails can be missiles
shot any place!

Cinch that shield
snugly to your face

That nail is waiting,
it wants to be slammed!

Line up your shot,
hammer tight in your hand

Now pound that nail
until you are done

You've passed Hammer Basics,
Class One-Oh-One

--(Tongue-in-cheek, mostly written by Michael John Ferri).

See what I mean? :)

The writer should provide free samples of his or her work. Ideally, that writer will provide a free custom writing (or rewriting, or editing) sample using your notes as source material. We have a whole article on that subject here: <http://www.ghostwords.com/the-value-of-the-custom-ghostwriting-sample/>

If your project requires storytelling ability, hire a writer with excellent storytelling skills. Ask to see pages of a project they've written. Does the writer draw you into the story? When I read, I do not want to be bored. I do not want to be distracted by a writer's goofs. If the writer doesn't compel you to keep eagerly turning pages, keep on steppin'.

You, the author, must provide notes of some sort that the writer can use as source material. Journals, diaries, recordings, or random piles of paper notes (handwritten or typed) will suffice. Or the writer can interview you to obtain the raw information. We offer the interview option; in fact, we have a whole article on that subject, too: <http://www.ghostwords.com/notes-via-the-interview-process/>

CONTRACTS

Each party will have obligations to the other. It's best that those obligations be detailed in a formal document to prevent misunderstandings.

A contract will detail when the writing starts, will conclude, and milestones along the way (such as points at which the client will pay, review the work, and then approve it). It should also state who owns, and gets credit for, the finished work. You have the right to inspect a sample contract, or one tailored to you. Feel free to run it by your lawyer. The writer may well agree to reasonable changes.

The contract should also specify that the writer will deliver wholly original work.

Ghostwriters are frequently signed to non-disclosure agreements (NDAs). This is your best guarantee against a writer stealing your work. Again, inspect the NDA before signing and/or have your lawyer review that, too.

You must understand, however, that copyright law does not protect ideas, only the expression of those ideas. In other words, the idea of: Boy meets girl, they fall in love, start robbing banks then die in a hail of bullets, is not copyrightable. However, your biography of Depression-era gangsters Bonnie and Clyde -- the written work itself -- is protected by copyright and the NDA.

We normally don't prepare contracts for small projects, such as wedding speeches and vows or a single blog post. It just slows down the process for the client. We proceed on a handshake basis. But, of course, we are not talking about a lot of money.

COST

Prices will vary. Deep-discount writers can be found on Craigslist, in foreign lands, and on some websites that enable writers to bid on client projects.

At the other extreme, it's easy to find writers who are legitimate big names in the writing profession (or some who think they are), and their prices are set accordingly. My advice is, unless that high-profile writer's name will be on your project, avoid them. You'll be wasting money.

Price is not necessarily an indication of quality. If that super writer is also super busy, you may not only pay a super price but also wait a super long time for it to be finished. Better to find a super writer who isn't super well known. With or without a super cape.

Terms of payment also vary. Some writers want payment in full before work begins. We do the same thing, for small projects, such as blog posts or short speeches. Some will want half at the beginning, the other half upon completion. We do that, as well as schedule payments in between if the project will involve a lot of money. Payment terms must be in the contract.

Some writers require a fee to do the writing plus a percentage of the sale of the work, and even royalties, such as with a book. I think that's excessive but some get away with it. We don't do that.

Prospective clients occasionally ask if we will do the writing in exchange for deferred payment, such as when a manuscript or movie script is sold. My associates don't like it when I say this, but it gets the point across: Writing a large project is a very time-consuming and laborious process. We cannot ask a writer to make that kind of effort in hopes of a later payoff. They have to put food on the table; we have to pay them so they can do so. And, thus, you must pay us. Adequate resources are required if you're going to hire a ghostwriter.

Ghostwriters Central is a mid-priced service.

ORIGINALITY & STYLE

Every writer has his or her own style of writing. And you have your own distinctive way of speaking or writing. If you want it to appear that you wrote the work, then that ghostwriter will need to write in your "voice." That requires some familiarization, so expect to have a few long phone chats, visits or Skype sessions.

We specialize in emotion. It is emotion that carries the story to peaks and depths and makes it a rollercoaster ride for the reader. It's emotion that keeps you from nodding off while reading. It's emotion, combined with highly-skilled storytelling ability, that sells your work -- to a publisher, to a producer, or to an audience listening to you speak.

If the samples provided by the ghostwriter you're considering hiring aren't grabbing your eyeballs, keep on steppin'.

Most writers you encounter are perfectly honorable people, but there's always a percentage that will try to rip you off. Plagiarism is the uncredited use (actually, theft) of

someone else's writing. Teachers encounter it all the time. There are websites that offer plagiarism detection services.

There's also a simple, free trick you can use. It's Google phrase matching. When the writer hands you the work you're paying for, find a phrase or sentence that's unusual in some way. Copy that bit of writing and paste it into the Google search field. Then, put quote marks ("unusual phrase goes here") on either end. Hit enter.

The quote marks tell Google to search only for that exact phrase. If it's out there on a page that Google has indexed, it will appear in the results. It is possible that phrase will appear in an otherwise unrelated document, but if you click on a page and find more than one or two sentences, then your writer has betrayed your trust and broken your contract. Demand a refund and call your lawyer if you don't get it.

The writer should allow you to make reasonable changes to the final draft. There are usually corrections to be made, some details may need modification, it is possible some things will require clarification, and so on. This is common.

When that is completed, the finished work is yours. Make a copy and dispatch it to the U.S. Copyright Office with the completed form and payment.

We would like to have your business.

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