

TheCopywritersCoach.com

How to Price a Job Correctly Even When You're Totally Stumped

By veteran copywriter and
copywriter's coach, Chris Marlow

For many copywriters, correctly pricing their work is a constant struggle. When it's time to offer a price, a myriad of negative influences — both internal and external — descends upon them. Sometimes the result is disastrous.

I know this from personal experience. At the beginning of my freelance career, some 20 years ago, I charged Stash Tea just \$18 per hour for my copywriting services. I got lots of work as you might imagine!

My contact, Susan, eventually left, and just before leaving she took me aside to tell me I'd been underpricing by at least \$30 per hour!

I never had the stomach to calculate my financial loss, but it's certainly been in the thousands, not just with this client but with others too. The sum total of my foolish pricing decisions could have funded a respectable CD earning hundreds of dollars in interest over the years.

Why do copywriters underprice?

Here's a short list of the primary reasons, and any or all may play a part in the final pricing decision:

1. The copywriter is insecure. She reasons that she's not highly experienced or "famous," and so should undercut her pricing.
2. No known benchmarks. The copywriter has not worked in an agency environment, or "in-house" at a catalog company, or in the advertising department of a sophisticated marketer, and has no concept of fair pay for his services.
3. Financial stress. Pressure to meet financial needs and obligations leads her to "come in low" in order to secure the job.
4. Other motivators: He needs more samples on his Web page and is willing to do the work for less in order to pad his portfolio; the client is a small business and doesn't have much money for copywriting services;

the client promises more work if he'll do the job "on the cheap" just this once (don't believe it); or... or... and the list goes on.

The fact is, many freelance copywriters talk themselves into accepting less than they're worth just to "stay in the game" ... but in doing so, they also ensure they'll stay on the margins of this highly lucrative career choice.

If you're even the least bit weak-kneed when it comes to pricing, you (and your family) will greatly benefit if you hone your negotiation skills, and show the client that you demand respect for your time.

To that end, here are some tools to help you price correctly on every job:

1. Understand that you cannot price less than \$50 USD per hour and remain comfortably in business. You must charge for your time, for your overhead, for your health insurance, for your retirement fund, and for PROFIT, which is your right as an entrepreneur. Generally, copywriters should charge at least \$75 per hour to earn a livable income.
2. Charge more if you provide more. Are you an expert in a particular field? Is your work impeccable, requiring little revision work for the client? Do you offer creative direction? Project management? Are you expected to attend on-site meetings? When you price, price for everything you bring to the table... not just the copy.
3. Avoid small businesses. They're legendary for using too much of a copywriter's time, and paying too little for it as well.
4. Avoid working for individuals, small businesses, or other entities that require education. If they don't know what a copywriter can do for them and you find yourself educating them about copywriting or marketing, run as fast as you can in the opposite direction. They'll drain your energy and pay little for it.
5. By the same token, if a business looks like it needs the help of a copywriter (e.g., badly written Web site), don't think "Hey, they need me!" Rather, understand that they don't need you or their Web site would be well written in the first place. Always work for people who understand and value copywriting. They're the ones who'll be willing to pay your price.
6. Seek pricing benchmarks. Over the last 20 years I've collected a file that is now 3 inches thick on copywriter pricing. Like piecing a puzzle together, the "whole" of it offers a better picture of what's real — and what should be — than the individual parts.
7. When you're really stumped, try this simple but stress-reducing technique (this works especially well for very large jobs that are scary to price):

Simply sit down and devote an hour to actually doing some writing on the project. (Don't let the client know you're doing this or you'll weaken your bargaining position.)

This one hour will help you grasp the true size of the project. Often it'll reveal that your original idea for pricing was way off... in other words, way too low. Spending one hour on the project will help you "chunk it down" so you can make a realistic estimate of how much time you'll spend.

Sometimes this hour is better spent thinking of all the things you must do to complete the job, such as helping the client write a Creative Brief, researching the competition, writing an outline, etc. Then estimate time spent for each task, in addition to writing the copy. Now you have something to work with in pricing, rather than the amorphous thought, "this seems like a big job."

8. Write down everything you'll do for the client and present it to him with your pricing. In my Fee Agreement I'm very detailed about what I'm providing (copy, testing concepts and rationale, offer development, new testimonials, etc.), and will even detail the size of the components of a package. When the client sees all that copy representing what I'm going to do for him, he's less resistant about price.

* * * * *

Award-winning copywriter Chris Marlow has written for the nation's leading businesses for more than two decades. For information on powerful copywriting, visit: <http://www.chrismarlow.com>

Chris also offers business and copywriting coaching to new, aspiring, and seasoned copywriters who want to accelerate their success. Check out the benefits of coaching at:
<http://www.TheCopywritersCoach.com>

Chris has also created the world's only large-scale survey of copywriter pricing and economics. Find out what others charge and earn at:
<http://www.FreelancersBusinessStore.com>

And for free information on how to quickly build a profitable freelance business, sign up for Chris' **Freelancer's Business Bulletin** at:
<http://www.FreelancersBusinessBulletin.com>

PO Box 1134, Palm Desert, CA, 92261
P: 760-340-2045 / F: 760-406-6200
Email: chris@chrismarlow.com

© Chris Marlow, all rights reserved

