

Students Should Train As Writers

by Jack O'Dwyer

(NAPSA)—People considering changing or beginning their careers can get advice and encouragement from an experienced professional.

College students majoring in subjects such as "PR" and "communications" are wondering what kind of jobs will be available to them when they graduate.

They have spent four years and up to \$100,000 and now can't find a job except at the minimum wage.



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But they actually have a lot of talent and skills that could earn them a good living.

To do this, they must become entrepreneurs.

For openers, they must stop billing themselves as "PR" people or "communicators."

PR Lacks Credibility

PR is one of the most discredited terms in the English language.

"PR specialist" ranked 43rd in credibility on a list of 45 public figures in a 1999 survey that cost the PR Society of America Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation \$150,000.

"PR" is subjected to nearly endless trashing in the media. Very few blue chips use the term, having switched to "corporate communications" long ago.

Hang Out Your Shingle

Entrepreneurs we know are making a good living working as writers for legitimate media and business. Some do full-fledged programs for clients.

They ghost-author books for businesspeople, write books and articles under their own names, write op-ed pieces for clients, letters-to-the-editor, sales brochures, speeches, handle e-mail correspondence, help businesses to market on the Web and create graphics using Quark and other programs. They also show businesses how to create their own flyers.

In short, there are numerous writing and related tasks that a grad can do for small businesses.

They're not apt to find such work via an ad or PR firm because of the way the finances of such firms are set up.

Working by themselves, they could charge businesses \$20 an hour (\$140 a day or \$700 a week) for helping in all the above named areas. If they charge \$30 an hour this would equal \$1,050 a week.

Firms Bill at 3X Salary

The typical PR firm bills out workers at three times their hourly rate. The \$20-an-hour becomes \$60 and the weekly cost to a client becomes \$2,100.

Individual entrepreneurs have no such costs. They can work out of their parents' homes or own apartments for which rent has already been paid. Many costs associated

Rankings of "believable sources of information."	
1. Supreme Court justice	23. Reporter for big newspaper or magazine
2. Teacher	24. U.S. congressman
3. National expert	25. Head of a big company
4. Member, armed forces	26. National Credibility Index
5. Local business owner	27. Local civil rights leader
6. Ordinary citizen	28. U.S. Vice President
7. Local religious leader	29. Head of a national assn.
8. High-ranking military officer	30. Community activist
9. School official	31. Wall Street executive
10. National leader with shared traits	32. Head, Presidential advisory
11. National religious leader	33. U.S. President
12. Network TV news anchor	34. Member, Presidential cabinet
13. Governor	35. Pollster
14. Local business rep. board	36. Student activist
15. Local newspaper/TV reporter	37. Local union leader
16. National civil rights leader	38. Candidate for public office
17. Local elected council member	39. Head of a national union
18. U.S. senator	40. Famous athlete
19. National syndicated columnist	41. Head of a national interest group
20. Mayor of a big city	42. Political party leader
21. Head of a state agency	43. Public Relations specialist
22. Head of a local agency	44. Famous entertainer
	45. TV or radio talk show host.

Ranking of leaders and/or public figures as "believable sources of information."

with a home office can be deducted. Sixty percent of medical premiums can be deducted before taxes are paid.

Another option is bartering. Many a PR firm started out bartering services for meals at local restaurants, groceries, gasoline, car rentals and numerous other products and services.

PR firms normally want a 60- or 90-day cancellation clause. Grads could propose projects one at a time and relieve businesses of the fear of getting stuck in a legal contract.

Mom 'n Pops Need Help

Grads can bring writing and promotional services to many small businesses that otherwise can not afford them. Many such businesses go under because they don't spend enough time marketing themselves.

Computer and Web savvy grads have a lot to offer a generation of small business owners that is largely computer illiterate.

Forty million Americans are working out of their homes (one-quarter of the workforce) because of high office costs and the ease of zipping work back and forth via the Web.

As Stephen King points out in *On Writing*, there's only one way to be a writer: read and write seven hours a day at least five days a week for years. Students should take many writing courses, keep a journal of 1,000 to 2,000 words nightly, and read a novel a week by authors who are bold and imaginative with words, such as Annie Proulx (*The Shipping News* and *Postcards*) and Charles Frazier (*Cold Mountain*). Mind-numbing "boob tubing" should be cut to a minimum.

New writers should associate with other writers and reporters and not salespeople.

A home office is a great boon

to good writing since writing is a solitary occupation and distractions can be minimized. John Bruen, an executive of a major New York PR firm, used to urge his account executives to do their writing at night when they had time to think.

Writers should save direct mail pieces instead of throwing them away. They are a good source of graphic techniques as well as tested copy platforms.

Create Flyer for Self

Writers today should be able to create well-designed sales promotion pieces, including one for themselves that they can pass out to local merchants. Instead of claiming writing or graphics expertise, they can show it. Merchants will want a similar piece created for them.

Buzz words such as "strategic," "integrated," "synergy," "goals" or "clear goals" should be avoided in approaching prospects. Merchants are on to such words and will think a con job of one type or another is coming. Since "local business owners" are number five on the Credibility Index and PR people are No. 43, it is the PR people who can learn from the businesspeople and not the opposite.

Existing ad/PR firms can view the new generation of writer/entrepreneurs as competitors or as "farm clubs" introducing businesses to a wide range of writing, marketing, promotional and Web services.

Some of the small clients might turn into major ones as the clients grow. Then they might be able to afford a full-fledged ad/marketing program via an established ad/PR firm.

You can learn more online at www.odwyerpr.com.

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