

writing *for* business, writing *in* business

by Jamie Jauncey

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About the author

Classics and a law degree might not seem the most obvious qualifications for a career as a writer, but the bug struck early and I was on the way long before I realised it. I first started writing for businesses when my own, a small magazine publishing company, went bust in the early 1980s. Since then I've learnt a lot more about business – mainly by writing for other people's. Today I'm based in Scotland, to which I returned in 1990 after 20 years in London. As well as my own client work, I'm a partner in the Dark Angels programme of Creative Writing in Business courses, and a member of the Scottish Storytelling Centre's Stories at Work team. I'm one of the Scottish founders of 26, a nationwide group of writers and business people who champion a more imaginative use of language at work. I've contributed to a number of business books and publications. My fifth novel, *The Reckoning*, was published by Young Picador in November 2008. I'm also on the board of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the world's largest literary festival. In the past I've chaired the Society of Authors in Scotland, sat on the Scottish Arts Council's Literature Committee, and been chairman of the judges for both the Scottish Children's Book Awards and the Pushkin Prizes. I also have a part-time career as a musician. At one time it was the pop scene. Today I play the piano with various Scottish traditional bands.

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Why do businesses need writers?

There are opportunities today for writers to work with business people in two distinct but complementary ways: they can either do the writing for them, or they can help them to realise the power of their own words. Businesses need writers because:

- The language of business today tends to be ineffective at best and profoundly alienating at worst
- Modern managers have poor communications and advocacy skills
- They're unable to frame messages and arguments in a convincing and compelling way

- They're unable to create voices that authentically reflect the identities of their businesses
 - Many of them simply hate writing. They see it as peripheral and unproductive, when in fact it's vital.
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What kind of help do they need?

- They need help to market their products or services to their customers
 - This could involve websites, leaflets, brochures, letters and so on
 - They need help to get their business messages across to shareholders, staff, colleagues, suppliers, competitors, opinion-formers and others
 - This could mean websites, annual reports, corporate brochures, videos, newsletters and so on
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How can writers help?

- By understanding what they need to say and to whom – we're good at assimilating information and building arguments
 - By helping them establish appropriate tones of voice – another thing that comes naturally to us writers
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What kind of help can we give them?

- We can take briefs and write the material they need
 - We can run workshops in a number of different areas – such as tone-of-voice or better business writing
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How do we work with them?

- By building direct relationships with clients
 - Through third parties such as graphic design agencies and brand consultants
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What special skills do we need?

- A willingness to understand and engage with what they do
- A willingness to subordinate our creative egos to their commercial needs!
- The ability to make the links between our own creative processes and their writing needs
- The ability to ask the right questions and absorb information quickly
- The ability to work to (often short) deadlines
- The ability to deal with middle managers, understand their agendas, and – crucially – spot the openings for more work!

How do we get started?

- Start on your own doorstep – a local hotel or small business, perhaps, that you know and think could do with a verbal makeover. Offer them your services as a tryout. Begin building a portfolio of work, then spread the net a little wider.
- Talk to graphic designers, if you know any. Words and images go hand-in-hand in most business communications. If you don't have any contacts, check the Drum Yearbook or Yellow Pages and go and talk to some. They'll be happy to show you examples of the kind of work they like.

What to charge?

- The \$64,000 question – and one that's based very much on experience. But as a rough guide, when you're first starting out, £25 or £30 an hour would not be unreasonable.
- As you gain experience and your clients become bigger you can obviously charge more.

Other rewards

- For the client – good writing can help people feel good about their work; good writing training can also have an element of personal development and team-building
- For you – working with clients gets you out of the house, makes you think about your own creative processes and brings the personal satisfaction of passing on important skills

Some links

<http://www.26.org.uk>

<http://www.26fruits.co.uk/blog/>

<http://www.thewriter.co.uk>

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