# Your Ultimate Guide to



# Ghost Blogging

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# What is Ghost Blogging?

You may be aware of the fact that blogging with highquality content is a key to attracting your target audience. People will never come to know what fabulous skills and expertise you have to make their lives and businesses better unless you demonstrate that knowledge through publishing content (blogging) tailored to them.

Blogging is beneficial for boosting SEO, raising your profile, and a bunch of other marketing magic, but most entrepreneurs, coaches, consultants, authors, and other busy, successful folks (like you!) don't have the time and/or talent to write and manage a blog.

You probably have a great deal of high value things to say and excellent ideas, but you just can't get them out there! Or maybe you get the posts down but don't ever get around to implementing proper blogging strategies and best practices. Whatever it is, you may not be as effective as you could be when it comes to blogging, and thus, missing out on your piece of the pie.

Here's a bigger issue: if your writing skills aren't up to snuff, you might be potentially damaging your credibility and sales. And turning to guest posters or buying generic, cheap content can dilute your brand and also damage your credibility.

Handing blogging duties over to a ghost blogger is an excellent solution.



Ghost bloggers write your content under your name while maintaining your unique brand voice. They handle this vital, beneficial task while they capture the energy of you and your brand. A ghostwriter for your blog can even contribute some new perspective while still keeping in line with your values.

**☑** Ghost bloggers write your content under your name while maintaining your unique brand voice.

Generally speaking, no one knows about it. They maintain confidentiality in their relationship with you, and unless you give them the go ahead, won't even showcase their work (written as you) in their portfolios.

But it's pretty widely accepted that there's nothing wrong in hiring someone to write for you and share your knowledge. No one says you must slave over writing posts if you don't have the time, energy, or desire to. Many well-known, smart, and successful entrepreneurs don't write for themselves. Why should you?

Many well-known, smart, and successful entrepreneurs don't write for themselves.



"Ghost blogging...like Blogging, only the writer's name isn't assigned to the post.

Does this make it any less real? Working together with clients, I love to learn about who they really are. Writing isn't for everyone, but their business? It's theirs. That's where I come in, as a writer I help share the passion and drive that these amazing people (from all kinds of industries) have. From roofs to kaftans, name it and I've probably written something of the kind.

You might ask but how do you know about those things? Well, I don't. They do. Research helps too. But at the end of the day it's passion and sharing something of value that counts. The secret to blogging in general isn't as hard as you think, it's taking the time to share what you know and love (albeit in bite size bits) and when you don't have that much time/knowledge in blogging/don't see yourself as writer but still know how important a blog can be to your business? Well, that's why I'm a ghost blogger – here to help businesses show their most authentic self."

- Camille, **Expressed by Camille** 

Writing isn't for everyone, but their business? It's theirs.

From "Why it's ridiculous to argue about ghost blogging" by Mark Schaefer:

It's not a pure and perfect world. Ghost writing is going to happen and it always has. Wishing and pontificating will not make it different. So why not at least do it well?

Most executives don't have the time or ability to blog consistently and effectively. So if they don't get help, it just won't happen. Isn't it a good idea to help bring their ideas to life?

The chairman does not pen his own speech, yet nobody questions that they own it. They don't write the shareholder's letter in the annual report, yet this is deemed as authentic. Do you think Former GE Chairman Jack Welch sat there and pecked out his own book? And yet it is seen as his."

- Mark Schaefer, { grow }

Ghost writing is going to happen and it always has.

# **Ghost Blogging Options**

When it comes down to it, you have quite a few options for outsourcing your blogging needs. Each option has its own merits and demerits, and depending on your particular requirements, some options may not be right for you and your brand. For example, most of our clients are writers, coaches, consultants, and entrepreneurs who are terribly busy with their ever-growing businesses, so they prefer having a heavily equipped agency bring their thoughts to life and help with blogging strategy for maximum results.

#### In-House

Turning to people already in your organization for blog content is a brilliant idea for some larger organizations. These people already know about you, your business, goals, and target audience. Your employees often already know what your customers or clients are interested in and what prospects are curious about, so having them add blogging to their regular tasks could be a good idea.

On the other side of the coin, not all of your employees may be good fits. Not everyone is a good writer, and even if they are technically competent, that doesn't mean they can create intriguing blog posts for marketing purposes. It may also be difficult for existing team members to not write content to "sell" and muster the creativity to come up with ideas for compelling copy. And whether or not they can convincingly write as you (or another key team member) is its own issue altogether.

"If your executives are interested in participating on the social web -- even with a ghost blogger -- consider this a gift. It shows they understand and support what you're doing and demonstrating that sort of cultural leadership is critically important to your future success."

- Mark W. Schaefer, Schaefer Marketing Solutions

# Freelancers

There are **a lot** of freelancers out there, so tapping one of them to work on your blog can be smart. We love working with freelancers because their rates are usually affordable, and they are incredibly flexible. Also, there are so many of them, if someone isn't working out we can simply move along and hand the gig to someone else at a similar rate.

One of the biggest issues with freelancers is oversight. When a freelancer is blogging for you, someone generally has to supervise them. Many freelancing folks are self starters who manage their work excellently, but many others need set deadlines, strict guidelines, and regular reminders to keep an ongoing project, like a blog, going. If you aren't a blogging pro who has time to set up a structure and serve as a project manager, you could end up with a freelancer who runs wild with your blog ... or forgets about it.

Also, the diversity in the skill sets freelancers possess is both an advantage and disadvantage. You can find an incredible writer who is knowledgeable in marketing and SEO, and she might also be able to perfectly format and post the content to your blog. Or you could find an incredible writer who knows nothing about marketing, never used WordPress, and doesn't know a keyword from a kielbasa. You should always ask a freelancer a lot of questions before you get started to ensure whomever you hire has the essential abilities you need for your blog.



#### **Services**

As more and more people start to believe that "content is king," writing services have been sprouting up. These rely on freelancers to create content for their clients, paying them relatively low rates—a trade-off for guaranteed payments and, depending on the service, more reliable opportunities. Be aware of the following shortcomings associated with this type of providers:

- No relationships are built, so writing as you convincingly and consistently is improbable
- Usually content is just delivered, clients need to upload, format, insert images, do social promotion, and so on
- May not have foundational knowledge about marketing and best practices

# Agencies

Some of the more budget-conscious prospects we've met were reluctant to work with an agency, but pricing for agencies falls along a vast spectrum. Smaller agencies, those just starting out, and those that are jacks of all trades will be on the more affordable side.

When Impressa Solutions launched, our average hourly rate was only \$20 per hour! Larger agencies, those that are more established, and those with an area of specialization will often charge far more.

There are some big perks to working with agencies, and most of that comes in terms of value. Yes, you are probably paying more than you would with a freelancer or writing service, but you are going to get a lot more for your money.

Your main point of contact at an agency generally has a lot of knowledge about more than just writing blog posts. She should be a great writer and editor and be knowledgeable in marketing and content strategy, post promotion techniques, best practices, SEO, and a bunch of other stuff.

When you work with an agency for your blog, you should expect more than just post content. The agency will normally work with you to lay down a good foundation for consistent content, which may include creating documents like a style guide, brand guide, list of personas, and an editorial calendar. They will also be there to consult on best practices before, when, and after you post, and if there's something you want to do that they don't expect to do well, they will most likely speak up, which can save you money, not to mention protect your reputation. Everything they do will be focused on building your ROI, even if that means saying "no" to something you request.

Agencies aren't there to just take your money and move on. They want long-term collaborations, so it's in their best interest to see that what you do is successful. And those relationships can make for some very strong ghostwriting--the more a writer can get to know you, the more effectively they can write as you!

According to some start up entrepreneurs and life coaches whom we have served so far, only specialist agencies that provide with right kind of services can meet and exceed your expectation in terms of complete blog management. That's why they prefer ghost blogging agencies to other options already discussed.



"Ghost blogging is very different, because you do need to let go of your carefully crafted voice, and often you're making up your style guide as you go along. I have a definite sweet-spot writing style that I honed while writing for Daily Candy, that morphed into other voices as I moved along: what I call "educated sassmouth." But as Tim Gunn says on Project Runway, "that's a lot of look." It's a jumping off point, it gets me clients, but using that voice in ghost blogging would be like a ventriloquism act.

Instead, you need to step back, to assess whether your voice melds with your client's or if you need to jettison it entirely to come up with a tone and vocabulary that honestly reflects her. Altering your style can be harder than it sounds if you've been "speaking" for years to the same general audience using the typical voice found in women's magazines. With my most recent client, I realized that I needed to carefully parse my practiced vocabulary and tone to find a truly personal voice, one that projected her voice and vocabulary clearly. This is a difficult yet important step; if the blog is attached to or sponsored by a magazine, you want to fit in, without sounding as if a staff member is knocking out blog posts that riff off the headlines of the month."

- Melissa Diskin

# Selecting a Ghost Blogger

Now that you know what your options are in a general sense, it's time to get serious about selecting a person, service, or organization to be your ghost blogger. This is a serious decision so don't just jump in—weigh your options. In addition to taking the following points into account, you should mainly focus on a ghost blogger who can consistently, authentically, and believably write as you, driving engagement with your content. There are many potential ghost bloggers who seem stellar, but aren't a good option. I've been hiring writers for years (and no, not every hire is a smash hit), and I've discovered some finer points of finding the right writer.

Focus on a ghost blogger who can consistently, authentically, and believably write as you, driving engagement with your content.

#### 1. Avoid the Jack of all trades

Some folks have been in the industry for a substantial period of time and have developed and honed several skills. Others, not so much. If your prospective ghost blogger claims to be able to not only write awesomely and authentically as you, but also tackle a whole bunch of other stuff, be wary. It's extremely, extremely rare to find someone who's an incredible writer, graphic artist, SEO, and PR expert.

# 2. Pay attention to the process

When I'm ghostwriting for a client in any capacity, I spend some time before I start typing to get to know my client, how they speak, how they write, and how they think. I review every bit of writing I can get my hands on--from books to blog posts to correspondence--and I often try to have a conversation or two, in person if possible. From there, I usually start building a style guide of phrases and words the client uses liberally, unique things that they sprinkle in, words they avoid, and any obvious strong opinions on certain pertinent topics. Others may have a different process. But they need to have a process. If they don't, they'll be creating generic content with your name on it.

# 3. See secrecy as a bonus

While utilizing ghostwriters is a given for those in many industries and in certain capacities, confidentiality is still important. This is very true for coaches, consultants, and authors. You could shake the confidence of your clients and customers if they were to find out someone else is writing for you. If a potential ghost blogger is reluctant to namedrop, that's a good thing. It's even better if they aren't adverse to an NDA.

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# 4. Look for subject matter experts

You are an expert in your field, and this should come across in all of your content, even blog posts. This is a tall order if the blogger you pick doesn't know much about your niche. Yes, you can get them up to speed, but it's much easier to find someone who already wields some mastery over the topic.

# 5. Try to find someone with a reputation

When working with a ghost blogger, selecting one with a reputation to uphold can be the golden ticket. Plagiarism, recycled content, poor editing, and not customizing content are all things that lead to bad feedback and a poor name, and those who have already built a good rep (or are building one) won't risk it.

#### 6. Find out what's included

Included services may include assistance with SEO research, publishing posts, maintaining an editorial calendar, and advice on strategy and best practices. Some may be able to help with images for the blog or provide social media blurbs for when it's time to promote fresh posts.

While a lot of included services seem to add value, they aren't a lot of good if you don't need them. Look for blog providers who can fill in the gaps, save you time, save you money, or otherwise enhance your ROI through their included services.

"Let go of the temptation to only interview or hire industry experts or specialists in your niche. The true gift of outsourcing to a ghostwriter is that they are able to bring an outside perspective - similar to your audience. Since your ghostwriting won't necessarily speak your "language," they will be able to instantly spot any client-repelling jargon that could distance you from your readers.

Instead, look for someone with a demonstrated ability to capture your subject matter expert's unique voice, understand their material, and elevate that content to perform well online."

- <u>Linda Dessau</u>, <u>Content Mastery Guide</u>

The true gift of outsourcing to a ghostwriter is that they are able to bring an outside perspective.

# What to Expect from a Ghost Blogger

"The number one way to ensure a successful engagement with a ghostwriter: be clear about your expectations from the start, and give honest feedback throughout the process. I also suggest leaving more time than you think you'll need for the back-and-forth revision process, particularly in your first few projects with a writer."

- Linda Dessau, Content Mastery Guide

When working with a ghost blogger, the only set thing you can expect is content for your blog. Beyond that, what you will get is dependent on who you are working with, what you have requested, their skill set, and so on.



# **Setting and Managing Expectations**

Before you enter an engagement, be sure to clearly outline expectations. This goes both ways. Whoever will be handling your blogging should know how much participation they will receive from you and when, and you need both a timeline and a clear explanation of what will be delivered. This will cut down on the chance of disappointment and frustration.

The best way to be sure everyone is on the same page is to get something in writing.

If your blogger is supposed to be managing an editorial calendar and tackling keyword research, that should be outlined, along with any other specifications (if there are others), like post length or a maximum amount of revisions. Definitely make sure deadlines for any drafts, final posts, and other deliverables are included too.

Of course, this doesn't mean you are off the hook either. You have certain responsibilities to live up to as a client.

#### **Your Part**

As the client, you need to be very transparent. In order for a content provider to know how to write as you, you have to provide them with ample information and answer any questions they have.

Once you have a blogger of choice, there are still certain expectations you need to live up to. There may be things you've agreed to explicitly (such as providing images for posts or paying invoices by a certain date), but there are plenty of implicit things that will be expected of you. You will be expected to provide feedback when asked, to answer various questions in a timely manner, and to handle any issues preventing your blogger from working that are outside their scope of services. Generally, you're expected to be helpful, and not a hindrance.



#### Wondering what kind of information you'll need to provide?

The following are questions we normally have for potential clients. The answers we receive help us create a plan, get a grasp on what a client needs and will expect, and give us an idea of what to expect from that client. This information also lets us know if we are a good fit and can meet the client's expectations, so responses to these queries determine whether or not we're going to take the gig.



- What are your goals and expectations for the blog?
- Do you just need posts created, complete blog management, or something in between?
- Do you have an overall marketing strategy, and how does the blog fit in?
- How often will new content will be posted and why?
- What kind of SEO efforts are underway?
- Are there any upcoming events, campaigns, or other initiatives that need support?
- How active are you with social media?
- Do you have any kind of promotional strategy in place? Or will you?
- What kind of posts were you envisioning on the blog?
- How engaged will you be in creating content, and how much will you contribute?
- Do you have any foundation documents such a style guide, brand guide, or audience personas?
- Do you have a budget set for blogging?

#### Their Part

There are certain things you should expect from the blogger you're working with. It's safe to assume you'll get a few of the same things regardless of who's working with you, but actual deliverables will definitely vary. For example, expecting full-service professional blog management services from anyone other than agencies will almost surely frustrate you.

Some of the things you can expect from your blogger, depending on your particular arrangement, may include the following.

Of course, this list isn't exhaustive, but the duties themselves can be pretty exhausting for your blogger. If you look at this as a whole suite of services, it would be something you could expect from an agency—and a rather large one, at that. So when it comes to what you expect from your writer, try to be as realistic as possible.

- Developing style or brand guides
- Posts created according to a particular schedule
- Content uploaded to your blog
- On-page SEO elements filled out in your CMS
- Content moderation
- Creation and management of an editorial calendar
- Keyword research and strategy
- Topic and title ideation
- Social media content to promote posts
- Post summaries for email marketing and other post promotion
- Emails for promoting your posts
- Outreach, PR, or other efforts to promote posts through earned media
- Uploading or sharing content through paid media or other paid distribution channels
- Creating calls to action

# Speak Up

When something is amiss in your engagement, you need to say something ASAP.

The sooner you speak up, the better. A quick, honest conversation could clear things up. During this conversation, speak and listen and be receptive, as there may be something you could do to remedy the problem and clear a path for your blogger.

Which isn't to say that the issue will be your fault. The blogger may be the one with the obstacle. When you voice your concerns, your blogger may speak to them, and offer some kind of assurance or solution. Of course, your blogger may also roll out some excuses or lies, and if that seems to be the case, you can cut bait and find a new content creator. Good thing you spoke up, right?



# **Tips & Tricks for Success**

From my experience on both sides of the outsourcing equation, I know that there are certain keys to help an engagement go more smoothly and be more successful for everyone involved. It wouldn't be very responsible of me to let those go to waste, so enjoy this list of tips and tricks. I promise you, every single one of these recommendations comes from hard-won experience!

# Let It Go (Don't Micromanage)

If you want to have an easy, stress-free engagement with your blogger, don't micromanage her output. Looking over her shoulder (even virtually), nitpicking, and trying to get everything your way is a recipe for an awful relationship.

Take it easy on the deadlines. Generally, there should be a deadline for a first draft and a final draft, and there should be appropriate time in between for reviewing and editing. For a single blog post, there's no need for due dates for every iteration—that's a little too high pressure.

Trust them. You are hiring a blogger who is a professional writer. Unless you went with a very inexpensive freelancer or cheap service, you should expect your writer to be well-versed in best practices and skilled at her craft. Breaking down how a blog post works and how you want her to write every post is timeconsuming, frustrating, and insulting.



# Supervise and Review (Don't Let Them Run Wild)

On the opposite end of the spectrum from the micromanagers are those who aren't involved at all. Your blogger may love you for the freedom you give her, but you may not be happy with the ROI you get from outsourced bloggers if you let them run wild.

Audit regularly. You probably don't need to pour over every post, but checking in on your blogger's work now and again is a good idea. Take a gander to be sure she is delivering what she is supposed to—both in terms of quality and quantity.

Ask for updates. If your blogger is also in charge of keeping an eye on any metrics or analytics, ask her to give you updates or provide reports on a regular basis.

Create and keep a calendar. Having an editorial calendar will give you a good idea of what is coming down the pipeline, when it should arrive, and what the purpose of those posts will be. Beyond keeping track of deliverables, this helps plan out posts to support broader campaigns and ensure the important stuff gets promoted.

#### **Follow Timelines and Guidelines**

Your blogger isn't the only one who needs ground rules. Clients can sometimes get themselves in trouble if they don't adhere to what they themselves have laid out. In order to make the engagement successful, you should provide resources, feedback, and anything else you are supposed to deliver when it's due. You along with your ghost blogger should set timelines and guidelines that work best for both of you.

# More Tips on Finding the Right Writer!



"Clients should use ghost bloggers not only to keep their blog updated, but also to gain new perspective on their niches.

Ghost bloggers sell more than services, they sell time.

By hiring a ghost blogger, clients can run a successful business and have time for their personal life too. In this way, they can avoid burnouts and preserve the precious work-life balance that allows them to be healthy."

- Ada , GhostWriterAda

Ghost bloggers sell more than services, they sell time.

# So What Now?

For many coaches and consultants, you are your business.

Even if you have assistants, bookkeepers, and other support staff, the core of your offering comes down to you. For the most part, you are your product, best PR rep, and main marketing vehicle. The more clients you have, the more precious your time is, leaving fewer and fewer hours for initiatives like blogging. Tapping someone to ghost blog on your behalf would free up a lot of time to let you focus on things you can't outsource and tasks that directly bring in income. The hours you have now freed up for working with clients and getting paid will hopefully cover the cost of your new blogger.

Since we (surely) have sufficiently convinced you that you need an all-around awesome ghost blogger to consistently write and manage your blog, it's time to get started on the path to blogging brilliance and maximum ROI.

Take our solid pointers into consideration when making your big decision on outsourcing your blog to a ghost blogger.

Finding an ideal solution (meaning: the right writer) to blog on your behalf is a big undertaking, and a key factor in overall success.

Then focus on maintaining a fabulous blog that positions yourself as a thought leader in your space and helps build trust in you. You need to publish relevant and helpful content frequently and consistently to attract your target audience to your business/website. This means at least one post every week written by your skilled ghost blogger using your voice!

Of course, blogging alone isn't going to make magic happen for your business. Blogging should be a part of the big picture when it comes to your marketing strategy. Yes, I said marketing strategy... you need one of those too.

Are you ready to start exploring what ghost blogging could do for you? Curious about how to get started? Wondering what to do about that whole strategy thing? Let's chat!



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