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Our Special Edition brings you a visit with one of our favorite authors of copywriting books. We were pleased to have the opportunity to visit with Peter Bowerman, when he was deeply entrenched in finalizing his latest book, **The Well-Fed Writer-Back for Seconds**.

The Well-Fed Sampler

Peter Bowerman visits with Freebird staffer Lyn Blair

Many of you know acclaimed author Peter Bowerman, from reading **The Well-Fed Writer**, a proven resource for freelance writers. The transformation from starving to well fed certainly has its appeal and Peter delivers more than a full course meal with his book. We're honored today to interview Peter and share some of his insights with you. Gourmet, anyone?

LB I understand your college major was Russian Studies. You pursued a career in sales and marketing for 15 years before beginning a career as a freelance commercial writer in 1993. What prompted you to make the career change and what made you decide to become a writer?

PB Once I got out in the working world and in truth, probably before that, while in college, I thought about being a writer, but could never really figure out how to do it without starving. I wasn't willing to do it that way. Then I came across Bob Bly's book **Secrets of a Freelance Writer**, which at the time was the only book on the market on commercial writing. The book just opened my eyes - it was nothing short of an epiphany. I thought, "Oh my God, I had no idea this field even existed." I saw it as a way to do what I wanted to do and actually not starve at it. I had pondered a career in government work (i.e., State department, Defense department, CIA) to leverage my Russian studies major, but got into sales. And while I did okay at it, it never made me happy, though it certainly helped me as I got off the ground.

LB Right. I can see how sales would help with any career starting out, especially if you're going to do a freelance career.

PB I don't want to overplay a sales background in people's minds and I actually address that in my next book because people have the idea that, "Oh well, I don't have a sales background so am I doomed to failure", which is kind of silly because I had no *writing* background. I had never *written* anything for money; I had never been trained professionally in *writing*; I had virtually no industry contacts and I was entering a very high stakes *writing* profession. Under the circumstances I think I could have easily used my lack of writing experience as an excuse not to do it. So it's what you focus on. If you think you need sales experience to succeed, you're right. And if you think you don't, you're also right.

LB Did you take any courses to help you get started as a commercial writer? If so, what were they?

PB No, I didn't. At the risk of immodesty, I've always had a natural ability to write. You mentioned AWAI and I've heard nothing but good things about the "Six-Figure Copywriting Course". If people are considering getting in the field and they are really not sure about their writing skills, they can't really go wrong with it. I've gotten a lot of positive feedback over the years about the AWAI programs.

(Note: Thanks to a snafu on AWAI's part back in July, they have offered some course discounts until 9/30/04 to readers of TFWW who sign up for the course through Peter's web site; details on home page at www.wellfedwriter.com).

LB When you started out as a commercial writer, did you have a mentor? Is there a copywriting master you've emulated?

PB One of the first things I did when I started setting the groundwork for my business here in Atlanta was to call about a dozen writers I found through different directories. Everyone was really nice and encouraging, which told me there was probably plenty of WORK! If there hadn't been, they might not have been so forthcoming. One of them was a gentleman who is now a member of a small commercial writers group I started seven years ago. He was just really wonderful, someone I could call with questions – usually about pricing. But there was no one else really. I suppose Bob Bly in the sense that I read his books and followed his advice, but we weren't in contact really.

LB After you began the transformation into a commercial writer, did you ever have any doubts that you made the right move?

PB Not at all. It was a feeling like I'd never had before – like I'd come home to something. For the first time ever, I was able to put all of my skills and talents to work, not just a few of them, in a creative direction and in a direction that made money and offered a very flexible lifestyle. It was just what I needed to do. I started my business when I was in my mid 30's, so this wasn't my first career. Once, when I said, "Gosh I wish I'd started this when I was just out of college," somebody jokingly said, "Well if you'd started this when you were just out of college, you'd probably be selling real estate now." Not sure about that, but I understood their point.

LB Was your family supportive?

PB Oh, yes. My parents have always been the classic kind of—"Hey! All we want is for you to be happy." I've never had any pressure on me to do anything and both of them are just *thrilled* with how everything has turned out, especially with the books. It's been exciting, no question about it.

LB What, if anything, is different today about launching a career in freelance writing, than when you began your writing career?

PB Obviously the Internet is a much bigger factor. I tell people today, if you're starting out, you really should have a web site. Work to build up a healthy number of samples and once you have, say, 6-10 or so, put your site together. It will dramatically simplify your marketing, make you more productive AND make you look more established and professional. By asking, "Hey Mr. Prospect, why don't you give me your e-mail address? I'll send you a link to my site," you give them direct click-thru access to your work. As opposed to making copies of samples, putting packages together, writing letters and mailing them out, etc., this is far more efficient. Even for the people you aren't able to get to on the phone, if you have their e-mail address you can shoot them a quick link to your site. That's a better contact and a more productive contact, than just leaving a message or obviously better than not leaving a message, if you get voicemail.

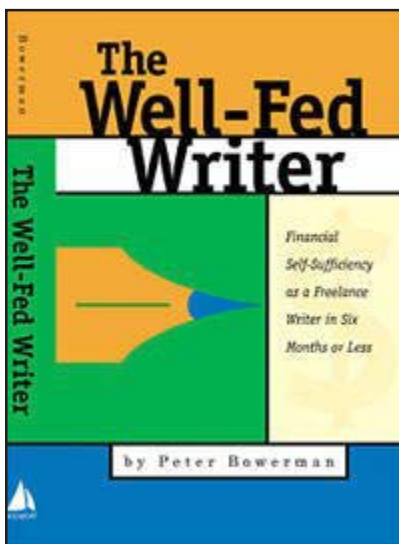
I don't know that the writing-business has changed all that much. There are always going to be some shifts in certain sectors. There might be trends in *which* certain sectors are using more freelancing services, but even that doesn't fluctuate an extraordinary amount. Corporate America

and smaller companies as a rule, outsource a lot of work because it just makes sense to not keep fulltime staff. So as long as that paradigm is in force, and there's no reason to suspect it won't be for a while, then there are opportunities out there. That's not to say that every single big company out sources all their writing; they don't. But there's enough opportunity to make it a worthwhile direction to pursue.

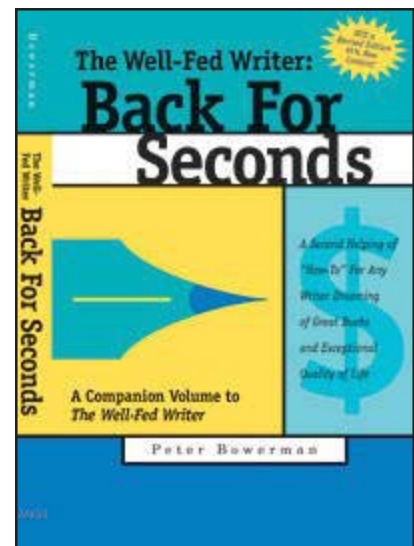
LB We were happy to learn recently that you have a new book being released in September called **TFWF: Back for Seconds**, a companion volume to **The Well-Fed Writer**. As writers, I know we're all interested in finding out how ideas are born. How did the idea for your second book come about?

PB As I say in the second book, the day after you put a book to bed, as it goes to the printer, you start thinking of things you wish you had put into it. And when you have *enough* of those things, you start forming ideas for another book. Over the years since my first book came out, I launched my newsletter and I got all these great stories, great feedback, and great input from others. My first book was about MY story, how I did it. But by definition, that story is limited. I'm a single person. I live in a big town. I did it full time. I did it by cold calling. I was a generalist as opposed to a specialist.

In essence my second book, **TFWF: Back for Seconds** was a way to say, "There are all these other people out there in vastly different situations from me who did it differently and I want to share how THEY did it - FOR those people who live in smaller towns, FOR those people who want to build it part time, or FOR those people who maybe want to pursue a very specific niche." I think there are a lot of really good ideas and a lot of good information in there. That sounds a little immodest, but I can say that because a lot of it is coming from *other* people. I just ended up collecting it all in a pretty darn good reference. And Bob Bly actually gave me a really stellar blurb for my second book as well. He said: "*When I wrote Secrets of a Freelance Writer, it was the first and only book on making six figures as a commercial freelancer. Of the dozen-plus books written on the subject since then, this book is by far the most comprehensive, useful and valuable.*"



Peter's first book - "*The Well-Fed Writer*" is available from Peter's web site www.wellfedwriter.com as well as www.amazon.com and many bookstores



Peter's second book - "*The Well-Fed Writer: Back For Seconds*" is now available from Peter's web site www.wellfedwriter.com

So the first book is more fixed on MY process and the second book is OTHER people and how they've done it. Plus of course, a huge chunk of the book is all about the marketing, the prospecting, the cold calling and the sales and what those mean and what they don't mean. Why they shouldn't be scary thoughts. I address the preconceptions people have - why they have a bad impression of sales or marketing and how to get rid of those damaging perceptions.

LB Would you give us a sneak peek at **Back for Seconds**? How does your new book, **TFWF: Back For Seconds**, differ from *The Well-Fed Writer*?

PB **The Well-Fed Writer** outlined a detailed step-by-step game plan for establishing a lucrative commercial freelancing business writing for corporations (large and small) and creative agencies (graphic design firms, ad agencies, PR firms, marketing companies, etc.) and for hourly rates ranging from \$50-125+.

With 95% new content, **Back For Seconds** is NOT a revised edition, but rather, a companion volume to **The Well-Fed Writer**. It builds on the original foundation with dramatically expanded sections on sales, marketing and cold calling, demystifying subjects often terrifying to "creative types."

In addition, the book features dozens of firsthand accounts from commercial writers across the spectrum, sharing insights on building the business in ways and under circumstances very different than those described by the author in his first book. That includes small market and part-time business startup, along with freelance opportunities with not-for-profits, little-known corporate avenues, universities, the BIG small-medium-sized business segment and other unusual niches.

Its six appendices (90+ pages) include a solidly detailed encapsulation of *The Well-Fed Writer*, a dozen profiles of successful well-fed writers, an illustrative commercial writing case study, a business startup primer for the newly self-employed (business structures, taxes, retirement and insurance) and writing resources across the spectrum. Finally, I offer an overview of self-publishing how I publish my books as a teaser to my upcoming (2006) release: *The Well-Fed Self-Publisher: How to Turn One Book into a Full-Time Living*.

LB You mention in *The Well Fed Writer* you enjoy change and that being a freelance commercial writer may not always be your profession. What other professions capture your interest?

PB Of late, I would say I'm becoming much more interested in the publishing side of this world and specifically self-publishing, as that's how I've published my books. And as a matter of fact, my next book, which is about two-thirds finished, will probably be out sometime in 2006. It will be called the **Well-Fed Self Publisher: How to Turn One Book into a Full Time Living**. Because I've had some good success with my book, and by extension, I'm hoping "my books" as well... I'm just fascinated with that topic. Because of the Internet, self-publishing has become much more feasible and a much more acceptable direction for writers than it ever has been before.

I'm not talking about print on demand. That's a whole other direction, which I have my own feelings about. When I talk about self-publishing, I'm talking about doing everything that a conventional publisher would do. I am referring to having a book type set, indexed, cover designed, off set printed and all that. I think I've gathered a lot of knowledge and judging from the response I get when I give talks about it, it's good knowledge. I want to share some of that. I think I can make a difference in that arena.

LB Putting all the information about freelance writing in perspective, what would you say stands out as *the* most important advice you could give a new writer launching his career?

PB I have a standard answer, when people ask me that.

1) Don't put these big companies on a pedestal. Don't think that just because there's a household name on the outside of the building you can't help them somehow. And people who work for these companies are often over-worked; they're often ill suited to the job. If you're good and you're smart in your strategic thinking, you can think about their business from a larger perspective; they need your help.

The other thing I would add is:

2) Be a GOOD writer. I think my first book gave a lot of people, who really weren't writers, the idea that anybody could do this because I said you don't have to BE a brilliant writer. And you DON'T have to be a brilliant writer to do well in the commercial field, but you have to be a GOOD writer; you have to be able to craft good, concise, clear communication. And it's amazing actually. I get a lot of e-mails from people who are doing OKAY out there and they're *not very good* - which just goes to show that you don't have to be fabulous. As I said in my book, the idea is to raise the quality of the writing, not lower it. If you're the type of person who has always been told by people all around you, in jobs that you've had - not by your mother or your best friends - but by people who would know, that you're a very good writer - or if you find yourself gravitating to the writing responsibilities of any job, which is what I found myself doing, those are good signs that perhaps this field might be a fit for you.

And as I'll talk about in **TWFW-Back for Seconds**, to a large extent, the sales and marketing aspect of it just isn't as scary as people make it out to be. When you say "sales and marketing" to creative types, it terrifies them and it just doesn't have to be that way. I really demystify those arenas to a great extent in the next book - exorcize some of the demons, so to speak.

LB That's good to hear. Now to jump to something else here: Your book **The Well-Fed Writer is widely read and** highly recommended as a resource guide by students on the AWAI Forum. I understand you now have a free e-zine. How could our readers benefit from your e-zine called **The Well-Fed E-PUB?**

PB The e-zine was designed with 2 catchwords in mind - *informational* and *inspirational*. The first book laid out the plan that I used to build the business. The e-zine and by extension the second book, draws from readers, draws from people who, through their first hand accounts, are building the business in a wide variety of different situations and circumstances and hail from a broad spectrum of backgrounds, education levels, genders, races, etc. It's more of the empirical evidence that this thing works. It's right from the trenches, stories of people who are - whether pursuing specific niches or not - having success. I try to have a nice mix of telling people about areas I'm not as well-versed in, whether it's writing for non-profits, the ins and outs of long-term contracts, certain avenues of corporate America you may not have thought of, etc. I share stories of people doing these kinds of things, usually successfully: "Oh I just landed this big job and this is how it came about serendipitously..." and the like.

The e-zine has been successful. I've been doing it now about 28 months or so. **The Banquet** is an e-book I created from the first 13 issues of the e-zine and I'll probably be coming out with another part soon. I arrange **The Banquet** by courses, like a menu. I took all the appetizers and stuck them together, and the main courses, salads and so on. Yes...*this is a plug...* for my e-book.-All that stuff is on my site. If someone is looking for the real nuts and bolts of how to do the business, my first book is a great place to go—and so is the second book. If they're looking for those people who are out there on the front lines, then the newsletter has got a lot of stuff and I've got archive issues on the web site as well— actually about 15 archive issues at this point are free, for a little while longer. (For more details and to sign up for the **WELL FED E-PUB**, visit www.wellfedwriter.com, then "Ezine.")

LB Your previous career in sales and marketing gave you a leg up in the self-marketing department. Like many others, I had a brief encounter with cold calling that catapulted me out of sales like a rocket launch. **The Well Fed Writer** makes it clear there is no getting around cold calling. Is there anything further you can tell us, words of encouragement or tips to help us make it through the cold calling barrier?

PB Actually, I have GOOD NEWS. As I explained in my first book and reiterate in my second, when I started the business I came from a sales background. I had done cold calling and I had no fear of it, so, not surprisingly, it became the centerpiece of my marketing efforts. Is it the only way to build a business? NO. In the second book, I talk about marketing by e-mail and direct mail. In one case, a gentleman did a very interesting fax marketing campaign. Then there's networking, both with people you know... in the sense of contacting people you know, as well as going to functions and getting the word out that way. I do feel you should become comfortable with cold calling because it's another tool and it can be quite effective. Many, many, many people have built commercial writing businesses through cold calling. For that reason I do devote an entire chapter to it, demystifying the process of taking the fear out of it. I think people will really feel infinitely more comfortable about the whole process once they read the chapter.

I can even throw out a little teaser for **TWFW: Back for Seconds**. One of the things I talk about in the book is focusing on actions vs. results. Meaning...in the beginning, people get freaked out about the process of cold calling because they're focusing too much on RESULTS. They're focusing on HOW it's going to go - which seems logical. Why wouldn't you focus on how it's going to go? You're so worried about making the right impression. You want to get those hot prospects. You want to get those writing jobs... and what if you screw up?

Back For Seconds will ONLY be available through Peter's site during the month of September. As a thank you for buying it (OR the first book) through him, Peter is offering some nice purchase bonuses. Visit www.wellfedwriter.com for more details.

What I tell people is, *that's focusing on results*. You don't have control over RESULTS. What you have control over is ACTION, meaning, you can wake up in the morning and say, "I'm going to make 50 phone calls today." I don't care how they turn out. I don't care if you get voice mail 45 times. Focus on taking the *action*. If you do that consistently over and over and over, day by day by day for a couple of months, you can't HELP but get the results. See the difference? If you get to the end of your day and if you made your 50 phone calls, you're DONE. You've accomplished the goal. Don't even focus on how it turns out. Again, the outcome doesn't matter. Obviously you're not going to build a business making 5 phone calls a day, but put some numbers on the board and do it consistently and you *will* build your business.

But that's just one idea of how you can take some of the anxiety out of the process. There's no reason to be *that* worried about it. This is a classic case of "focus on the things you can control and forget the rest". The only thing you have control over is the actions you take. What that person says when you pick up the phone, whether they're going to like your samples, whether they're having a good day or a bad day, whether they need writing... you don't have any control over that. You say the right things, it will come out in conversation and then you'll either move the conversation forward or you won't.

LB That's great advice – really helpful. I mean it already is for me. I think our readers are really going love that.

PB The advice can apply to any kind of writing, whether you're approaching magazine editors, book proposals or whatever.

LB Not every aspiring writer lives in a metro area. If you happen to live in Fargo, North Dakota or some other sparsely populated area, how do you go about building a client base there? I know there are successful copywriters in remote areas. Do they have a different system for self-marketing?

PB I do address this in the second book, **TWFW: Back for Seconds**. I built my business in Atlanta, GA, which is a big city. And so I didn't personally have first hand experience building a business in a small town. Frankly, there is a difference between building it in a town of 5,000 and building it in a town of 100,000 which is still a smaller market. If you live in a town of 5,000, you're going to probably have to branch out geographically. Generally speaking, for people in a small town the marketing approach is different in that it's much more relationship-based. People do business with people they know. It's really about forging those bonds and being of service. Not that this isn't the case in *any* situation, but it's just more so in a smaller town. And as a rule, small business people in smaller towns often don't see the value of spending a lot of money on marketing materials. I mean little businesses, one, two and three person shops— which have never been a market I've really gone after that much. In answer to your question, yes...the person in a smaller town does have a chance in this business, but they're going to have to go about it differently.

Branching out geographically is becoming more and more feasible. Distance doesn't really make a lot of difference anymore. You could end up with the best of both worlds in the sense that you can be living in a small town, paying small town prices for things and having small town quality of life while earning much more competitive big city rates, if you have clients in larger cities. That's not something that happens overnight, but it's being done all the time.

LB When more work comes your way than you can comfortably handle, do you ever take a beginning commercial writer under your wing to help out with the load?

PB Honestly, not really and I'll tell you why. The main reason is almost by default. I have a group of people locally here. This is the writer's group that I started in '97 and these are very

As a special incentive to buy your copy of *Back For Seconds* (OR TWFW) through his site, Peter will be offering buyers of either book both free shipping AND your choice of a free special ebook bonus: either *The Banquet* OR *The Well-Fed Tool Box*, a "cut 'n paste" resource guide. Details at www.wellfedwriter.com

experienced people. I'm actually the junior member in the crowd, but since I started the group they can't kick me out! And whenever I have overflow, that's actually one of the benefits of the group: you can share leads and overflow work. I actually have a whole section in the next book about starting your own writer's group and the benefits, payoff and possibilities that can come out of it. There are some very interesting marketing possibilities you can do with a group. But back to your question... I have a mentoring service which I started a couple of years ago, mainly because I just didn't have time anymore to address people's questions. I was getting SO much e-mail and was spending hours and hours in front of my computer answering them and I just said, "This is crazy." So I just started charging and it's gone actually quite well. I mentor people who are starting commercial writing businesses as well as people interested in self-publishing. There are details on all that at the "Mentoring" link on my site (www.wellfedwriter.com)

In terms of someone who is just starting out, as much as I'd like to take them under my wing, what it would take to get them up to speed on a particular project is just not necessarily feasible. That's not to say it couldn't be done, but trying to translate doing that to reality may be difficult.

I don't think anyone out there would accuse me of not being supportive of people starting out. I still answer my e-mail—*every single one*. I just may do it a little more briefly. And as people want it more and more, I say, "You might consider hiring me and then you've got my undivided attention."

LB I understand. You can only spread yourself so thin.

PB To this day, four years after this book has been out, people are rather amazed that I answer their e-mail. They assume it's just an auto-reply and they're kind of blown away when it's not. And I really try to keep that up. It's one of the lessons of self-publishing I've learned—be a nice guy and accessible author and people will remember that. They share that with their friends. It never hurts to have a good buzz out there.

LB What happens if a client tries to sue a copywriter because of some mistake in the copy? Is there a way for a copywriter to protect him/herself from losing everything they own in such a lawsuit?

PB As for client suing a copywriter, I promise I'm not picking on you when I say this, but I have to smile when I hear questions like this. NOT that it could never happen, but it is a long shot of biblical proportions. Not only has it NEVER happened to me or anyone I know, I've NEVER ever heard of it happening to anyone in my business. It's just NOT a big concern.

LB It was refreshing to hear your response to that question. Your answer will put some students' anxieties to rest.

LB Peter, I really want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to interview you.

PB Well I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story and get the word out on this. I sincerely appreciate it. I never take anything for granted and so when people approach me I'm just thrilled so... and happy that I can kind of share the story.

LB Great. I've enjoyed our interview today.

PB Me too.

LB Thank you very much Peter.

More about the author of **TWFW-Back for Seconds**:

Peter Bowerman has been a freelance writer and columnist in Atlanta, Georgia since 1993. His corporate client list includes The Coca-Cola Company, MCI, BellSouth, IBM, UPS, Holiday Inn, GTE, American Express, Mercedes-Benz, The Discovery Channel, Junior Achievement and many others. He has published over 250 columns and articles and conducts seminars on writing. He is the self-publishing author of *The Well-Fed Writer*, a 2000 award-winning Book-of-the-Month Club selection and its companion volume, *TWFW: Back For Seconds*, being released in September 2004. Details: www.wellfedwriter.com. Visit Peter's commercial writing site at www.writeinc.biz