

How to source and vet content writers [Video]

Effective content writers bring quality to your content that can increase your search visibility, traffic, conversions and help to distinguish your brand from competitors. Unfortunately, finding the right author for your audience and organization can take a considerable amount of time, and that time investment may double if the candidate doesn't work out.

Knowing where to look and what to look out for can help you set the foundation for content marketing success. Below, agency owners, content writers and strategists share their most useful guidance on how to source and vet potential candidates.

Finding the right content writer

Before you turn to your network. Referrals are a common way to discover writers, and this method can enable you to learn whether the candidate has a history of meeting deadlines or is receptive to feedback before you even approach them. However, relying too heavily on your own network may result in missed opportunities.

"I am cautious of relying solely on referral networks because of a 'flock' mentality," said Shannon K. Murphy, chief strategist at Shine Content Strategy, "We're not adding diverse voices or thoughts to our branded publications if we only pull from within our networks." With racial equity taking center stage in the Black Lives Matter movement, brands should consider diverse voices at all levels of the organization. Perpetuating homogeneity can also result in overlooking and missing out on valuable alternative viewpoints.

Leverage social media sites. Platforms like LinkedIn and

Facebook can provide you with an abundance of candidates, and knowing how to go about your search can help you sift through potential writers.

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Jessica Foster, Carol Tice, Heather Lloyd-Martin and Mel Carson discuss how to find and foster relationships with content writers on Live with Search Engine Land.

“Go on LinkedIn and do a targeted search,” Carol Tice, founder of the Make a Living Writing blog and Freelance Writers Den community, said during our session of Live with Search Engine Land focusing on how to find and foster relationships with content writers, advising that employers search for the exact type of writer they need (using a query like “freelance Seattle technology writer,” for example). “What LinkedIn will return you is the people you’re connected to – your connections will rank at the top, so it’s a way of doing the referral network, but in a bigger lens,” she said, recommending that employers also look into job boards specifically for writers.

“If you’re looking for a particular type of writer, I go to niche Facebook groups and try to find writers that way,” said Jessica Foster, SEO copywriter and content strategist at Keys&Copy SEO, adding, “If they’re very active, they’ve branded themselves professionally on either Facebook or LinkedIn, then to me, that’s a good sign.” A writer’s LinkedIn recommendations or their Facebook business page may also provide you with useful information on potential candidates.

Scope out industry publications. “When looking for writers, check out publications in your field that you like and admire, chances are these blogs are using freelance writers who are subject matter experts,” Murphy said, noting that this method can help you cut back on time spent educating writers about your industry and enables you to get a peak at their work. If there’s a potential match, you can then search for the writer on Twitter or LinkedIn to see if they’re open to working with

you.

This strategy can also save you time even after you've attracted the right talent. "Collecting publications and articles you admire is an oft-neglected but vital part of the content strategy process – you need to be able to show writers examples of the style and tone that you're trying to emulate," she added.

Incentivize writers to come to you. You can increase the likelihood of writers coming to you first by providing them with equitable compensation and development opportunities.

"I came in to do blogging, [but] I'm looking for a chance to write an email sequence around a post or offer, to do a free product for subscribers, to do case studies, white papers, special reports, e-books," Tice said of the growth opportunities that she, as a writer, looks for when working with clients. "I'm not going to be interested if I don't see there are more lucrative and high-visibility projects included," she said.

"Producing the kind of content we want to see from content writers has been hugely helpful in attracting the caliber of candidates we're looking for," said Devin Bramhall, CEO of content marketing agency Animalz, "It's a bit more of a long-term play when it comes to sourcing talent, but it works, because you become the place great writers aspire to work for."

Vetting your prospective writers

You need more than published samples. Writing samples are one of the most common ways to evaluate a candidate, and while they do provide you with more information to work with, they should not be the only thing you assess.

"Existing clippings get them in the door, but given that

published blog posts and/or articles can be edited (sometimes heavily) from others, it's not always a good reflection of a writer's capabilities," said Bramhall, "We ask candidates to choose a piece of content marketing and evaluate it, as well as submit a short writing project." Bramhall's agency also provides clearly defined role descriptions and expectations to facilitate their own evaluation process.

"Ask them to give you raw drafts instead of their finished ones," said Tice. Requesting the first submitted draft provides you with a glimpse of their writing before the editing process and would reveal whether their published samples were heavily edited.

Your writers need to be trainable. "The [writers] that are a little bit self-effacing . . . they're the ones that I think, 'Now this is somebody that can be coached and mentored to learn that other stuff'," said Mel Carson, CEO at Delightful Communications. The honesty and attitude that candidates display can help agencies and brands determine how successful their relationship is likely to be.

To mitigate the risk of onboarding an underperforming writer, employers can start their writers off on a trial basis, Heather Lloyd-Martin, CEO at SuccessWorks, recommended. "If they can't handle edits or constructive criticism . . . that's not somebody that I can work with because, in my head, they're not trainable for my firm," she said.

Watch the full Live with Search Engine Land session for more insights on finding and fostering relationships with content writers. You can also view our full list of Live with Search Engine Land sessions [here](#).

About The Author

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