

A Free Lance

Where does the term come from, and what are the benefits of today's freelancers to companies in the twenty-first century.

If you take a look at Wikipedia, the term "Freelance" was first coined by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) in his well-known historical romance *Ivanhoe* to describe a "medieval mercenary warrior" (or "free-lance"). The phrase later transitioned to a figurative noun around the 1860s and was then officially recognized as a verb in 1903 by various authorities in etymology such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Only in modern times has the term morphed from a noun (a freelance) into an adjective (a freelance journalist), various verb forms (a journalist who freelances) and an adverb (she worked freelance), and then from the verb into the derived noun form "freelancer".

The author and poet Ernest William Hornung (1866–1921) also used the term in "The Gift of the Emperor" to describe something of poor quality: "I warmed to my woes. It was no easy matter to keep your end up as a raw freelance of letters; for my part, I was afraid I wrote neither well enough nor ill enough for success."

I have to say that I can understand the derivation from Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe" – the idea of a free lance (although it might be more aptly described as a lance for hire – the free part actually referring to the mercenary warrior's allegiances rather than his pecuniary reward) is romantic in its truest sense. However, the use of the term by Mr Ernest Hornung does seem somewhat convoluted – although the idea of writing poorly enough for success is intriguing.

As you might have guessed from this last remark, my area of freelancing is in fact copywriting. In the main, brochures, flyers, direct mail; but more and more, the demand is for copywriting for the web. Invariably, companies have already launched a website, and of course, there is copy to be read on each page. What they are looking for now, is what is known as SEO - Search Engine Optimisation, and that involves copy with an essential ingredient - keywords. What keywords, how they should be used, where they should be used, what density, and what exactly a long tailed keyword or keyphrase is, I won't bore you with now. But believe me, they are very important to Google, and if you want your website to be noticed, very important to you.

So why is a freelance copywriter so beneficial to a company in the twenty first century? In the instance above - why would you want to employ someone on a full time basis to provide you with seo copy for your website. Essentially it is a one off job - and although updating is necessary, it is still not a full time role, but a project which is best done by an outsourced specialist. Unless of course you have a 200+ page website, and then you could probably justify a full time salary.

A secondary advantage is freedom of choice. You can employ one copywriter to write advertisements, one for web copy, one for sales

literature etc etc. And if at any time you want to make a change, there are no employment restrictions to hamper you.

Basically, it is a proven formula that can almost be said to be market driven. A new penman will take a fresh look at your product or service, and that in itself can be of tremendous advantage to your company.