

# Former teacher used entrepreneurial approach to succeed at freelancing

**I**m an entrepreneur who writes. When I started out, I considered myself neither a writer nor an entrepreneur, but embracing both with a philosophy of kindness to everyone brought me freelancing success.

Twelve months, one writing conference, three websites, six classes, 35 books, 95 queries, two writing coaches, 27 networking events, two entrepreneur groups, more than 3 million Google searches, three social-networking sites, and one BlackBerry (phew!) later, and I was making money freelance writing.

## Breakthrough

As an elementary-school teacher, I wrote along with my students, modeling my own process as a writer, but was I really a writer? When I finally answered yes, I asked a bigger question: Could I earn a living as a freelance writer?

After 12 years, I quit teaching and devoted myself to learning the answer. After years of marriage to an entrepreneur, I knew I could apply that same entrepreneurial savvy to my freelancing business. Using Google, I researched how to start a business, how to pitch, where to take classes, what books to read, what programs to buy, and more.

Now, I just needed clips, and income.

Somewhere I read that newbies like me might get clips by starting small. So I submitted a few essays to my church magazine and got them published. Using those published pieces, I queried local magazines with story ideas about two newsworthy people I knew. Two more published articles later, I finally had clips for my website and was moving toward my goal of making money.

I still had much to do to grow my writing business, so I joined two entrepreneur groups, Ladies Who Launch and Entrepreneur Mastermind. Both offered networking opportunities and taught me about owning a business, writing a business plan, and building a community of supportive entrepreneurs.

On Twitter, I entered a contest and won six hours with a writing coach. The coach pushed me to think beyond magazines, to consider blogging, and to focus on my expertise in education.

I took a class to learn blogging basics. My second blog on learning, Imagination Soup, became another way to build my brand. Despite my initial resistance, my coach's advice paid off—freelance blogging now provides most of my income. (I'm currently contracted for regular posts with Parenting.com, Imagine Toys and Learning Care Group.)

## What I learned

Fortunately, I listened to my coach. Blog writing provided a steady income,

Melissa Taylor, of Denver, is a freelance writer and a blogger for *Parenting* and *Imagination Soup*. The mother of two is also an award-winning teacher with a master's degree in education. She is passionate about playful learning, children's literature and education.



plus I found that there are more blogging opportunities than prospects for national magazine articles.

Networking paid off, too. I met an editor at a party, and another at a tea house through a LinkedIn connection. After just nine months, I had regular assignments from those editors, who worked at *Colorado Parent* and *Colorado Expression*. And after a year, I started a children's book-review blog for *Colorado Parent*, which led to other blogging gigs. I've learned the value of face time: Meeting someone in person always got me results when emails didn't.

When I started freelancing, social media was exploding. I embraced Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn as tools for business success. These platforms also gave me writing jobs as well as access to lots of people to interview for stories.

## Advice

Once I gained experience in local markets, I wanted to write for more national magazines and websites. Enter the second writing coach, whom I paid to edit my articles and improve my queries. It was money well spent. She made me look good, and with her help I started getting better-paid assignments.

My critique group challenged me as a writer, too. We met once a month for about a year, critiqued each other's writing, and supported one another with ideas and resources. To grow as a writer, you must read others' writing and get feedback on your own.

Kindness goes far in business. With each article, I befriend everyone from PR teams to photographers. Be nice to everyone—it's my best business tip.