



Retain to gain

Why hiring writers on retainer makes smart business sense



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The content marketing conundrum

In this fast-paced era of content marketing, marketing departments frequently find themselves short-handed. When you look at the laundry list of responsibilities they're expected to handle, it's easy to understand why.

Between supporting new product and service rollouts, creating and managing the editorial calendar, optimizing marketing automation tools and conducting customer and market research, they're also expected to generate a constant stream of engaging communications, stay up-to-date with rapidly shifting social media trends and find new ways to keep the content pipeline full.

There aren't enough hours in a day to get this amount of work done—at least in-house. Which is why, if your department is drowning in a sea of content that's demanding to be created, you should strongly consider hiring an external b2b writer on retainer (or outsource writing services for an extended term).



What is extended-term outsourcing?

In a nutshell, hiring a writer on retainer involves outsourcing your copywriting needs to a preferred vendor for an extended period of time. These contracts can range in length anywhere from three months to several years, with opportunities to revise or cancel the contract at the end of each period.

Unlike advertising agencies, professional b2b writers typically don't require clients to sign annual contracts. Instead, they accept work on a first-come, first-served basis and they charge a premium rate for that flexibility. In exchange for a bit of consistency, many writers are willing to steeply discount their hourly rate for a specified term. In most cases, you predict a range of writing hours you'll need in a given month—say, 50 to 100—for a predetermined span of time, and the writer charges you a flat monthly fee. The more monthly hours—and the longer the time frame—the steeper the hourly discount.

In addition to cost savings and faster service, you also have the benefit of working extensively with a specific team of writers. Once the team understands your organization's style—and everyone gets used to working together—your external writing team essentially becomes an extension of your in-house team. That means faster turnaround times, work that is reflective of your organization's style, fewer revisions and a host of other benefits.



When does a retainer make sense?

Most companies hire professional writers on retainer when they've temporarily lost someone in-house—say, due to parental leave, secondment or short-term/long-term disability. In these situations, hiring someone externally makes perfect sense. You don't have to deal with the paperwork, payroll and additional costs of hiring and training a full-time employee, and you gain access to affordable, high-calibre writers when you need them.

While this seems to be the most obvious time to sign an extended outsourcing contract, there are plenty of other situations where this kind of arrangement makes sense, such as:

- You're experiencing an unexpected hiring gap (at an incredibly busy, and incredibly inopportune, time)
- You have a strong internal marketing and communications team but you lack talented in-house b2b writers
- You're in the middle of layoffs and don't have the resources to hire someone full-time
- You're trying to keep up with content marketing demands but don't have enough hands internally to adequately fill the content pipeline
- You have a number of simultaneous deadlines coming up—or large projects—that absolutely cannot slip through the cracks



The last two scenarios are increasingly common in today's content marketing era. At a time when consumers are performing more of their own research—and demanding higher-quality content from their vendors—it's impossible to hire enough people in-house to produce the sheer volume of quality content necessary. Most companies can't afford to hire the senior full-time writers needed to adequately do the job—and even if they did, content creation is often a feast-or-famine task. Keeping an in-house writer busy five days a week, 52 weeks a year is often a feat in itself.

In these situations, it makes sense to leverage your in-house team to fill your writing needs, but even this route comes with its fair share of challenges. Content marketing has evolved into quite the marketing beast—one that requires a very specific skillset. While your advertising copywriters may excel at writing killer ads, they may not have what it takes to pull off a lengthy, yet captivating, ebook. Similarly, your communications team may be great at generating content calendars and dictating the direction of a campaign, but they may not have the time to research and write collateral that will truly resonate with your audiences.

Benefits of hiring on retainer:

- ✓ Cost savings
 - ✓ Flexibility
 - ✓ Higher productivity
 - ✓ Limited commitment
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How it works in action

Case study 1

The challenge: The Canadian division of a multi-national technology company was in the midst of a hiring freeze following a recent acquisition. This proved problematic for the marketing/communications department, which had a very mature online marketing strategy that it needed to maintain or risk losing momentum.

The solution: Although the company wasn't allowed to hire internally, it was still allowed to outsource—so it came to AR Communications to outsource its entire communications function. We dedicated four full-time staff to the 12-month retainer, essentially functioning as a remote communications department. We provided monthly reports of our hours worked, with an itemized list of every task completed.

The outcome: Our experienced team was able to hit the ground running and pick up where the client's team left off—successfully executing the company's online marketing strategy. The organization was so pleased with the results that it renewed the retainer for another 12-month period, after which point the department was able to hire staff internally again. We continue to do work for the company on a per-project basis.

Case study 2



The challenge: A national advisory firm was short two members of its marketing and communications team—one was on a 12-month parental leave and the other on long-term disability. The company needed to find writers to pick up the slack quickly, so the department could continue without missing a beat.

The solution: Having worked with AR Communications Inc. before on a per-project basis, the company reached out to inquire about a potential 12-month retainer arrangement. We sat down with them to determine what type of work would be required, and how many writing hours (on average) would be needed. After assessing previous monthly workloads, we presented them with two options: 50 to 100 hours per month at \$X/hour, or 100 to 150 hours per month at \$Y/hour (with Y being lower than X). They opted for the latter, with the bulk of assignments focused on smaller collateral (such as reports, blogs, and quick turnaround editing and proofreading) versus longer thought-leadership pieces.

The outcome: Over the 12-month period, the AR Communications team interacted with a handful of “touchpoint” contacts at the firm. Urgent assignments were turned around quickly—sometimes within hours—while other deadlines were determined on a per-project basis. Our team got even more familiar with the company’s tone and style, and established a strong understanding of the types of collateral required. For the most part, the monthly hours fell within the predetermined range and, in the off-chance that they didn’t, we filled those hours with larger assignments.

In the end, the organization was pleased with the seamlessness of the arrangement and signed us to another 12-month contract for the same amount of hours.

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How to find the right vendor

While outsourcing offers benefits to both the writer and client, not all professional writers offer this service—and finding the perfect one can be a little tricky. Most of the time, you have to come out and ask if such a service is available—and you have to ask the right company.

If you already have a strong marketing and communications team in-house, and writing assistance is solely what you're after, you want to make sure that you find a professional writing company, rather than an advertising agency or communications company. The former specializes in the writing of content—although you can request deeper involvement in additional tasks such as interviewing subject matter experts, content planning and strategizing. The latter, on the other hand, specializes in strengths you likely already have in-house. Because these companies offer a full scale of services—including the creation and execution of advertising and marketing strategies, ad placements and design—they'll charge extra for those services, and maybe even outsource the writing component themselves.



When researching those professional writing companies, it also makes sense to look for a company that's equipped with a team of writers (rather than an individual freelance writer)—particularly if you're going to require a lot of hours. A team of writers can meet simultaneous deadlines, accommodate quick turnarounds and handle a larger workload. Individual writers may struggle in such a situation, because they won't be able to adequately meet your needs and those of their other clients (which could potentially impel them to end the retainer prematurely).

If you require b2b writing, it's also important to find a team that has b2b experience. There really is no comparison between b2b and b2c writing. Ask to see writing samples, interview them about their process, talk to them about previous retainer contracts. Basically, do as much reconnaissance as possible to make sure the arrangement will work (if you'd like more information on how to do that, check out our ebook—*The perfect fit: How to outsource great writing*).



Arranging a contract that works for you

One of the best things about hiring writers on retainer is you essentially dictate the type of contract you require. To make sure you receive the outsourcing services you actually need, it's consequently important to ask yourself the following questions before reaching out to a potential vendor:

- Specifically what types of projects will you need the writer for? (editing, proofing, thought leadership, blog writing, short-form or long-form content—or all of the above?)
- How long would you like the contract to be? (remember, the longer you commit, the greater the financial benefit)
- How many hours will you require (per week/month)?
- How intimately will the writing team be involved with your day-to-day operations (will you require them to attend weekly staff meetings? Interview SMEs? Manage the entire communications department?)

The more details you can jot down ahead of time, the more likely you'll be to find a writing team that can not only deliver your desired services but become an extension of your internal team as well.

Get started

Having a highly-skilled team of writers on-call is a benefit to any company—particularly those interested in building a mature content marketing strategy. In today's business environment, content truly is king—and those companies capable of engaging their audiences in an effective way rule the roost.

If you'd like to learn other tips and tricks for generating stellar content, [sign up](#) for AR Communications Inc.'s monthly e-newsletter, *The Communication Breakdown*, or take a few moments to read some of our [other ebooks](#).

To learn how a retainer can benefit your company, contact us today.

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