

Business Expansion for Women Entrepreneurs in Online Freelance Writing

Erika Shane

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Dr. Christa Teston

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### Abstract

One major problem in the online freelance writing industry is the conceptualization and implementation of business expansion for the purpose of growth. This type of business is typically an individual entrepreneurial endeavor, and gender can be a confounding factor in the issue of business expansion. The following analysis links the experiences of Rachel Landry, a freelance speech and biography writer, to other freelance writers and women entrepreneurs in an attempt to analyze motivations for the avoidance of business expansion. One writer can only take on so many projects and therefore their business can only expand so far, and one solution to this issue is for freelance writing entrepreneurs to hire a curated team of talented writers. In addition to addressing specific concerns about hiring a team of writers, there are some key strategies and tools that can be utilized to ensure that the business is expanded into a diverse yet efficient and stylistically standardized organization, allowing for maximum economic growth.

## Introduction

This report examines various reasons why many women entrepreneurs choose not to expand their businesses, and proposes possible motivations and methods for expansion. The analysis is framed with a focus on Rachel Landry, a freelance speech and biography writer who conducts her business online and operates independently. The purpose of this report is then to explain why hiring a team of writers is a viable solution for online freelance writers - men and women - who wish to expand their business, and to provide strategies for how to do this without sacrificing personal integrity or quality of work. This report does not deal with all possible issues surrounding online businesses and the hiring process in general, but rather it focuses on issues - both explicit and implicit - facing women who are business owners, as well as Landry's specific concerns. Finally, this report does not attempt to alleviate all societal pressures facing women entrepreneurs, but it is meant to bring light to systemic issues and potentially persuade business owners to expand their business in a way that still aligns with their goals and values.

## The Problem

Online business holds within itself a level of precarity, as does freelance writing. To pair these models in the creation of an online freelance writing business is to undertake a potentially insurmountable entrepreneurial challenge. Landry embarked on this journey of entrepreneurship over ten years ago and has achieved high levels of success, both financially and in terms of job and life satisfaction. Throughout the past decade, she has maintained a solo operation in terms of her speech and biography writing practice. She has hired an administrative assistant to help with the business and scheduling aspect, but she has never desired to build a team of writers, regardless of the potential benefit for her business.

### *Entrepreneurship Limitations*

Typically, entrepreneurial enterprises that are run by a single individual can only progress so far before they plateau. When this happens, changes must be made. There are only so many hours in the day, and the human mind and body have limitations. When the solo entrepreneur reaches the full extent of their time, energy, and financial resources, business growth will most likely stop accelerating. Writing is typically an individual endeavor, and an online freelance writing business will almost always begin with one person and their computer. In this type of business model, progress and growth can only extend so far.

A potentially confounding factor in growth difficulty is the fact that freelance writing, especially speech and biography writing, falls within the service industry. The service sector of business is saturated, and a startling majority of women-owned businesses are either in the service or retail sectors (Coleman 2007, p. 304). Landry's online speech and biography writing business falls into this category. Because of the highly competitive nature of the service industry, "opportunities for growth and profitability are limited" (Coleman 2007, p. 304). In the competitive, overly-saturated service industry, business owners face the decision to either persist without making changes and face the leveling-off of their business's growth, or they can choose to expand their business and actively pursue physical and financial growth.

Landry provided two of her own personal reasons for why she has chosen to do her work exclusively on an independent basis. One of these reasons is that she wants to be able to maintain

a consistent voice throughout her writing. If she chose to expand, she fears that she will have to sacrifice consistency in voice and style. Furthermore, she feels that she has narrowed down her focus and found her niche in the freelance writing community; expanding her business could potentially mean branching out into other forms of writing with which she is less comfortable. These are both valid concerns, and they reflect a more systemic phenomenon in the entrepreneurial arena - gender-based differences in the experiences, values, and motivations.

### *Gender-Based Ideological Differences*

It is impossible to deny a gender disparity when it comes to the financial performance of men- and women-owned entrepreneurial enterprises. This difference can be summed up by two statistical conclusions: “From a performance standpoint, women-owned firms [are] smaller than men-owned firms in total sales, total assets, and total number of employees” and “Women-owned firms [are] significantly more likely to be organized as sole proprietorships” (Coleman 2007, p. 309). While the number of women who are starting their own businesses and making entrepreneurial endeavors continues to increase, there remains a significant gap in economic profits and growth, as well as in business size.

To unpack the reasons behind these differences, there is a focus of study being conducted within business fields to dissect the ways that success is measured, and how different measures of success reflect typically gender-based values. In a study specifically about business growth among women business owners, Jennifer Cliff began to delve into the different experiences and reasons stated by women for why they have chosen not to expand their business (at least in regard to widely accepted definitions of “expansion”). One major factor that was brought up repeatedly was familial obligation (Cliff 1998, p. 526). Even today, women and mothers are often more obligated to perform time-consuming parental and familial duties, such as cooking, attending school events, etc. While men are typically relieved of some domestic responsibility when they start a business, women, usually, are not (Cliff 1998, p. 526). Business expansion can entail more administrative or managerial duties and potentially more projects. This, in turn, can mean longer working hours. Landry explained how familial obligation and time constraints have been a factor in her life and career. She was a single mother and could not tolerate the long hours of the film industry while being the sole caretaker of her child, so she chose to begin her own online writing business. Landry’s experience coincides with findings that, instead of starting a business with the intent to be entrepreneurs, women typically may have more of a “desire to create employment that allows flexibility to balance work and family” (Brush 1992, p. 13). It would not be presumptuous to then assume that Landry’s familial obligations also impact her choices, either consciously or unconsciously, as a freelance writer and entrepreneur.

Furthermore, Cliff brings up the issue of gender differences in life experience as a factor in differences in business growth. Women, on average, grow up with less “industry, management, and prior startup experience” (Cliff 1998, p. 526). This lack of experience can have negative effects on both confidence and growth expectations. Landry stated multiple times that a lack of confidence was one of her biggest obstacles in beginning her business, and it has taken her years to cultivate the confidence necessary for her to know the value of her work and how she wants to run her business. Her previous lack of managerial and entrepreneurial experience undoubtedly played a role in her initially low confidence in her work and her business. On a less explicit level, lack of exposure or experience with business or startups can affect an owner’s expectations for growth. A woman embarking on her first entrepreneurial venture is more likely

to question her own abilities have more modest growth expectations (both physically and financially), than someone who has had experience working in business startup situations (Cliff 1998, p. 526). When aims and expectations are set too low, meeting and even exceeding these expectations may not be enough to keep a business alive, let alone promote growth.

Due to this culmination of factors, and perhaps others - such as gender-based societal expectations for personality traits - studies have shown that men and women measure success in business management differently. Cliff explains:

Empirical studies indicate that men tend to place a greater emphasis on economic and quantitative, nonambiguous measures of achievement and success, such as status and wealth; women tend to assign more importance to social values and qualitative, ambiguous measures of achievement and success, such as personal fulfilment and strong interpersonal relations (Cliff 1998, p. 527).

Therefore, a man who is an online freelance writer may desire to hire more writers because he knows that it will financially benefit the company, and to him, this is success. However, a woman in the same profession (such as Landry), may feel successful because she loves her work and feels personally fulfilled by the positive feedback she receives from clients. She may feel this way regardless of if the business is reaching its full financial potential. This is not to say that women entrepreneurs do not prioritize economic growth at all, but typically they “pursue social goals such as customer satisfaction...*together* with economic goals,” whereas men who are business owners often prioritize the latter first (Brush 1992, p. 13). Landry even explained that she personally defines expansion as attracting more high-profile clients - not physically expanding - but this can only increase growth by so much.

## **Solution**

All of the aforementioned reasons and explanations for the avoidance of business expansion are valid, and some of them point to larger societal issues that cannot be addressed by a single solution on the part of a business owner. However, for freelance writers who desire business growth beyond the scope of simply attracting wealthier clients, there are solutions available. One such solution is to begin the process of hiring a curated team of writers, and it can be applied specifically to Landry’s business or to others in a similar situation.

### *Rachel Landry’s Specific Concerns*

It is beneficial to first address Landry’s specific concerns, then deal with the larger process of hiring a writing team. Landry admitted that she has had to turn down projects because she personally disagreed with the views of the potential client, and did not feel that she could provide them with quality work. If she were to create a team, she could have talented writers with diverse political, religious, and personal backgrounds. Instead of having to turn potential clients away to other writers at other companies, she could have those other writers on her team. One minor caveat is that Landry’s name and business would still be represented in the work produced by her team. If her disagreements and aversion to certain potential clients are strong, then she still may not want to take the job. However, if her disagreements are personal or insignificant enough that she could still feel comfortable putting her business’s name on the work

that is created, then having a diverse team of writers could allow her to maintain her own personal integrity without sacrificing business growth.

Another one of Landry's reasons for not expanding her business was that she only writes in her area of expertise, which is a rather small piece within the larger domain of freelance writing. She could potentially attract significantly more business if she was to offer more writing services. In some ways, she is limited by her "weakest skills," or the types of writing that she does not offer (Lazear 2004, p. 208). In addition to hiring writers with more diverse personal beliefs, it may also be useful for her to hire writers with different areas of writing expertise. Her expanded company could take on different types of projects, expanding its writing portfolio and its profits.

The last of Landry's specific concerns regarding expansion, and perhaps her strongest point for refusal, was that she wants to be able to maintain a consistent writing style and voice in all of her projects. The issue of voice consistency crops up in all types of collaborative writing, and it becomes especially important in speech writing, where the writer's voice eventually becomes the speaker's voice. There are measures that can be taken to minimize the effect of having multiples writers. The two main factors in voice and style consistency are establishing style standards and maintaining effective communication (Perisco 2009, p. 58-59). If all writers are aware of the style conventions for their specific projects, and if constant communication is upheld between writers and management (i.e. Landry), it is possible to produce speeches and biographies that reflect the illusion of a sole contributor. This will also allow Landry to continue to pursue the more social, less financial goals of her company. If stylistic standards are established and upheld, Landry, and others in her position, would not have to sacrifice superior customer service and client feedback.

### *Hiring a Writing Team*

When it comes to the process of actually hiring a team of writers, there are certainly different skill requirements and different levels of scrutiny or curation that can be applied depending on the caliber of writing that is needed. Joseph Perisco, the former chief speechwriter for Nelson A. Rockefeller, posits three main qualities that are essential for individuals being considered for a speech writing position. The criteria can easily be applied to nearly all types of writing professions. The first deals with having excellent rhetorical skills, and this is easy to judge simply by acquiring and examining writing samples (Perisco 2009, p. 57). Further, there is what Perisco calls versatility, or "general intelligence coupled with a technical innocence of the subject (Perisco 2009, p. 58). This skill is slightly more difficult to judge, but it essentially requires the candidate to be able to write coherently about a wide range of topics, but at a level that the desired audience will be able to understand. Finally, there is the ability to work under time pressures (Perisco 2009, p. 58). This is something that would be useful to writers in all professions, but speech writers are often working during different types of campaigns (political, fundraising, etc.), where being able to produce a meaningful speech on short notice is essential.

Finding the best writers can be another challenge, due to the nature of online business. Networking is done online as opposed to face to face, and the process of finding candidates will be different for every company or business owner. Landry elaborated on the types of websites that she used to use to find writing jobs, and it is likely that other talented writers are using these sites to try and find their footing in the online freelance writing world. Landry mentioned the websites *elance.com* and *guru.com* as sites that she has used in the past to find jobs. These sites,

as well as other online professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn, are, at the very least, useful starting points in the process of hiring a team of writers. Personal references are also incredibly useful, especially if they come from trusted and esteemed individuals.

### *Logistical Expenses and Benefits*

When it comes to the process of hiring writers, overhead costs in the freelance writing business are relatively insignificant in comparison to what they are for larger corporations. Landry provided some insights into virtually all of the expenses involved in running her business (Appendix B). Interestingly, most of these costs are related to the maintenance or marketing of the business - such as website domain and hosting, merchant fees, and advertising costs - and would not necessarily fluctuate with growth in the number of employees. Each freelance writer and entrepreneur will run their business differently, but Landry has provided one detailed model that most likely follows the same general design as others who operate similar businesses.

Each new writer would need their own computer equipment, and this may or may not be an initial company expense, depending on the caliber of equipment that individuals possess prior to being hired. Going forward, upgrades, repairs, and new equipment would become business expenses. However, these expenses are tax write-offs, which serve to lower the amount that the company would then have to pay to the government.

Items such as Skype accounts, call-recording software, international cell phone plans, etc. are all items that individuals may already possess. Monthly payments would presumably be covered by the company once the individual is hired, since these items are clearly necessities for the operation of the business. These costs are also tax write-offs, and are relatively negligible in comparison to the potential profits that each new writer would earn.

Furthermore, personal networking and marketing is a potential logistical benefit to expanding an online freelance writing business. Landry explained that advertising is her most significant expense, and this is probably true for other freelance writers. Individually, writers are limited to their own network of contacts, clients, and companies that they know or can reach through whatever advertising platforms they choose to use. Bringing on just one more writer - especially someone who is skilled and has a reputation in the field - means potentially doubling the amount of contacts for the company. Ideally, this will contribute to a far-reaching chain of connections. Landry constantly stressed the personal nature of her work, and if she can hire other writers with personal connections that can turn into lifetime clients, her business will increasingly gain more steady sources of revenue. Sufficient growth in revenue may then allow Landry or other freelance writing entrepreneurs who adopt similar policies to reduce the amount that they spend on outside advertising avenues. For online businesses, networking at the personal level is invaluable.

As the entrepreneur and sole owner of her business, Landry has the power to set and negotiate compensation or salaries for any writers she could potentially hire. Other freelance writers in the same situation also possess the same power. A direct, streamlined administrative process allows for transparency and ease of communication between employer and employee. The lack of corporate bureaucracy may be attractive to other freelance writers who are looking to join a team while still maintaining a reasonable level of autonomy and a freelance atmosphere.



## **Conclusion**

Hiring a team of writers for an online freelance writing business is only one potential solution for the issue of business expansion, but it is one of the most feasible and most effective solutions given the physical constraints of running a business as an individual enterprise. When economic growth is a goal of a freelance writing entrepreneur, and this growth comes to a halt, seeking other writers is one of the only options for progress. Future research would be beneficial in analyzing the confounding factors of gender, entrepreneurship, and online business, and how business expansion and the hiring process play a role in these situations. Each of these elements presents its own conflicts, and this report does not delve exhaustively into all of the issues dealt with by entrepreneurs, business-owning women, and individuals who operate online businesses. However, in the specific case of Rachel Landry, and potentially others in her situation, hiring a team of writers using effective hiring strategies presents an economically efficient means for business expansion and maintenance of quality.

## Appendix A

Interview Notes: Rachel Landry; September 13, 2017

*We understand that you have a background in the film industry; how and why did you make the transition into freelance speech writing?*

- Spent 20 years in the film industry, became a single mom, needed a job that was more conducive to being a mother
- Was “shooting nights and sleeping days”
- Always had a unique writing talent, internet gave her the avenue to find the right type of job (did not want to be an author or journalist)
- The business aspect was more “dumb luck”

*What sort of interview process do you conduct with your clients? Do you have to meet in person; do you stay in constant contact?*

- Interview goal: personalized but time efficient; Conducts 1-hour Skype/Facetime meeting
- Always begins with the same general questions, then lets the interview guide itself
- Tries to “interrogate the client” to find out about dreams, goals, motivations, etc.
- Wants to create a “complete view” of the client and not leave anything out.
- “Not just a resume,” she likes to “dig deep”
- Sends the client a draft, and 9 times out of 10 they love it

*Is your writing done exclusively on an individual basis, or do you collaborate with other writers?*

- Other writers have asked to join her team, but she has refused thus far; wants to maintain her writing voice and style, keep the “human element”
- She is selective in what she writes, and only writes her specialty
- Hired an administrative assistant, but no other writers, even though this causes her to sacrifice the quantity of jobs that she can take
- Defines expansion as landing more high profile clients and jobs

*When writing pieces that are either about other people or for other people to present, do you maintain your own consistent voice or do you adapt your writing voice to meet the needs of the client?*

- Always likes to adapt; said that the client chooses the voice
- She chooses her style based on feedback from the client - this comes organically to her, but it has taken years to get to this point

- She likes to make the pieces as personal as possible, and she always wants the same reaction from each client

*What are some of the most prevalent problems in your field, either with speech and biography writing or with the business element?*

- The writing is never the problem, it's always on the business administrative end
- Managing expectations: making it clear that she produces high quality work, and her prices reflect this
- Recently updated her website to hopefully attract more high profile clients
- Trust: she asks clients to pay in advance, and people are often wary of online business
- Some people ask for concessions / special treatment, and she has had to build the confidence to say no
- In 10 years she's only had 2 clients so dissatisfied that she gave them a full refund
- Personal conflicts: if she gets a "bad vibe" from someone, or strongly disagrees with their political or religious beliefs, she has turn them away
- She cannot fake a good bio, and she believes that they deserve good work, just not done by her

## Appendix B

## Explanation of Business Expenses

Rachel Landry; October 12, 2017 (Reformatted from original email)

1. Building and maintaining my website. The site platform, plus hosting, and my domain name. I built the website myself using a DIY template, to keep the cost down - roughly 300/yr
2. My skype account - 80/yr
3. My call recording software (one-time cost) - \$30.
4. A printer and ink supplies - roughly \$200/yr
5. A cell phone plan with long distance to pretty much any country (if you market your services globally) - \$125/month
6. Branded email account (if it isn't included with your website). It's not a necessity, but it's definitely more legitimizing than a yahoo or gmail account - \$??
7. My Docusign account (for electronic agreement signing) - \$300/yr
8. My merchant fees (the fees that I have to pay to Visa, MC, and Amex for accepting credit card payments) - % of transaction
9. Paypal fees if you use paypal to get paid. I no longer use them.
10. And of course, the biggest expense: Advertising. Once I figured out who my target market was, I had to find ways to be where they are and get noticed. It's an ongoing effort and my advertising costs are currently around \$5000/yr
11. Admin support. I was doing everything myself, but after nine years in business, I finally got to a point where the volume of inquiries was becoming overwhelming, so I hired a freelance admin support person. I pay her between \$200 - \$500 every month and she takes care of all the day to day stuff; inbox management, responding to inquiries, agreements & invoicing, scheduling meetings, etc. etc, so that my time is free to write
12. At one time I paid membership fees to various industry related professional associations that host networking events and seminars and business development talks, etc. - \$300/yr
13. Banking fees. Every business has banking fees
14. Don't forget, you have to set aside part of your earnings to pay your taxes! As a freelancer, your employer isn't taking care of that, so make sure you know what your tax expense will be as you start to earn, and be prepared for it. I know that's not really overhead, but it's a significant expense that most people forget about

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