

SELECT POSTS FROM THE TMSA BLOG

**Insights from
the Wannabe Go-To Content Writer
for Transportation & Logistics**



Conrad Winter

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To Outsource or Handle it In-House?

by: Conrad Winter

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Why cost shouldn't be your only consideration.

Everyone loves a good do-it-yourself project. What could be more satisfying than making over a bathroom yourself or installing shelves on your own? The money saved and satisfaction can be immensely rewarding. The same is true for landing pages, email campaigns, white papers and blog posts designed and/or written in-house by you or your team; they can bring cost savings and satisfaction, too.

For the savings, the satisfaction, the control and more, doing it yourself is the ideal. But the reality is that things have to line up pretty perfectly for a DIY project to make sense in business. That's because in business, there's more than a lost weekend at Home Depot. Without freelancers the work is far from free and comes with the cost of internal time spent as well as the cost of potentially doing it wrong and losing leads, sales, revenue and brand standing as a result.

Here are a few key considerations for marketers weighing whether to insource or outsource for creative and marketing projects.



As you save on freelance costs, are you paying in other ways?

Doing it yourself on tasks that could be easily outsourced, comes with an opportunity cost. Hiring a freelancer for lower value tasks enables you to invest your time in high value projects that lead to higher returns. Coming up with the strategy and delegating the executions enables marketing experts to exert their expertise over a much wider swath, encouraging the original thinking of their team members, ensuring quality and maintaining focus on the big picture—as opposed to selecting stock photography, editing video or writing headlines, which can easily be done by others and often with much more attention to detail than a harried upper manager would provide.

Another way to look at it is simply by looking at it on an hourly basis: freelancer rates are much lower than executive rates; eight hours of a

marketing director's time will always be more expensive than eight hours of a writer's time, for example. For that reason, it's always going to be more expensive for a marketing manager to do it themselves.

Is doing it yourself to maintain control really necessary?

When you can handle projects in-house, you can ensure the quality is up to standard and the creative is true to brand standards—oftentimes just by walking down the hall to check on your team. You don't have the same control when you outsource; however, when you use freelancers, you can create a process for communication and accountability that provides unique advantages.

The deadlines and project management that a freelancer brings to the table often create more structure and accountability than you'll receive from an inhouse team (or even by doing it yourself.) You can also control labor costs more effectively through outsourcing. This is because the hours you and your inhouse team spend are often a black hole—out of sight and unchecked. In contrast, freelancers always know where they stand on hours. Whether they're billing you a project fee or hourly, it's their job to be accountable and keep you abreast—their business and their profitability depend on it.

Are you shortchanging strategy by focusing all your attention on execution?

You and everyone on your team have a limited number of hours every day. Spending them on high-value strategic tasks, can lead to large-scale rewards. Dedicating them to executional tasks leads to limited rewards with often short-lived gains. Put another way: if writing the copy for your newsletter leaves you with no time to develop campaigns or product launches, you'll pay for it over the long run.

When marketing directors can commit their full mindpower to big ideas, breakthroughs in lead-gen, sales and revenue can follow. Conversely, when time is limited, original thinking is limited, companies fall back on

tried and true and potential is limited. In that way, freelancers free marketers to focus on priority goals and tasks.

Do you or your staff have the expertise for professional quality?

There's a lot to be said for getting the job done, figuring it out, finding a way and not being deterred by unfamiliar tasks you or your team have never before attempted. In addition, getting it done and saving the money can be a team builder as well as a feather in your team's collective cap.

But your market may not see your video or white paper the same way. What is a triumph to you, may not be up to professional standards to them. The impression can do more damage than good. If you need to step up, it makes sense to step out for help. After all, who has a better chance of success? Someone who has written 20 whitepapers or someone who is writing their first?

Will you follow through, or will there be a cost of not getting done?

The "weekend rule" is a good rule of thumb for viable home improvement projects; if you can do something in a weekend—like painting a room or putting up drapes—your chances of actually improving your home are good. If not, your risk of living with an unfinished eyesore and nagging chore increases. Same is true for marketing projects. Be in it to finish it. If not, hand it off. No one needs a failure on their scorecard.

Are DIY projects keeping you in catch-up mode?

If you and your team are constantly under the gun to get the monthly newsletter out or post every week, it's taking a toll. You may be getting it over the goal line each time, but constant emergencies distract you from essential, but less intense pursuits, like keeping up on creative trends, industry opportunities, competitors' moves and more. They can pass by unnoticed when you're constantly struggling to manage immediate needs.

Outsourcing helps you keep your edge in two ways: by bringing in new perspectives and by freeing you to research, follow trends, find inspiration and look ahead.

Are you always racing and never finding the time for optimizing?

Another negative consequence of spending your work days moving from one rush project to the next is marketing myopia. Just focusing on rolling out campaigns and programs without dedicating adequate time to reporting enables inefficiency and stunts improvement. Without taking the time to see what's working or not working, you can't make adjustments that maximize results and optimize spending. Outsourcing your fire drills that distract you without fail—like that weekly blog, quarterly newsletter or monthly Eblast—provide the opportunity to focus on making improvements.

Do you believe you could do it yourself faster than you could outsource it?

Things always look easier than they are. But underestimating the value of experience and under planning often lead to disaster. In home improvement and marketing, there is a process to everything. Processes always take time—but they also save time because they are based on best practices that have succeeded in the past. Freelancers bring process to your project. By taking the necessary steps that you may not have the time or patience for, they increase your chances for success.

The process of having to articulate strategy and provide clear direction is as valuable for the giver as it is for the freelancer because it forces marketers to think things through and make the best decisions.

Are you considering the effects of dissatisfaction?

Can you take on additional work or assign a heavier workload to your team without creating stress, tension and resentment? People often quit at “the absolute worst time” for companies because they're overworked.

If you're short-handed already, a vacancy will be devastating. In this way, outsourcing provides staff insurance that supports continuity in your communications and company.

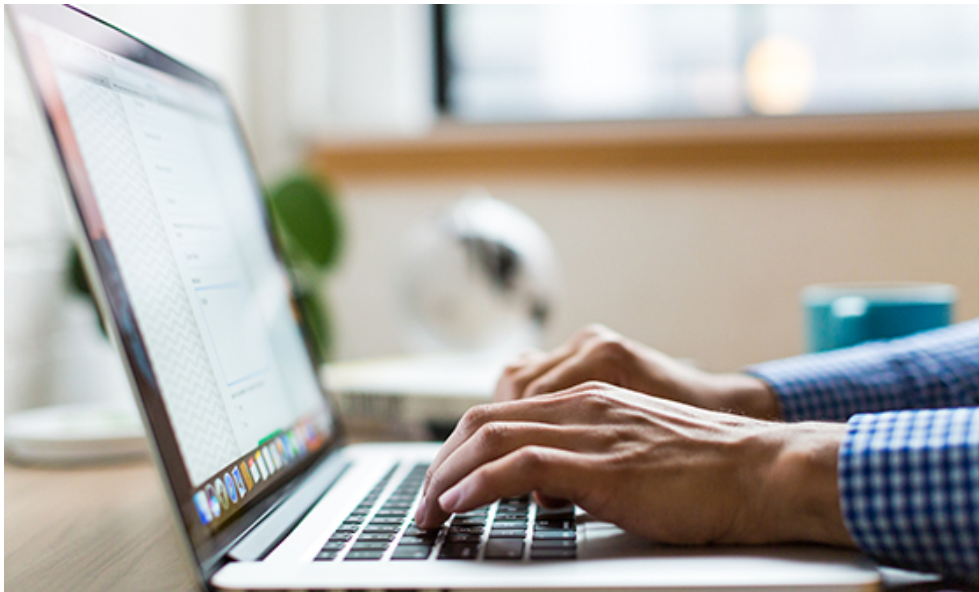
Conclusion:

The cost of outsourcing is a worthy investment when considering the potential costs of doing it yourself, or even doing nothing at all. As companies and workers get more comfortable with working outside the office and collaborating virtually during the pandemic, the process of reaching outside becomes less risky and more routine. And when they consider the value, it seems less extravagant altogether.

Do-it-yourself writing tips for marketers forced to do more with less

by: Conrad Winter

Published June 3, 2020



For a lot of marketing heads, the pandemic has moved their workload from bad to way worse. For years I've been seeing the rise of a phenomenon—marketing leads who are expected to execute an increasing number of projects. On top of steering the juggernaut of their brands, they're also performing an array of design, production, optimization and analytical tasks. But the place I'm seeing it the most is in the amount of writing that falls on their shoulders—everything from social posts, newsletters and blog posts to campaigns, white papers, and web copy.

Marketing directors were already juggling a mind-boggling amount of work...and then the pandemic hit. If there was any budget for outsourcing before, chances are it got zapped. Many short-handed marketing

departments lost staffers, too. So if you are a marketing director who's already doing it all and writing it all, what do you do now? The answer: do it better and faster. Here are a few road-tested tips from a [freelance copywriter in transportation and logistics](#) to help you manage the new work load through the pandemic and beyond.

First things first: power through the procrastination.

Whether it's a nag or an actual item on your to do list, it's time to get over the hope that this is all going to end and you're not going to have to write that "thing"—whatever it is. I've found that it's that first step that's so very hard. My go-to to just get that little jump that gets the writing train in motion is the [Pomodoro Technique](#). The way it works is you set a timer for one hour, and you write. What you accomplish doesn't matter: maybe you mind map (a fancy word for brainstorm) or outline, maybe you just start writing the darn post. The point is, after an hour, you'll have something to build on, the project will be real—and you may just keep working now that you've got it going.

Pomodoro sprints are a way to keep your momentum going, too. After your first, take a break and then hit it again. Repeat until you're finished. Don't ask me why. Breaking up the work just works.

Don't jump over your strategy.

It's easy to overlook your 30,000-foot view , your strategy and your personas when faced with a deadline. It's hard not to be laser-focused on the deliverable you want so desperately off your plate. But you must. Force yourself to do the brief, even if you're certain it's all in your head. Don't allow yourself to be lured into the weeds. On top of everything else you have to do, you don't have time.

Do an un-outline for posts and long-format writing.

No one likes outlines—the word tends to the torture of elementary-school English. Instead write headlines (iterate a bunch of them—more on that below) until you come up with one you love and simply must write to. Then write your subheads. (Sneaky, huh? you just wrote the outline

without dragging your heels like a 12-year-old.) Next step is to write it. Wait a day if you can.

Write a cr*p-draft.

The best lesson of my writing career was to give myself permission to write a horrid, awful, embarrassing first draft. I wouldn't judge myself. The only catch? I had to write it fast and forward, meaning no editing while I wrote. (Sounds scary, I know, but that cr*p-draft is never as bad as you think it will be.)

Emphasize the edit.

With your draft in hand, the hard part is over. There's just *something* about having a manuscript—good or bad, it doesn't matter. It's easier to improve writing than it is to create writing. So take the time to celebrate your draft and take a break (important point) before launching into the most important part of writing. Editing is when you make it good.

Attack tactics for ads, landing pages, videos and such.

Marketers who are expected to do it all with no budget will invariably face projects they've never done before. Take heart, there is always a method. When you don't know where to start, it can help to think in terms of a document format. Sometimes when you create a form, it can free you to just fill in the blanks. How would this hack work for an Eblast? The format would go something like this: Subject line, preheader text, headline, salutation, text blurb, call to action line, button. Why does this work? It breaks seemingly-insurmountable challenges into approachable pieces that you can write, and then go back and make better later.

Iterate your way to good.

The difference between a post or ad or Eblast that reads like a strategy document and one that has reader interest, eloquence, cleverness or expresses a nugget of insight...is iteration. To come up with a really good headline or lede or tagline, you have to come up with a lot of them. There

is no other way. That is really the secret. I know, you don't have a lot of time, you have to get it out the door. But if you do have a little time, even if it's during your edit, try to beat what you've written. The mind gets loose once the project is in motion—and that's when the gems present themselves.

Don't let it languish.

All right. You've written it. Other people have to see it and approve it. They may improve it. (Let's hope.) They may ruin it. (Don't take it personally.) Whatever happens, you have to manage it. Insist on clear, consolidated feedback. Your reviewers comments can't conflict. Let them fight it out. Keep track of the rounds of revisions by keeping a running tally of reviewers' initials and your corrections like this: SG_CW_SG_CW_SG_CW. In this example, Steve Garvey made three rounds of revisions which the copywriter (CW) executed. Why do this? It's a gentle way of keeping Steve honest and ensuring he's not going backwards.

Proofread in a calm mind.

If you had to write it yourself, chances are you'll have to proofread it yourself. Even though you've seen the document 5 times already, just do it. Don't let a deflating typo slip through. Before you publish, take the time to read through every word frontwards and then backwards. (Old proofreader's trick.) Do it while your mind is fresh and not at 1 in the morning. Your document can never be proofread enough. It will amaze you what you catch. And after all your hard work, your writing deserves it.


One last word.

Writing is hard. Even when you've been doing it a long time. It doesn't help to beat yourself up because you think you're taking too much time. Good writing keeps the marketing ball rolling by drawing leads, maintaining brand presence and motivating your team members

internally. But good writing takes time. So until this is over and you get your budget back to outsource, take the time.

What Can You Do With a Worthless August?

by: [Conrad Winter](#)
Published August 21, 2019



Outside it's warm, but muggy, sunny, but hazy and beautiful, but buggy. It's summer in all its glory, but let's face it, August is tough. It creates tension while promising relaxation. Even those of us lucky enough to go on vacation can't escape feeling a little anxious. It's like we're 13 again and know school is just around the corner.

In this month, people can behave rashly—even erratically. As slow as August can be, one should never underestimate it. The eighth month is notorious for market swings, changes in work roles and responsibilities, vendor shifts, territory grabs and relationship changes.

Big industry and life-changing things can happen that are anything but relaxing. What is it about this month? Is it boredom? The secret revenge of those who didn't go on vacation? Or is validation of something bigger? Like, just maybe, August isn't so worthless after all. Perhaps this sleeper month is really the only month when some of the most important work can take place.

August is a time warp.

With the abundance of downtime, slower pace and break in routine it provides, August is the time when the focus can shift from executing on plans to questioning their very existence. It's a unique opportunity. The weeks preceding Labor Day are when the mind is free to meander around the big picture, make hay over details, mull over the mild nags we're too

busy for during the rest of the year, and most importantly, muse about solutions—both creative and clairvoyant.

With the right attitude and reasonable expectations, the dog days can become a business's best friend. Making the most of the opportunity can take many forms—from habit improvements and random acts of mentorship to major rebrandings, restructurings and website redesigns. August gives us plenty to be optimistic about, and everyone should have an initiative. Here are a few of the ways to make the most of the great indoors during this month:

Grow your resources. You need a stable of outside partners, vendors and service providers in case something happens to your mainstay. Everyone does—and it's on your list. Schedule time to chat with writers, designers, programmers or SEO folks you've been meaning to talk to. Doing it now beats doing it when your need is urgent and you're in a panic.

Expand your mind. It's so easy to educate these days. Binge on company webinars—live or library. You're constantly receiving invitations; maybe accept one for a change. Or consider taking self-paced courses through educators like [Udemy](#). They offer bite-sized courses on online topics like HubSpot basics, copywriting or digital marketing. Alternatively, you could take a more committed route through [American Management Association \(AMA\)](#) seminars or bolster your technical skills through [General Assembly](#) classes.

Find your silver bullet book. A company I work with did this last year to great success. We all read [Play Bigger](#) and, manic on the message, set about putting the insights in action. I think this is an ideal August activity for companies; you pick a hot business book, have everyone read it and then take a day to workshop it as a group.

Throw down a killer content calendar. I love this one. Imagine how empowering it would be to have a year's worth of blog, blast and newsletter topics strategized and scheduled in advance? Think about how great it would be to plan your white papers well in advance: It would give you more time to thoughtfully and creatively produce them. It would also enable you to devote more energy to promoting them and leveraging white paper content for other uses, giving you more mileage for your investment. And why stop with the planning? Get writing and you'll really be ahead of the game.

Systems review and overhaul. Like every basement, glovebox or utility drawer—you have systems and processes that need a good look-through. You know the ones: your traffic board and your flow for content, social and sales. There's no other time in the year that you'll be able to devote the time and attention to these things that they deserve. I know it's about as unsexy as cleaning the garage—but damn, you'll be glad when you do it. Ahh economy and efficiency—bracing as a dip in a cool mountain stream on a hot day.

Your website. Need I say more? Well, yeah, maybe I do. A complete overhaul is probably out of the question without some serious planning; however, a dispassionate audit and thorough Internet walkabout to see “what people are doing out there” is well within the bounds of August. A great site starts by asking “what if?” Use the downtime to get the ball rolling and create a report that shows your CFO you're serious.

Make someone's else's summer Part I: Everyone has time to do *something* significant in August—like mentoring someone, whether formally or informally. That could mean giving someone a chance to help on a project, having lunch with an intern or just teaching someone something. It could mean a lot of things. Essentially, August gives you a chance to “take the time” when ordinarily you wouldn't have the time.

Sometimes it doesn't take a lot to make the difference in someone else's life or career that changes everything.

Make someone else's summer, Part II: Organize a volunteer event for the company or department or division. Take your team to make kits for a homeless outreach organization for an afternoon. Or sign your company or department up to do a [Habitat build](#). Summer's a great time for this. With the slower pace, the experience can sink in a little deeper and kinship can take root.

August is always a crazy growing season. Use these ideas to take advantage of it! And please share your killer plans, progress and perspectives on [TMSA's Facebook group](#). After all, there's nothing better than a little peer pressure when it comes to blasting through the summertime blahs.

Transportation and logistics is a hard industry.

Hard because transportation and logistics is complex and you have to know it to market it. Hard because so many prospects see what you do as a commodity. Hard because lean practices of constantly doing more with less applies to everything in this industry—including marketing. Over the years, the content I've written has helped companies like Crowley Logistics, Flash Global, TradeLens and Flexcon Containers. You'll find samples of the work I've written for these companies and others at conradwinter.com.

Content marketing for transportation and logistics is especially hard.

The terms, processes and customer pains in this market are complex.

Writers in transportation and logistics need to know a lot. You can't expect a regular B2B writer or content marketer to get up to speed quickly, so working with writers like me who already know logistics, transportation and supply chain saves you time explaining and editing.

It's differentiate or die.

Successful content marketing, requires an emphasis on the marketing part—the part that differentiates you. To achieve this you need writers who know your brand, yes, and more importantly know how your brand appeals to the market. An outside writer like me provides the advantage here. The plain truth is it's hard to see yourself the way your prospects do. But when you can do that, you can create content

marketing that separates you from the commodity game and builds preference for your brand.

It's hard to keep up with the demands of content marketing.

You know that content is king of the road in this industry because there's so much to know and it all changes so quickly. You also know that prospects want your perspective and your expertise. And it's no surprise that you need to give it to them in the form of valuable content. Great.

The problem is that you don't have the time to create content yourself and if you outsource, you need to make super-efficient use of your limited budget. An independent writer like myself who can quickly get up to speed and efficiently write content that resonates with your market is an outstanding option for you to keep the cadence of posts, case studies and white papers without going crazy in the process.

How will you keep up the content marketing consistency?

It's not you. You are committed. Some would even consider you hard core.

You've launched content initiatives in the past and maintained them successfully. But what happened? Your posts lapsed or your campaign ended. And before you knew your content marketing went fallow. It happens: personnel changes, burnout, competing initiatives all can leave your content effort unattended.

Do you see the pattern?

Hire someone and they could leave. Hire an agency and they could get too expensive. Do it yourself and you'll make yourself crazy. Each of these has a way of leading you to a lapse, that very easily becomes a long silence that you can't afford in this very competitive market.

Outsourcing is a really good antidote to this threat of inactivity.

Outside writers like me provide the product on-time, in full and on schedule—or they don't get paid. It's a really good system. And with the right writer, it leads to consistent, quality work as well as lasting relationships. Committed independents, like me, like long-term relationships. They enable us to sink our teeth into a market and get comfortable in a company's brand voice. And like I said before, we're incented to produce because we want to get paid.

I make it easy for you to keep your content marketing commitments.

There is no doubt you are committed to achieving results, quality and consistency in your content marketing. It's crystal clear. The only part that's missing is a steel-edged solution that keeps you on track come what may. Ready for a writer who is as committed to your market and your brand as you?

See how I could be the solution for your content needs.

Check out the work I've written for transportation & logistics companies at conradwinter.com. Or if you want to get right to it and talk about your content gaps or aspirations, reach out at conrad@conradwinter.com or by calling 917.664.1768.