



# Promotion Is Free

I often get questions from new writers about how to get the word out that they are there and available for writing work. This topic has been coming up a lot recently, so even though it's been covered before, I thought it was time to revisit it.

From my experience, when you're starting out as a freelance writer, you don't have a big budget to take out full page ads to proclaim your arrival. That's why I'll be concentrating on the free promotional methods that worked for me when I started freelancing. I won't stop there, though, because there are a few new outlets that I think any writer starting today would do well to consider.

I'm going to keep the sections short, concentrating on saying what the promotion method is, how to do it successfully and any pros and cons. By the end, I hope you will have a few methods that will help you to make the next leap in your freelance writing career.

## A Web Presence

One of the first things to address when promoting yourself as a freelance writer is having somewhere where people can find you. These days, that means having a web presence – and that doesn't have to cost you anything. My preferred method is to get a blog, because you don't have to mess around with creating static HTML pages and blogs are easy to update. Although I always recommend buying your own domain name, you don't have to go this route when you are starting out. In fact, you can still promote yourself effectively by getting a blog on a free host such as Blogger or Wordpress.com. The advantage of doing this is that it doesn't cost you anything and you can be up and running in five minutes.

## Getting Started

So what do you need to make yourself known as a freelance writer? Think about it from the prospective client's point of view. When they eventually find you, they want to know who you are and why they should hire you, what you have done and how to get in touch with you. They will also want to see examples of your work. That means that at the very least you need an about page which talks about your background and

experience, a resume page, which gives more detail about your published clips and other relevant information, and a contact page with a contact form and any other contact details you want to release. If you also want to include your rates, then many people find that helpful too.

## Adding Content

Use your posts to keep adding examples of your writing, and soon you will have a freelance writing blog with a respectable amount of content. It may take an hour or two to get the pages written to your satisfaction, then it will take only 10-15 minutes every time you post (depending on the length of the post and how often you post.)

## Shop Window

So, how does this help you with promotion? In order to promote yourself, you have to have something to promote. Think of this as your virtual shop window, inviting customers to browse and buy. Once you have this set up, you can use some of the other free promotional methods I'll be discussing to get more people to see what you have to offer.

## Forums

Once you've got a [virtual shop window](#) for your writing services, it's time to let people know it's there. One effective way you can promote yourself is to use forums. There are thousands of forums on any topic you can imagine, so it won't be hard to find one. As a writer, you can choose among writing forums, work at home forums and forums for any particular area of expertise.

## Which Forum To Choose?

For the purposes of promotion, you need to find a forum that is active. Check to see how many threads there are with recent posts to see if the forum is active. Look at the number of users at the bottom of the forum and see when the last person joined. All of this will tell you whether a forum is alive or dead. If it's dead, move on swiftly. If it's active and you like the look of it, then sign up. So, how does joining a forum help with promotion? The secret is in the sig.

## The Secret Of The Sig

When you join a forum, you get to set up a profile with information about your name and your interests. You can also

create a signature that appears at the end of any forum posting you make. This is a good opportunity to create a link to your site. Not only will it help forum users to find you, but many forums are indexed by the search engines, so you will get some Google juice from the posts you make.

## No Hit And Run

It's not good manners to link drop and run. To get the best out of a forum you have to participate fully in it. I often fall into the trap of signing up for a lot of forums, then finding that I don't have the time to participate. That's a mistake. The whole point of forums is that you have to join in with the conversation and get known. It's better to find one that you like and stick to it. If you don't want to drop by ten forums a day, sign up for the RSS feed so you can see what discussions are live and decide which ones to take part in. Plenty of people have used forums to find jobs and to connect with people they want to work with.

Here are some of the forums I have joined, where I have learned a lot about writing and blogging and made some good friends and connections: [Authority Blogger Forum](#), [About Freelance Writing Forum](#), [WAHM.com Forum](#). Joining forums won't suit everyone, but they are good places to keep up to date with what's happening in the writing world and promote as you participate.

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## Article Marketing

I can't talk about promotion without mentioning one of my favorite ways to promote – through [article marketing](#). I've heard people criticize it, but I have found it an effective and free way to promote my writing services. The only investment you need to get started is the time it takes you to write an article. For me, that's about 20 minutes if I'm writing on an area I already know about.

Follow tips for [good web writing](#) to write a good article for article marketing. Finish it up by writing a brief call to action, inviting readers to get more information on your site. You will be able to include at least one link in this part of the article, though many directories forbid links in the article body itself.

## Getting Started With Article Marketing

The first time you try article marketing, you will need to take the time to sign up with an article marketing site. My favorite is [EzineArticles](#), because it's easy to use, has articles of a decent quality, and gives you quick Google juice. In other words, when you publish an article there, you will find it listed on Google within a few days. Other well rated services are [IdeaMarketers](#) and [GoArticles](#). Once you've registered, publishing future articles will be even easier.

## Why I Like Article Marketing

There are two reasons why I like article marketing. The first is because I can write about anything I like. It gives me a chance to spread my wings and try writing about new topics. In other words, it's good writing practice, with the added benefit of having articles that I can add to my portfolio. I have used the articles I have published on EzineArticles to land gigs before.

The second reason I like article marketing is because of the links I get to my site. Article directories supply content to thousands of sites. Although the links aren't always good quality, they do result in traffic to the sites I promote – and that makes it even easier for people to find me online.

## Getting The Most From Article Marketing

For best results, write several articles. I have written more than 40 and have placed these on various article directories, some of which still come up on Google when people search for my name. Others I know have written hundreds, and they really sing the praises of this strategy. Article marketing works because it promotes you both directly and indirectly. Although I don't write as much for directories as I used to, I sometimes recycle useful blog posts to get some additional attention for my blog.

Article marketing is good because it is free, it uses skills you already have and it sends traffic to your site. Believe me, that traffic keeps coming for a long, long time. I am still getting traffic from articles I wrote three and a half years ago. I have used these articles as samples of my work, and to get people to see more of my work. You can do the same.

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## Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarking is another free self promotion technique that writers can use effectively. It's also an excellent way of keeping track of your writing research, though I won't say much about that here. If you're interested I wrote a post on [Why Writers Should Use Social Bookmarking](#) which explains that function in more detail. So, what exactly is social bookmarking and how does it help you promote yourself?

## What Is Social Bookmarking?

You're probably familiar with using bookmarks or favorites in your browser to mark the sites you want to find again. Social bookmarking works in a similar way, but online. You can use a site such as delicious, which is one of the best and most popular examples, to store links to content that you like – and there's no reason why it can't be yours. You can use tags, as you do for blog posts, to categorize the content that you post.

Where the promotion comes in is with the social aspect. With social bookmarking sites you can choose to share some or all of your bookmarks with others. People who like the things you bookmark can become fans or friends, and you can participate in groups based on your interests.

## Choosing A Social Bookmarking Site

There are many, many [socialbookmarking](#) sites, but you have to be careful which ones you choose. For example, if you promote your own links too heavily on StumbleUpon, you will be penalised. Some sites regard self promotion as akin to spamming, but there are plenty of sites where it's ok to push your own stuff. Some of the sites I use include delicious, Digg, Mixx and BloggingZoom. I also use several social networking sites, though I will cover those in another post.

## Getting Started With Social Bookmarking

To get started with social bookmarking, choose the services you like best and sign up for accounts. With some sites you

can import your browser bookmarks so that you can use those online too. I've found this feature quite useful in the past. Then start bookmarking any of your content that you think is worth sharing. Posting quality links usually results in traffic to that site or resource. (Watch out for the Digg effect; if you are running a Wordpress blog, using a plugin such as WP-Cache or WP-Supercache will stop your site from buckling under the flood of traffic.) Submit your posts regularly and you will get more readers and more links in the search engine results.

Remember to participate in sites which are very social. Leaving comments on the links others submit will help you become a part of the group and will also increase your visibility.

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## Joining The Blogosphere

Earlier I suggested that writers start a blog as a virtual shop window for their writing services. If you've done that, then you are now part of the blogosphere, and there's more to participating in it than simply having a blog. Blogging is all about conversations with your readers and with the writers of the blogs you read – and joining in with those conversations can bring huge promotional benefit.

To get started, use Technorati or a blog search engine (Ask Blog Search and Google Blog Search are my favorites) to find out which blogs are publishing in areas that you're interested in. These may be writing blogs or blogs in your area of expertise. Technorati displays an authority ranking which tells you which blogs are most linked to by others. Visit these blogs and leave useful or relevant comments on any posts that interest you. When you do this, you can include a link to your blog in the appropriate field on the comment form. This doesn't always give you Google juice, but it does bring you traffic.

When those visitors arrive at your blog, have something of quality to show them. Respond to comments left on your blog and, if appropriate, point readers to other useful resources you have published. This will build your readership, increase traffic to your blog and make your blog rise up the search engine rankings. The reason that this works for your writing business is because clients read blogs too. More and more of my clients are coming to me through this blog. When they search for 'online freelance writers' my blog appears in the top 20. (I'm working on moving to the top 10.) This can happen for your chosen keywords, too.

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## Social Networking

If you're promoting yourself as a writer, then you can't ignore social networking. The question is where to start and which sites to choose. I am not going to pretend that I could ever answer this question to everyone's satisfaction, so instead I'll tell you about the sites I use and how I use them.

Many of the social bookmarking sites allow you to add friends, to join groups and to interact with others who share your interests. I have done this on [Digg](#) and [StumbleUpon](#), though I haven't done much on some of the other sites I use. If you participate in the social side, then eventually your friends and fans will help to promote you (you have to help to promote them too).

When you approach networking online, there are many options. I use [LinkedIn](#) for business networking. I don't post status updates often, but I have a profile, resume and recommendations so that potential clients can check me out. If you are running a writing business, then don't ignore LinkedIn. High-end clients may well use it to find you.

I also have a [Facebook](#) profile. Facebook works on the premise that the people you add will really be friends, and that's mostly true of my profile. I don't use it heavily, but I occasionally share a link with my friends, which they may then share with theirs. Some people use Facebook aggressively, but I take a more hands-off approach.

At the moment, the big buzz is in microblogging. Check out microblogging services such as [Twitter](#), [Plurk](#), [Pownce](#), [Jaiku](#) and others where you can connect with the blogosphere and also share your stuff. Take the time to fill out your profile, brand your page or make it look interesting, and share content that you think is good. Join in the conversation and you will soon build up a fan base and a network of friends.

Some people spend a couple of hours promoting themselves through social media. I don't have that much time, so I help myself with some useful tools. If I've written a post that I want to add to the social bookmarking sites, I use [Onlywire](#) to submit to several sites at once. I use the StumbleUpon toolbar for quick stumbling of others' content. I participate in conversations on Twitter and Plurk (you can use [Ping.FM](#) to send status updates to several services at once. I know that people have found my site this way. I've also made connections with people who offer work. That's how I know that promoting with social networking really works – and it's fun too.

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## Traffic Widgets

Now I'm going to talk about traffic widgets. These are little snippets of code that you put on your website, perhaps in your sidebar, to bring traffic to your site. This is a free way to promote your site. There are dozens of traffic building widgets out there and I have tried quite a few. They all work pretty much the same way. You sign up for the site, add your blog with information about it, and put the widget in your sidebar. The idea is that your posts or headlines will be shown on other blogs, while you will showcase others' posts and headlines on yours.

The key to using these systems successfully is to choose the right category for your blog. In the past, I have found that being lumped in with different kinds of blogs means that the people whom I would like to connect with don't see my blog. However, I will say that if you have a new blog, or a blog in a popular area such as blogging or technology, there may be some merit in using widgets.

I wasn't always a cynic. I tried widgets and enthused about [Blogrush](#), [Entrecard](#) and others. However, I didn't find that they worked well for me so I have [decided not to put any more](#) on this blog. So why am I mentioning a promotion technique that I no longer use? Because it might work for you. For every person that says that a particular widget doesn't work or is a waste of time, there are dozens more who enthuse about it. So I'm leaving the choice up to you.

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