

Finish Strong:

The 4 Best Ways
to Shore Up Your
Writing Business
in Q4



HIGH-INCOME BUSINESS WRITING



It's hard to believe, but the third quarter of 2023 is almost over. With just four months left in the year, now is the time to take stock of where you are in your business and how to finish the year strong.

It doesn't matter if you're doing better than ever, if your income is flat or if you're struggling.

There's plenty of time and opportunity to make important changes that will help you finish 2023 on a high note. But you need to pick the things that will have the biggest and fastest impact. And you need to start now, in September, to give yourself a head start.

That way you can enter Q4 with good momentum and finish the year strong.

I've spent a lot of time thinking about what would make the biggest difference in a short amount of time. I did an initial brainstorm, then thought through what's made a big impact for my own coaching clients during challenging times.

I wanted to limit my list to ideas that are universal and would make a very positive difference for any writer, copywriter or marketing strategist, regardless of where they were in their business journey. I didn't want to get into strategies or ideas that might take months to deploy.

I also didn't want to focus on shiny objects. I've found that 80% of what's going to move the needle in a freelance business lies in improving the fundamentals, not on the latest and greatest tech, hack or trick.

Fundamentals are, by default, simple. But they're not always easy to work on. Blocking and tackling require focus and discipline. There are no shortcuts, only better ideas and strategies. And steady execution.

The four ideas in this guide represent where I landed. Are there other things you could focus on? Of course. But you can't go wrong with following what I'm about to share.

One last thing. This isn't meant to be a comprehensive how-to guide. Instead, it's designed to be a self-diagnostic tool and a general blueprint. Think through each recommendation and ask yourself: *How well am I doing here?* If there's room for improvement, get to work on making those improvements today.

The sooner you start, the sooner you'll build momentum and get results.



01

Refine Your Positioning



Positioning is one of those buzzwords that creates a lot of confusion. And while there are many ways to define it, positioning is simply about defining:

- ✦ What you do
- ✦ For whom
- ✦ Why you're different from most others
- ✦ Why those differences matter to your target audience

To put it another way, positioning is all about *the perception you're creating in the market*.

So the question you need to ask yourself is, *How clear is my positioning?* More specifically, how clear is it to **yourself**? If I woke you up in the middle of the night and asked, "Quick, tell



me how you're positioning yourself in the market!" ... would you be able to give me a clear answer quickly?

Positioning is mostly an internal exercise. You need to be very clear about how you want to position yourself. Once you know that, you can take that to the next step, which is about creating key messages that communicate this positioning clearly on your website, your marketing materials, prospect conversations and proposals.

So, again ... how clear is your positioning? Are you clear about the services and the value you offer? Are you clear about the audience you serve best? Are you clear about what makes you different and better *beyond the writing*?

Good clients aren't looking for just any writer. They're looking for someone who understands them, their business and their target markets well. The easier you can make this decision for them, the better you'll do.

Don't turn this into a 6-month project. We're not shooting for perfection right now. The idea is to see if and how you could make refinements to your positioning. Start by asking yourself how clear you are about each of these four elements:

- ❖ What you do
- ❖ For whom
- ❖ Why you're different from most others
- ❖ Why those differences matter to your target audience

From there, it's about tweaking your website copy and other key messages so they better communicate how you want to position yourself in the marketplace.



02

Step Up Your Prospecting



There's no way around it. If you want a strong business, you must get out there and look for business.

And not just when you're desperate for work. You must prospect for clients throughout the year.

I know that's an unpopular piece of advice. But it's also the kind of advice that solves all kinds of other problems. I'll even go as far as saying that *this alone can solve 80-90% of your challenges as a solo professional.*

Here's the good news. You don't have to spend all your days and weeks prospecting. You can throttle your effort as needed. It also doesn't have to take hours and hours every day.



Additionally, prospecting doesn't need to be your main marketing method forever. Over time you want to build a strategy that involves both prospecting and some attraction marketing strategies that get prospects to come to you.

But if you're not currently where you want to be in your business—and your work pipeline is drying up (or nonexistent)—there's no substitute for prospecting. Period. In fact, in those situations, prospecting must be a BIG part of your week.

To be more specific, if you dedicate, say, 30 hours per week to your business, and you currently have only 10 hours of client work per week, prospecting MUST take up the other 20 hours.

OK, scratch that. Take 5 of those hours to do some fun things you've been putting off because you've been crazy-busy over the past three years. Jump back on that novel you started writing last year. Do some volunteer work. Or take an afternoon off to go fishing, hiking or hanging out with your kids.

You deserve that, for sure.

But the other 15 hours? Spend those prospecting for clients. And more prospecting. And lots and lots of follow-up and touching base (more on that soon).

Until your pipeline is full and the work is filling up most of your workweek, prospecting must be your biggest "client." Period.

Is it hard? Will you face rejection? Will you get radio silence from a lot of people?

Yes, yes, and yes. But this is what we signed up for. There's no free lunch in this business.



03

Qualify Prospects and Opportunities Better



If you do a good job with your prospecting you're going to inevitably generate interested prospects. And how you lead those initial communications and discussions will determine how many prospects you turn into clients.

In the business of professional services, the "selling" starts the moment you get a prospect saying they might be interested in talking with you. Here's the good news: you don't have to actively "sell" them. Selling is not something you do to someone. Selling is simply about having a productive and honest conversation.

And in order to have a productive and honest conversation with a prospect, you need to get good at leading that conversation effectively and efficiently, whether it happens over email, LinkedIn or Zoom.



I recommend you create a cheat sheet that reminds you of the four key areas you want to cover during your conversation:



Need and Outcome

- What they're looking to accomplish
- Why that's important to them
- What success would look like for them



Current State

- How they're going about this currently (and how that is working)
- Why they're looking for outside help
- What they're looking for in a writer



Timing

- Their timing for getting this done
- Start + go-live date



Money

- What budget they're working with

Use the prompts above to formulate your own questions for each prospect. And use your cheat sheet to ensure you touch on all these areas. You may not need to ask about all these items. But the idea is to have a handy guide that can keep the conversation focused.

Qualifying prospects well does two things. First, it helps you quickly determine the quality or fit of each opportunity. With practice, you'll be able to do this in a 20–30 minute conversation, especially if the conversation starts over email.

There's nothing worse than spending too much time talking to a prospect and creating a proposal for them, only to find out later that their expectations were unreasonable or they can't afford anything close to your fees.

Second, you showcase your professionalism and expertise when your qualification process includes solid questions. You're able to get the information you need faster, which prospective clients appreciate.

Additionally, you're presenting yourself as not just a writer but also as a trusted advisor. Yes, you may have some questions about project specs (word count range, for example). But notice that most of these questions are about desired outcomes, current state and client motivations—not things such as word count.



04

Follow Up More Strategically and Consistently



Following up with prospects and clients is a severely underused force multiplier. By that I mean that it can yield disproportionate results for the time and effort required.

I'd even go as far as to say that a smart follow-up strategy and system can take your freelance business from average and unpredictable to *extraordinary and predictable*.

Here's the harsh truth. Most of your prospects are NOT ready to hire you today or anytime over the next 90 days. And that's true across industries and disciplines.

In fact, according to Vorsight, at any given time, only 3% of your market is actively buying, 40% is poised to begin and 56% is not ready. Other sources claim that "ready to hire" prospects are closer to 5% or as high as 10%. But everything I've ever found on this topic shows that the actual number is somewhere between 3% and 10%. My own experience confirms this.

Again, the overwhelming majority of prospects aren't currently looking. And yet, on average, 15% to 20% of the "not yet ready to purchase" opportunities convert to sales if they've been



followed up with over time (source: Gleanster). Similarly, SiriusDecisions has found that 80% of the prospects deemed “bad leads” go on to buy within 24 months.

Here’s my point: just because a prospect *doesn’t* respond to your outreach—or they respond with the generic “We don’t have a current need but we’ll keep your information on file...”—doesn’t mean that they’re (A) a bad prospect or (B) will never hire you.

In most cases, it’s a **timing** issue. Your outreach didn’t come at just the right time!

How do you overcome that? With smart follow-up.

Sure, we all want quick wins. We want to find the prospect who’s ready NOW. But a lot of factors have to align for that to happen, which is why you don’t want your prospecting strategy to be only about finding “ready NOW” prospects. That kind of strategy is all about hope. And hope is not a strategy.

How much follow-up should you do? And when should you do it?

You should follow up two to three times as much as you do now. The answer might sound flippant. It’s not. It’s the truth!

Most of us don’t follow up nearly enough. We don’t follow up enough on outreach emails. Or with prospects who indicated they may want to chat about possible work. Or on outstanding quotes and proposals. Or with prospects who sounded very promising at first but decided to pause or hire someone else. Or with past/dormant clients.

In our effort to find the needle in the haystack—the opportunity that’s ready to close TODAY—we ignore or forget about those that could close tomorrow.

Of course, you want to be smart and strategic about your follow-up. Take into consideration:

- ✦ What stage you’re in
- ✦ Who contacted whom
- ✦ Responsiveness and cues from the prospect as you get them

And adjust your follow-up accordingly. But the main point is that you need to follow up more often and for longer than you think. Even haphazard follow-up over a long period of time will get you better results than little to no follow-up.



The Takeaway



As you can see, the answer to finishing 2023 on a high note doesn't involve fancy tech, clever hacks, smarter AI prompts or some new LinkedIn trick.

Sure, all those things can help when used strategically. But what's going to really move the needle in your business over the next four months is a return to fundamentals:

- 1 Refining your positioning so it communicates your value well
- 2 Prospecting more aggressively
- 3 Qualifying opportunities in a way that showcases your value better
- 4 Following up more intensely (and for longer)

Focus intently on these four areas and your chances of a solid Q4 go up dramatically.

If you'd like some help in any or all of these areas, stay tuned. I'm about to release something completely new and very affordable that will equip you with everything you need to stabilize and strengthen your business quickly.

Here's to ending 2023 on a high note!

Ed Gandia

