

Chapter One: Why Specialty Matters in Ghostwriting

THE MANY BENEFITS OF SPECIALIZING

A GHOSTWRITER, in a nutshell, is an invisible, uncredited author. The books he or she writes are credited to another person and the ghostwriter must never, ever disclose his or her involvement, unless he or she has some kind of alternative arrangement with the client.

The ability to write well in another person's voice on a project that you'll never get credit for is a vital talent within the communications industry.

You can go one of two ways when designing your ghostwriting career. You can be a generalist writer—one who takes on any book in any topic—or you can do what I suggest, which is to market yourself as a specialty ghostwriter. A specialty ghostwriter does essentially the same thing as a generalist ghostwriter, but he or she focuses on writing within a specific industry or on a specific topic rather than writing books on any subject.

Of course, ghostwriting itself is a specialty. Ghostwriting involves different skills than blogging or article writing. It requires a special kind of discipline that not all writers have; it demands a writer set aside pride of ownership; and often since it focuses on books (although ghostwriters can also ghostwrite articles, blog posts and other documents), it requires a knack for writing longer works.

All of these things are unique talents that make a ghostwriter “special,” but it’s not special enough to make business easy to attain. You are one

ghostwriter within a pile of thousands who possess the same skill set. While this might set you apart from the general freelancer pool, you have to find a way to also set yourself apart from the ghostwriting pool. Specialty ghostwriting can be your ticket to doing just that.

Let's take a look at four reasons I find specialty ghostwriting such a powerful career choice, and why I think you will too.

SPECIALIZING BETTERS TARGET MARKETING

I believe that the ability to better refine your marketing efforts is easily the biggest benefit to choosing specialty ghostwriting. You might think that a generalist ghostwriter who claims to be able to write on any topic and can, therefore, approach any potential client would have more opportunities to land gigs—but you'd be wrong. In addition to the competition aspect, generalist ghostwriters must cast a much wider net, resulting in more expensive and

time-consuming marketing campaigns. Have you ever been to a restaurant that has a big fishbowl for business cards? You drop yours in and hope they pull it out and give you a free meal? That's what it's like to be a generalist ghostwriter. Your name, portfolio, clips and pitch end up in this enormous fishbowl and look basically the same as all the others in there.

A specialty ghostwriter, on the other hand, can run extremely focused campaigns targeting one limited niche, or several related niches, thereby controlling both expenses and time while generally securing a much better conversion ratio. They have a better opportunity to be seen and their experience within an industry quickly sets them apart from those generalists still stuck in that fish bowl.

Part of the reason they have a higher conversion ratio is that specialty ghostwriters can create more compelling ads. Instead of focusing on a target client's need for a ghostwriter and appealing to that, a specialty ghostwriter can create more

emotional and practical appeals within their pitch or website content.

For example, let's look at a generalist ghostwriter and a ghostwriter who specializes in autobiographies and memoirs. The generalist ghostwriter might create an ad stating that they can write a book. They may list several of the types of books they write, such as business books, memoirs, motivational books and so on. The specialist ghostwriter, on the other hand, is only going after a certain type of client, so they will likely create one specific ad that focuses on the importance of creating a memoir and that illustrates their understanding of how to make such a document marketable. Which ad do you think would be more effective?

SPECIALIZING ALLOWS TIME TO GET GLOBAL

Many industries, including finance, insurance, real estate, sports, and politics operate differently from one country to another. When you're a generalist,

there's no way you can verse yourself in all the unique differences. But when you tighten your focus and write within just one industry, you can take the time to study how your industry operates, is regulated, and works in a foreign country. This allows you to truly position yourself as an expert on a global (or at least multi-country) level.

SPECIALIZING STRENGTHENS VALUE

Specialty ghostwriting helps you add value to your contribution, thereby making you a stronger candidate. Let's use me as an example here. After more than a decade spent within the financial industry, I have a significant amount of knowledge about how the industry works, various sophisticated investment strategies, and the best way to communicate complex topics within finance to consumers. I also have a much better chance at understanding a complex financial topic that I'm not presently familiar with than someone without a

financial background. If a financial advisor wants a book written for his or her clients, it's likely to be much easier to work with a ghostwriter who understands the sophisticated topics to be discussed than a generalist who has no concept of finance. And which writer is going to give the book that extra, added insight that really helps prove the client's authority? Which writer is likelier to provide cleaner, almost-ready-to-go work that the client doesn't have to spend a ton of time editing?

When you specialize, your value goes beyond a basic understanding of the topic being covered. This in-depth topic knowledge allows you to create more accurate and original content. In heavily regulated industries such as finance, it can also help ensure compliant content that keeps regulators happy.

SPECIALIZING INCREASES PROFIT MARGINS

Clients will pay more to get content written by an expert in their industry. They understand the value

they're getting for the work, and they're willing to pay for it. But that's not the only way specializing increases your profits. It takes far less time to create content about a topic you're already knowledgeable about than one you know nothing about. Generalist ghostwriters, who must spend more time researching than a specialist ghostwriter would, don't get to charge more for that extra time. If a generalist writer has to spend more time on a task and charge the same—or less—money than a specialist, what's happening? The generalist ghostwriter is driving down his or her profits.

I'm a big believer in giving clients the utmost value for their money. But I'm also a business owner myself (as are you). As such, I have to factor my own bottom line into each contract I take on. I want to create the most profit I reasonably can. Specialty ghostwriting allows me to do that while still adding value in for the client—talk about a win-win.

THE UPSHOT

Sometimes the decision to specialize is a difficult one for a writer to make. Many ghostwriters are concerned that by narrowing their focus to one specialty, they'll be cutting out large swaths of potential clients and limiting their potential to succeed. If you're thinking this way, then don't take my word for it—take the word of the University of California's Haas School of Business. In 2014, they published a study that found that freelancers who took on a large number of dissimilar assignments were less likely to secure contracts than those who worked a large number of similar projects.

It helps to think about this in terms of the big fish, small pond analogy. When you're competing against countless other generalist ghostwriters, you're just another minnow in a giant ocean. When you take the leap and embrace the specialty, as long as you have some useful experience within that specialty—something that makes you valuable—you

immediately become a whale running aground in a tiny pond.

It's also helpful to look at this from a potential client's point of view. Imagine yourself as just another resume in a pile of ghostwriters all reaching out to the same clients. What's going to set your resume apart? Banking on your ability to write the hell out of a sentence is probably not a good idea because, after all, writing well is something a lot of ghostwriters do. But imagine how much more attractive you become when you already have a deep understanding of the topic the book will cover. Or, imagine how much more appealing you would be if your resume talked about your focus on a particular genre; the way you help clients tailor their projects toward current reader trends in their specific market. Ultimately, any specialized knowledge you have gives you an upper hand over other applicants, and that's what is going to get you work.