



EDITOR'S NOTE

CopyPress prides itself on creating workflows that allow creatives to maximize their earning potential, while also maximizing the ROI of marketers.

A few years ago, we attempted to highlight some of the areas of difference we saw in the economics between buyer and seller in survey format. We botched the resulting survey pretty badly and were taken to task for it.

Still seeing the issues we saw then, we set out again to create a survey that would help us:

- 1 - Educate creatives on how they can maximize their earnings
- 2 - Educate buyers on the pay trends and needs of creatives

We wanted to fill in the gaps of assumption. We currently still hear, “that is too expensive” when discussing pay rates with customers, and we wanted to help them understand where the market stands. Further, we want new creatives to understand their true earning potential.

This time around, we went out and hired a few consultants to help us put together a great study. We enlisted Jenn Mattern from All Indie Writers (<http://allindiewriters.com/>) to help us with the survey questions. We enlisted a data analyst to help us with the data analysis. We wanted this survey to be a better indicator of the true environment today and help connect the dots for both sides.

We go into more detail about our methodology and whom we surveyed below. However, I think it's important to note this is a snapshot of the environment intended to help improve communication, pay, and quality across the board.

We think we have achieved that goal.

Dave Snyder

CEO

CopyPress



The Current CONTENT ECOSYSTEM

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUE STATE OF CONTENT MARKETING, we knew that we had to look beyond the thought leaders. While a select handful of influencers certainly have expertise in the industry, we wanted to get down in the trenches with people creating the content. This decision led [us at CopyPress](#) to create the CopyPress State of Content Marketing Survey.

Of the people we interviewed, 77 percent described themselves as freelance creatives, in the form of copy editors, designers, developers, or multiple roles. Once we knew this statistic, we could develop a clear picture of how contractors view their roles with clients and how their positions are changing, especially [compared to our 2013 analysis](#). Along with freelancers — many of whom are members of the [CopyPress Community](#) — we also spoke to in-house marketers and agencies. Thirteen percent of our respondents work for marketing agencies, and 10 percent worked in-house for one company.

Each of these players has different concerns and see different opportunities within the content marketing industry. These perspectives allowed us a complete view of the current content ecosystem and how that industry will evolve over the next few years.

Methodology

We discussed content marketing with **355 industry professionals** with data collected through a Google survey. To share our survey among the content marketing industry, we created a State of Content Marketing landing page as well as created a pop up ad on the [copypress.com](#) site. We sent two email blasts about our survey to our community of non-creatives, totaling 20,250 subscribers. Our community of internal creatives, 30,343 subscribers, received a series of five email blasts. We also created a cold outreach campaign, where CopyPress sent an informative email about the survey to a total of 701 copywriters, designers, marketers, and freelancers.

Creating article posts was another method we utilized to increase the survey visibility and participants. We posted three unique posts on three unique domains: [allindiewriters.com](#), [michikokatsu.com](#), and [copypress.com/blog](#). We shared the survey across our social media platforms including, Inbound community, Twitter for our blogger program (3,639 followers), Twitter for CopyPress (2,363 followers), Facebook (6,000+ fans), and LinkedIn (1,738 followers).

We downloaded the information into an Excel workbook file for further analysis. We then sorted the responses by different types of marketing group (for example, freelancers or in-house creators) and placed the data in separate workbook sheets. We translated each of the workbook sheets into a Stata system file for analysis. Once in the Stata file, we named each of the variables and labeled values to correspond to the question-and-response options in the original Google survey.

The Stata files were then concatenated into a single file and cross-tabulations run on a subset of the variables to compare marketing group responses. Simple frequency counts were also run on all variables to show the counts, proportions, and cumulative proportions of respondents who endorsed the different response options for each question.

The estimated 95 percent confidence interval for survey responses is only applicable to freelancers, which had by far the largest N-value recording (132). We had too few respondents in the other groups to calculate error rates. For the group of freelancers who responded to the survey, the 95 percent CI ranges from +/- 8.5 percent for responses, where 50 percent endorsed a response category for a given item to +/- 1.7 percent, where only 10 percent endorsed a response category.

Content Marketing From an Agency Perspective

We talked with a variety of agency professionals to discuss what fields their company works with and how they interact with clients. Many respondents worked with a mixture of content marketing, SEO and SEM tactics, social media, influencer marketing, and web design and development, both as individuals and as employees for companies.

Over the next five years, 84 percent of agencies said they expect content to become more important, and 79 percent believe content promotion will also become more important.

“For a while, people just pumped out content. Now there’s too much. I think this is forcing people to take a harder

look at what they are actually producing. Additionally, with Google answering queries directly in search results, companies can no longer just create that high-level content and expect results. We need to think more about how content addresses the customer journey, starting with top of the funnel queries and going deeper.”

— **Cassie Gillette**, KoMarketing Associates

CLIENT BUDGETS FOR CONTENT MARKETING

Among our respondents, client’s average marketing spend ranged between \$5,000 to \$20,000 annually, with 35 percent of responses. Twenty-one percent of people said their clients spend \$50,000 to \$100,000 annually, and 19 percent said they spend less than \$5,000. Based on that information, 20 percent of respondents said 50 percent of their clients’ budget went toward content marketing, while 20 percent said 80 percent or more of their clients’ budgets went toward content marketing. See Fig. 1 & 2

However, this data may be skewed; we surveyed some agency representatives who focused almost exclusively on content marketing services.

Fig. 1

% OF CONTENT MARKETING BUDGET TOWARDS CONTENT CREATION

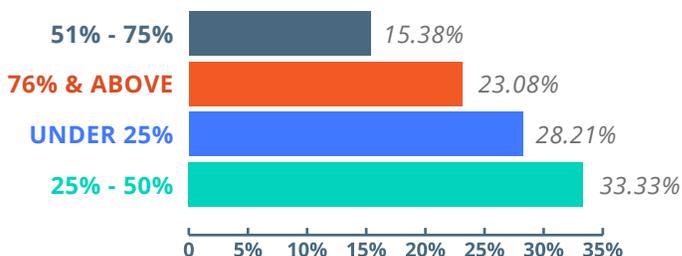
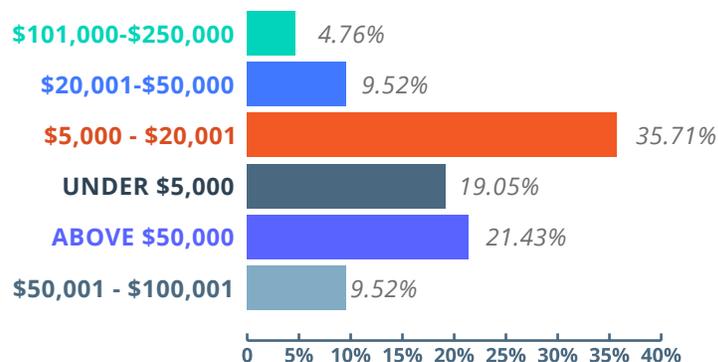
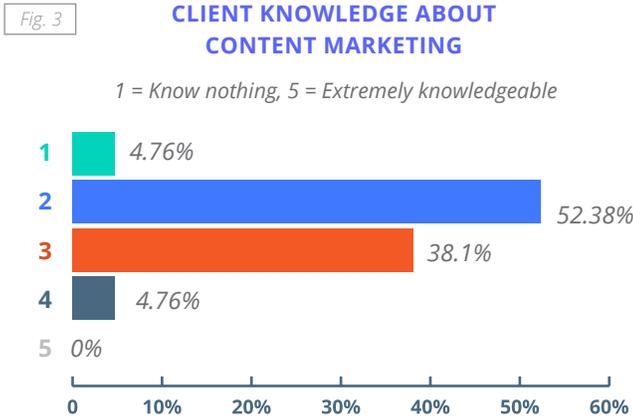


Fig. 2

AVERAGE CLIENT MARKETING SPEND



What did give us a lot of insight was the agency's perception of client knowledge. Almost 58 percent of agency representatives thought their clients knew nothing or next to nothing about content marketing, while only 5 percent thought they were quite knowledgeable. *See Fig. 3*



CONTENT CREATION SERVICES

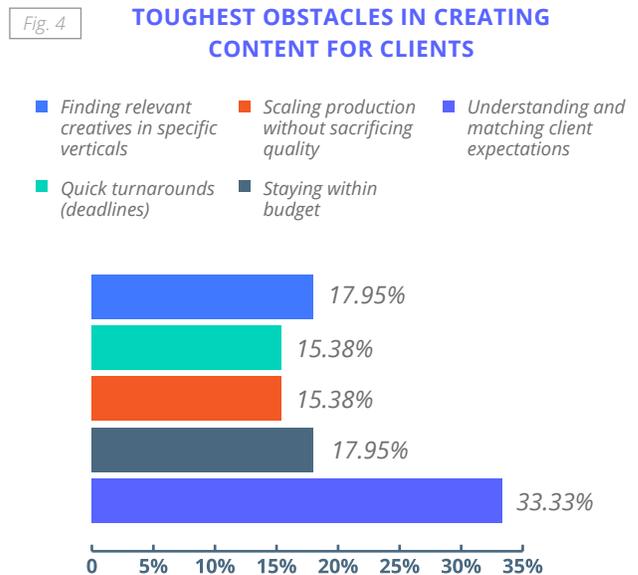
Among our respondents, 92 percent of agencies said they created content for their clients as a service, and 82 percent said they create an average of 1 to 10 pieces of content per month. Only 10 percent of respondents said they created more than 50 pieces of content per month for their clients. When asked about the type of content they offer, 70 percent of agencies said they produce web copy, 92 percent said they produce blog posts, and 50 percent said they produce product descriptions, sales copy, or long-form content, such as e-books and white papers.

“Don’t create for the sake of creating; create with a specific goal in mind and do everything possible to meet that goal.”

— **Joe Sinkwitz**, *Digital Heretix*

While written copy was standard across the board, we started to see differences in visual content creation. Only 30 percent of agencies said they create static infographics, 45 percent of agencies create interactive media or videos, and 16 percent said they create illustrations. And 73 percent of respondents saying they produce their content internally.

When asked about the hardest obstacles facing agencies when creating content for clients, 33 percent said their biggest challenge was understanding and matching client expectations. Other factors that came into play were finding relevant creatives in specific verticals (18 percent), meeting quick turnaround times (15 percent), scaling production (15 percent), and staying within budget (18 percent). *See Fig. 4*



CONTENT PROMOTION SERVICES

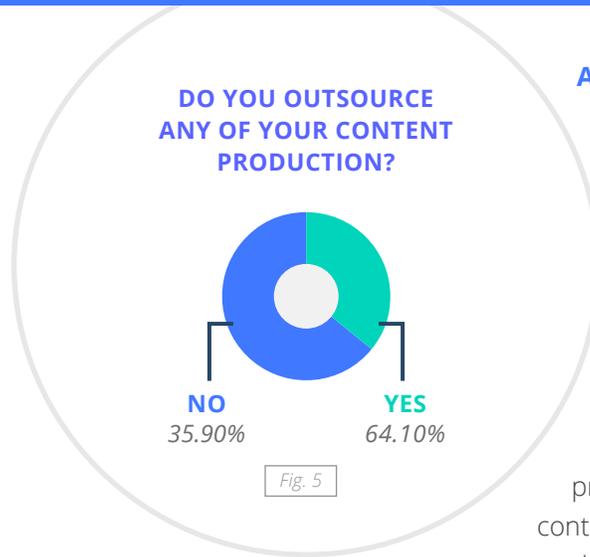
Along with content creation, 79 percent of agencies that responded to our survey said they also offer content promotion as a service. About 48 percent of their clients spend less than 25 percent of their budget on promotion, while 36 percent spend between 25 to 50 percent of their budgets on promotion.

“Before the article publishes, make sure that there is a clear plan of attack of the promotion strategy. I think it’s also key to not limit yourself to the external promotion elements, but how you can internally promote the content. An example would be making sure that you promote this content to your internal sales team so that they can utilize this content to nurture leads.”

— **Natalie Stezovsky**, *Influence & Co.*

Since “promotion” can be a vague term, we asked our respondents to explain exactly what they meant. Forty-eight percent of respondents said they promote their content through link-building and guest posting efforts. After those avenues, 24 percent promoted content through social media marketing, 9 percent use native advertising, and another 9 percent used influencer marketing.

Seventy-five percent of agency respondents promote their content internally, while the rest use a mixture of internal efforts and contracted promotion.



AGENCIES OUTSOURCE CONTENT

When asked about content production, 64 percent of respondents said they rely on outsourcing, (See Fig. 5) and 81 percent of those respondents turn exclusively to freelance creatives. Only 10 percent of agencies that outsource content production work exclusively with content production companies, and the rest work with a mixture of the two. When

asked why they outsource their content, 70 percent said outsourcing was to create high quality, engaging work as opposed to high-volume content (4 percent), low-cost content (4 percent), and SEO-optimized content (11 percent). See Fig. 7

Fig. 6

AVERAGE AMOUNT PAID FOR OUTSOURCED WEB COPY

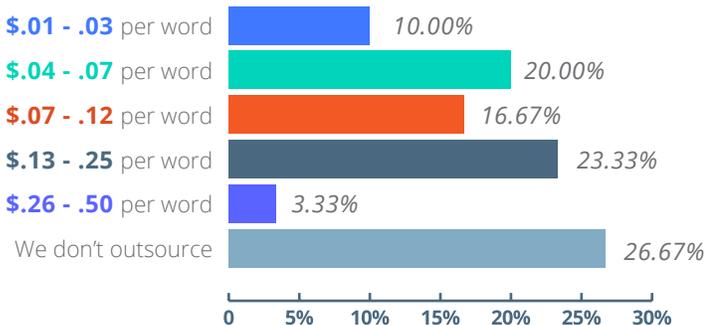
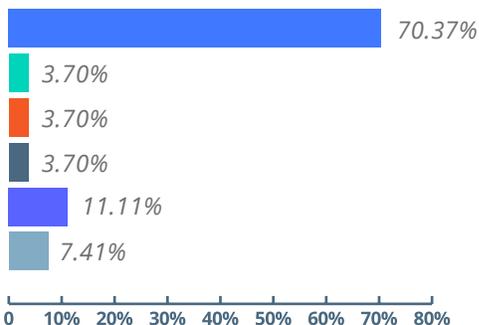


Fig. 7

MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF OUTSOURCED CONTENT

- High-quality, engaging pieces of content
- Low-cost content
- Properly optimized for SEO
- High-volume, consistent content
- Other
- We don't outsource content



What Company Employees Think About Content Marketing

While agencies work to stay on top of industry trends, they're often at the mercy of what their clients want. We knew if we wanted to paint a complete picture of the content industry, we would have to go straight to the source and understand how companies view content.

Among all of our respondents, 39 percent said they work in the technology industry — or at least technology best describes their company. Thirteen percent said they work with consumer goods, and 8 percent said they work with tourism and travel.

Thirty percent of our respondents said they considered themselves middle management, while 47 percent considered themselves upper management or executive-level employees. About 9 percent of respondents were the owners or founders of the companies they worked for. As far as staff size, 74 percent of respondents said their companies had one to four content marketing employees on staff, and 17 percent said they had more than 10 employees.

CONTENT MARKETING EFFORTS AND EFFECTIVENESS

39 percent of survey respondents thought their efforts weren't very effective or weren't effective at all. Meanwhile, 42 percent said their efforts were effective or very effective. When asked to define effectiveness, 35 percent of company employees said they wanted better search rankings and increased visibility, 43 percent said they wanted increased sales and revenue, and only 13 percent said they wanted higher volumes of repeat traffic and a loyal community.

"Great content needs to make a user take the next step by clicking a call to action. If a reader completes an article and takes action, it was targeted, timely, and accomplished its goal on providing useful information."

— **Pete Angus**, *Media Shower*

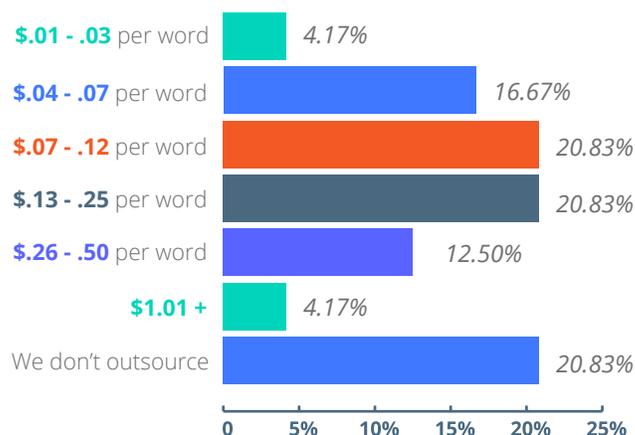
One reason for the lack of effectiveness in content marketing might be the company budget. Twenty-six percent of companies spent less than \$5,000 on content marketing annually, while 22 percent spent between \$5,000 to \$15,000 on content marketing, and 13 percent said they spent between \$15,000 to \$50,000 on content marketing annually. When asked how the content marketing budget compared to other channels, 60 percent said it was smaller than most areas and only 30 percent said it was larger than most areas or the largest budget of all channels.

CONTENT CREATION AND PUBLISHING SCHEDULES

While 95 percent of our company respondents said they create content internally, 59 percent said they also outsource content production. Internally, 91 percent of companies said they create blog posts in-house, while 50 percent said they create their own product descriptions. None of our respondents said they produce their own e-books and white papers.

Long-form copy such as white papers seemed to be as challenging to in-house companies as visual media. None of our respondents created their own illustrations or infographics internally; however, 65 percent of

Fig. 8 AVERAGE AMOUNT PAID FOR OUTSOURCED ARTICLE COPY



respondents did create their own interactive media and video content.

"Greater competition increases the need for truly standout, original content — for us, data science is our biggest opportunity."

— **Elisa Gabbert**, *WordStream Inc.*

Companies that outsource tend to work with a mixture of freelance talent and content production agencies, but 45 percent hire external writers to create high quality, engaging content. Other reasons include outsourcing content that can be optimized for SEO, reduced costs, and scalability. Article projects are the most common types of content to outsource, with 52 percent of companies hiring external help. Meanwhile, 76 percent of companies said they didn't outsource web copy projects and preferred to complete those projects internally.

PUBLISHING AND PROMOTION

Along with content creation, we wanted to know about publishing. Forty-three percent of respondents said they publish content once a week, while 35 percent of respondents publish content daily. Only 13 percent of respondents said they published content multiple times per day. The average company publishes one to 10 pieces per month, as 48 percent of respondents reported. Another 30 percent said they publish between 11 to 25 pieces per month, and 9 percent said they

DO YOU TAKE ON FREELANCE CLIENTS DIRECTLY?

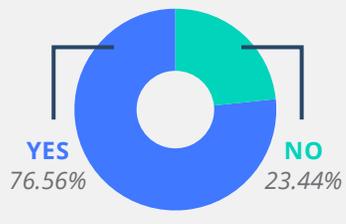


Fig. 9

DO YOU TAKE WORK THROUGH A THIRD PARTY SERVICE OR COMPANY?

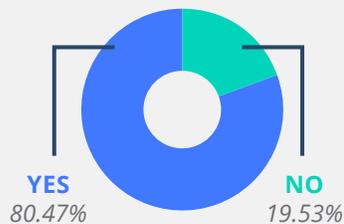


Fig. 10

DO YOU HAVE A PERSONAL BLOG OR WEBSITE?

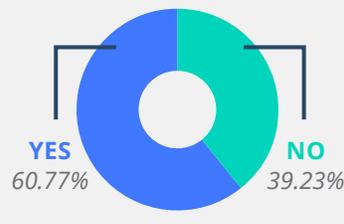


Fig. 11

IS YOUR PORTFOLIO ON A THIRD PARTY SITE?

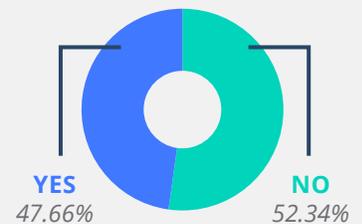


Fig. 12

publish more than 50. Despite these results, 65 percent of respondents said they want to publish more, and 22 percent feel like they publish the perfect amount.

Once published, 70 percent of companies said they use a mixture of social media, email marketing, and blogger outreach to generate traffic and links to the content. Only 17 percent of respondents limited their efforts to social media channels. For those firms that did use social media, each company was different and used combinations of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn to share content related to their brands.

How Creatives and Freelancers View the Industry

Based on our survey results, 64 percent of freelance creatives work full-time freelance careers. We found that they take on a mixture of their own clients and work with third-party content services. In fact, 77 percent of freelancers work directly with clients instead of through an employment service, while 80 percent work with third-party agencies. This mixture allowed us to gain multiple perspectives of job stability, pay rate, bylines, and myriad other questions that we asked. *See Fig. 9 & 10*

When asked about the type of third-party companies they work for, 32 percent said they work for content production companies and 8 percent said they

work for both content production companies and agencies. Another popular choice of employment was marketplaces where creatives could post content or answer job postings for work. Twenty-seven percent of respondents said they work for marketplaces at least part of the time. Most freelancers selected multiple options when we asked them about the type of third-party companies they work for, with 58 percent of respondents working for combined marketplaces, agencies, and content production companies.

WRITING AND FREELANCE EXPERIENCE

Most respondents have freelanced for several years, with more than 24 percent of respondents saying they have more than 10 years of experience as freelancers. Beyond that, 27 percent of respondents have between 6 and 10 years of freelance experience, and 23 percent have spent 3 to 5 years in the field. Considering digital content is becoming the norm, we wanted to see if the field is attracting new talent and why those who launch their creative careers remain as freelancers for so long.

This data correlates strongly with total writing experience. Twenty-five percent of respondents said they have more than 21 years of writing experience, with 20 percent of respondents reporting 6 to 10 years of writing experience. The trend continues, as 19 percent of respondents have 3 to 5 years of writing experience. *See Fig. 15*

AVERAGE AMOUNT OF HOURS PER WEEK SPENT FREELANCING

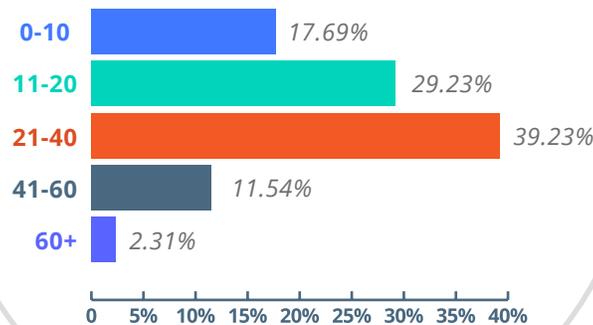
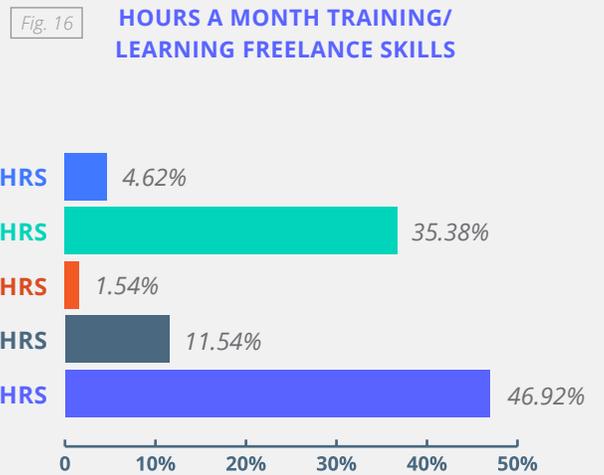
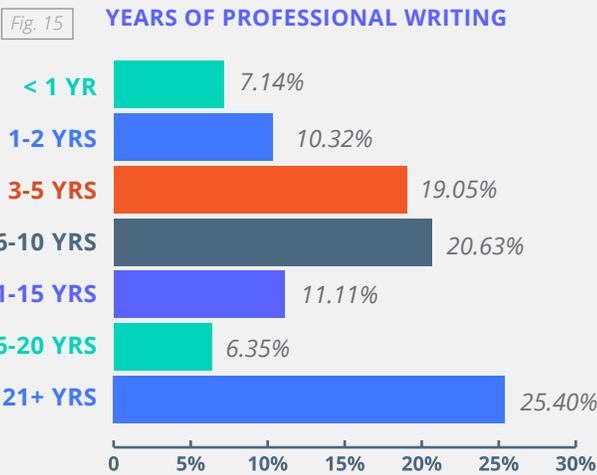
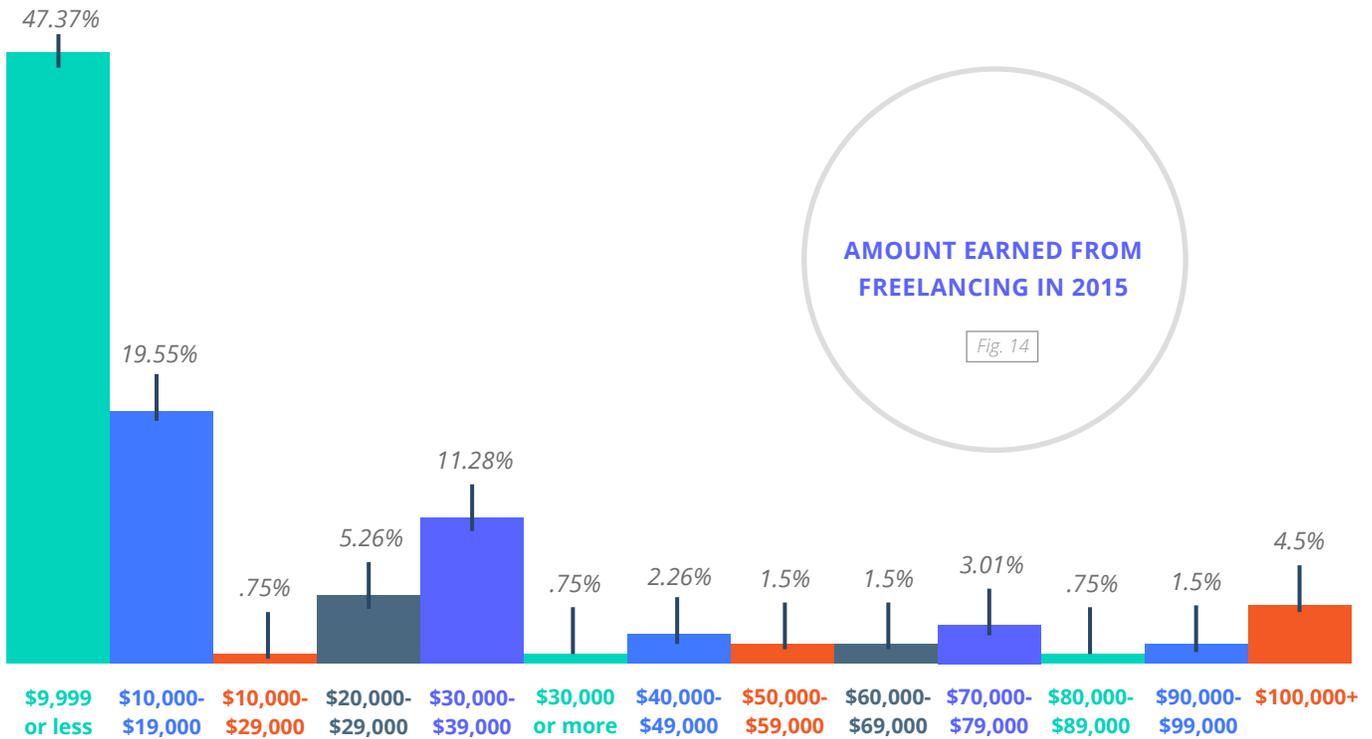


Fig. 13



Through our survey, we're able to see that many writers are attracted to digital marketing, even if they started their careers before the Internet. Sixteen percent of respondents had more than 21 years of total professional writing experience, while 11 percent had two years of professional writing experience or less.

We were able to see that writing is a professional field that doesn't discriminate based on experience, and writers can make up for a lack of years in the field through specialized training. Thirty-five percent of respondents said they spent three to five hours per

month training and learning freelance skills. And sixteen percent said they spend more than six. Despite this progress, there is still room to learn, as 47 percent of freelancers said they spend fewer than two hours per month improving their freelance skills.

The average freelance creative is well-educated, with 78 percent of respondents having at least a four-year college degree and 28 percent having a master's degree or advanced degree. However, entering this industry with a high school diploma or GED is possible, as 13 percent of our respondents did.

When marketing themselves, 60 percent of respondents have a personal blog or website, and 48 percent host their portfolios on a third-party site. *See Fig.11 & 12*

WORK HOURS AND PAY RATE

We also wanted to discuss the hours an average freelancer creative works per week. 40 percent of respondents said they work 21 to 40 hours per week, and 30 percent said they work 11 to 20 hours per week. Further, only 14 percent said they work more than 40 hours a week This finding confirms our theory that creatives enter the freelance community to use the flexible schedules and work environment.

Despite a majority of surveyed writers saying they work over 21 hours a week 67 percent of respondents said they made less than \$20,000 as a freelancer in 2015. 28 percent of writers said they earned \$30,000 to \$39,000, with 6 percent of respondents saying they earned more than \$90,000 last year as a freelance creative. *See Fig. 14*

“The thing that I find most difficult about being a freelance writer is having to justify your value to clients. Many clients are content with just paying the least amount possible for content. They don’t realize that it’s worth investing in great content.”

— **Sarah Burt**, *Freelance Writer*

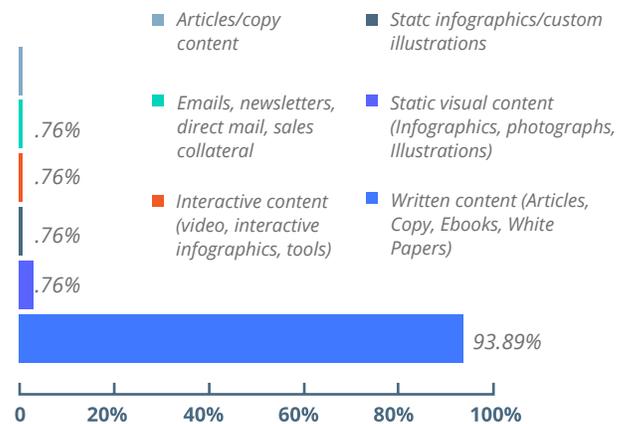
Interestingly, among our respondents the bulk of content freelancers are creating is still written. Almost 94 percent

of respondents said they produce written content such as articles, copy, e-books, and white papers, while only 4 percent said they created static infographics and other visual content. The remaining respondents said they created content for interactive content, such as video or tools, or created email content and sales collateral.

See Fig.17

Fig. 17

TYPES OF CONTENT PRODUCED



From all the content created, 85 percent of respondents said they take on web copy projects. The average pay for these projects is 4 to 7 cents per word, with 27 percent of respondents reporting that figure as their standard rate. Meanwhile, 12 percent work for 3 cents per word or less, and 16 percent work for a range of 7 to 12 cents per word. However, hope exists that writer pay rates are becoming fairer: 15 percent of respondents said they

Fig. 18

AMOUNT FREELANCERS CHARGE FOR WEB COPY

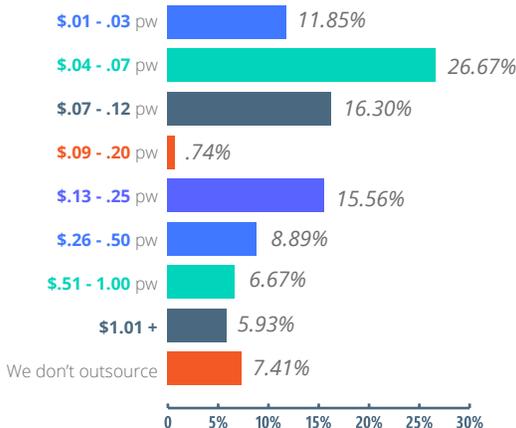


Fig. 19

PROJECT PAYMENT TERMS

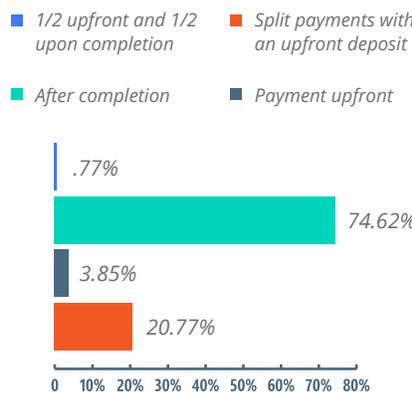


Fig. 20

SATISFACTION WITH PER WORD RATE

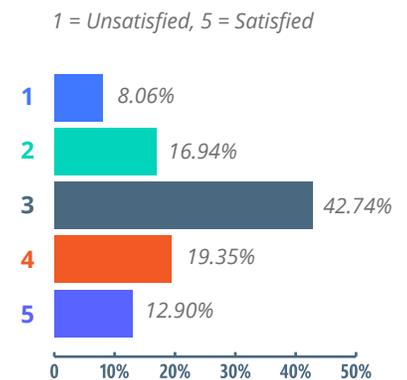
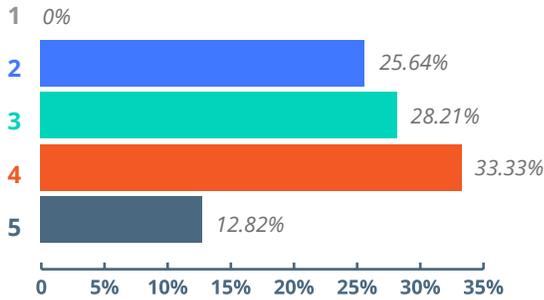


Fig. 21

REGULARITY OF CONSTRUCTIVE CLIENT FEEDBACK ON COPY

1 = Never, 5 = Always



typically earn 13 to 25 cents per word, and 13 percent said they earn 50 cents per word or more. This finding followed a similar trend for written articles. *See Fig. 18*

Despite this variety in pay rates, only 25 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with their pay rates, while 43 percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Thirty-two percent of respondents said they were happy with what they earned on a per-word basis.

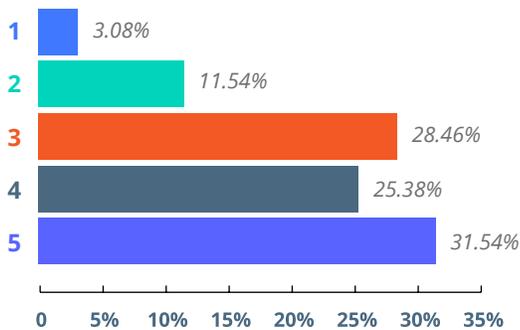
COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

Many writers also find value in constructive feedback, but not all are getting it. Almost 40 percent of respondents said they only receive feedback some of the time, while five percent weren't satisfied with the feedback they received and only 12 percent were very satisfied. *See Fig. 21*

Fig. 22

REGULARITY OF DOCUMENTED INSTRUCTIONS

1 = Never, 5 = Always



This same pattern occurred when writers were asked how often they received documents instructions, whether they were project-specific or general style guide rules. Twenty-nine percent only sometimes received instructions, and 13 percent sometimes or rarely received instructions. While only one of our writers surveyed said they were completely unsatisfied with communication about projects (from instructions to feedback), 75 percent of respondents thought communication could be improved at least a little. *See Fig. 22 & 23*

Writers rely on feedback and instruction to improve themselves, and the industry could suffer if this trend continues.

Fig. 23

SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNICATION ON PROJECTS

1= Unsatisfied, 5 = Satisfied

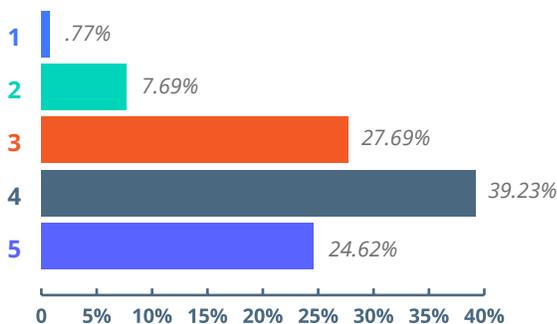
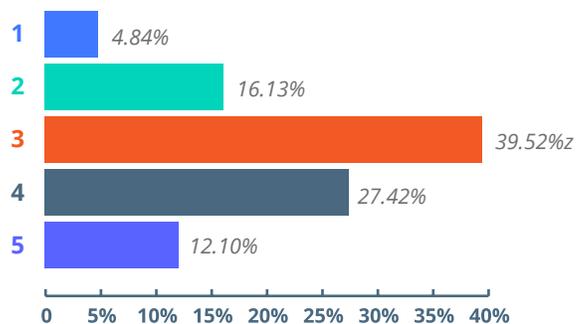


Fig. 24

REGULARITY OF CONSTRUCTIVE CLIENT FEEDBACK

1 = Never, 5 = Always



ATTRIBUTION IN THE FREELANCE WORLD

A common trend that we like to follow in our annual content marketing reviews is attribution and its effects (if any) on writer performance. Only 11 percent of writers said they always receive attribution for their work, although 29 percent of respondents receive attribution some or all the time. On the other end of the spectrum, 47 percent of freelance creatives said they rarely or never receive attribution or bylines for their work. We found this figure interesting when considering 53 percent of writers said attribution affected the time and effort of their work at least moderately. *See Fig. 25 & 26*

When asked to write content attributed to their name (as opposed to ghostwritten), only 7 percent said they charge less in exchange for a byline, and 7 percent said they charge more. Most respondents said they would charge the same amount either way. *See Fig. 27*

Our theory of attribution as a motivator was disproven when we asked what would increase their satisfaction more as freelance creatives. More than 63 percent said higher pay and only 8 percent said more attribution. In fact, more respondents (10 percent) said they valued more creative freedom over bylines as a motivator. *See Fig. 28*

