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Golden days for Web freelancing

Seven sites worth writing for

This column appeared Jan. 26, 1999, in the Online Journalism Review. [Here's the version](#) on the OJR site.

By J.D. Lasica

First of two parts. See [Part 2](#).

The Web has opened up new landscapes for writers. Where major newspapers like the Miami Herald pay all of \$200 for an off-lead, front-page travel story including photos — I got the check Friday and spent it Saturday — online publications sometimes pay considerably more.

While [Salon](#) and [Slate](#) remain cyberspace's best-known outposts of original content created by staffers and freelance writers, the Web today is flush with a host of online publications offering quality non-fiction. Indeed, this might be the best of times for freelance writers with some online savvy.

In a two-part series, we'll look at an admittedly arbitrary sampling of Web sites that specialize in health, entertainment, finance, technology, teen, travel and crime news. Most of these sites require first-time publication rights, but a few may insist on retaining all subsequent rights, while others may agree to reprinting an article that originally appeared elsewhere.

[Part two](#) chronicles freelancing opportunities at seven additional sites.

APB Online

<http://www.apbonline.com>

Type of publication: Crime news

Headquarters: New York

Description: Launched on Nov. 11, APB Online is a national news service devoted exclusively to police and crime news, issues and trends. The APB Web site provides daily news and feature coverage written by a staff of 17 reporters and editors, and a national network of two dozen freelance correspondents.

"I'd like to double my freelance staff so I have broader and more even coverage of local and regional police and criminal justice events and issues," says managing editor Hoag Levins. "I'm specifically looking for freelance writers who are experienced newspaper reporters capable of researching and writing hard news stories. I'm interested in both breaking news stories written for publication the same day as well as news features that require more research and take readers behind the scenes in America's police stations, court houses, prisons, and related law enforcement institutions and agencies."

Levins has these tips for aspiring writers: "The world of police and criminal justice is a place of incredible color and human conflict even in the smallest American community. We're interested in compelling stories about the people, technology, issues and conflicts involved in every level of the criminal justice system. Aspiring writers should take a new look close to home."

"How are local cops and courts responding in novel new ways to old problems and to new problems like the threat of Internet crime or the growing move to publicize lists of sex offenders? Be a tour guide. Show us the most interesting or outrageous aspects of your local criminal justice system."

Pay: Rates range from \$150 for a "quickie" assignment to \$900 for an in-depth piece, but most fall in the \$350 to \$450 range.

Contact: [Hoag Levins](#)

HealthScout

<http://www.healthscout.com>

Type of publication: Personal health

Headquarters: Westport, Conn.

Description: An ambitious site that launched in the fall, HealthScout aims at a general audience seeking practical medical information and health advice.

"HealthScout strives to give readers a deep, yet effortless, understanding of health and medicine by making articles talk directly to the reader in plain, conversational English. We use humor where appropriate, and we have an attitude that shows," editor in chief Terry Dunkle says in an e-mail interview.

The site uses freelance reporters for most of its news, and "we're always looking for new talent," Dunkle says. "You need to be a genuinely curious reporter (there aren't many!) who isn't afraid to ask dumb questions and who can recognize the prime ingredient of a great article: the surprising fact."

Send your resume and three or four sample clips to Dunkle.

Pay: Straight daily news stories, typically 300 words, pay about \$100. "We will soon be in the market for enterprise reporting — longer, deeper stories that pay \$500 to \$1000 or more, depending on scope and importance," Dunkle says.

Contact: [Terry Dunkle](#)

Mr. Showbiz

<http://mrshowbiz.go.com>

Type of publication: Music and movies

Headquarters: Bellevue, Wash.

Description: "We're looking for people who've written about music or movies and preferably have contacts with the studios or the major music labels," says Marina Gordon, senior producer.

Freelancers write most of the site's CD reviews, movie reviews and celebrity interviews, while staff reporters write the news stories. Those who've written for online publications and "understand interactivity" have an advantage, says Gordon, who estimates that half of the site's content is freelance. Freelancers enjoy writing for a daily entertainment site rather than for a print magazine with a three- or four-month lead time, she notes.

Gordon points out that the site has a stable of regular freelancers, but it's open to writers who have experience,

strong industry connections or bold ideas about interactivity.

Send clips and background information along with story ideas. "It's difficult to break in here if you don't know someone who works here," she says.

Mr. Showbiz's sister site, [Wall of Sound](#), also accepts some freelance.

Pay: Ranges from \$40 for a quick review to \$400 for an exclusive interview.

Contact: [Marina Gordon](#)

Orato

<http://www.orato.com>

Type of publication: First-person narrative news magazine

Headquarters: Niue, New Zealand

Description: The fledgling Webzine Orato describes itself as "an alternative to the traditional news media" and as "a global soapbox ... that delivers the news in its purest form."

Says editor Charles Montgomery: "That means we want stories from people involved in or affected by news and current events, and we want it first-person. We deal with writers offering their own extraordinary stories as well as journalists helping others share their stories with the world.

"Stories told in that first-person narrative format can fit into several categories: politics and war, social issues, entertainment, sports and adventure and pop science." The site's goal is to become a daily magazine in the spring of 1999.

Freelancers can submit forms to pitch a story idea or to enroll in a network of writers who are open to receiving assignments near their home base.

Montgomery tells prospective writers: "Keep an eye out for compelling first-person stories."

Pay: Fees generally run \$100 to \$400 for features of 400 to 2,000 words. Rates depend on the newsworthiness of the subject, the originality of the story and the experience of the writer.

Contact: [Charles Montgomery](#)

React.com

<http://www.react.com>

Type of publication: Weekly news destination for teens

Headquarters: New York

Description: React.com, a teen Web site, is looking for additional freelance writers and reporters to contribute short pieces to the site.

"We're particularly interested in hearing from online editors, producers and wire service people who have experience in covering sports, extreme sports, high school sports on a national or regional basis, technology and personal computing, health and science and finance," says Susan Mernit, director of new media for Parade Publications. "All the pieces we assign, whether short news pieces or features, will need to be written in a way

that enlightens and informs 12- to 18-year-olds."

Pay: Rates range from 50 cents to a dollar a word.

Contact: [Susan Mernit](#)

Upside Today

<http://www.upside.com>

Type of publication: Technology and finance

Headquarters: San Mateo, Calif.

Description: Upside Today features short, timely, Web-only stories in addition to publishing content from Upside, a monthly magazine geared toward high-level executives.

"Upside Today is an insider's site that covers high-tech news and financial machinations in an edgy way," says senior writer/editor Tish Williams. "We're looking for spirited writers with a lot of attitude who understand which tech issues are important to Upside. No product pitches and no senseless rants, though we welcome informed, opinionated commentary."

The site has used little freelance work in the past, but "we plan on expanding our use of freelancers exponentially" this year, Williams says.

Her advice for aspiring writers?

"One-line e-mails asking, 'What do you look for in a freelancer?' go unreturned. Letters that point to published articles, outline areas of interest, show credentials and insight, reference someone I know, or give me a sense of what type of writer you are tend to be more helpful.

"Send all correspondence through e-mail: My mailbox is a zoo, if it's not electronic, it finds its way into the dust-bunny farm under my desk."

Pay: Varies. "Fifty cents a word is a good start," Williams says, "and most of our pieces are short. We pay more as we gain confidence in writers."

Contact: [Tish Williams](#)

ZDNet News

<http://www.zdnet.com>

Type of publication: Technology news

Headquarters: San Francisco

Description: ZDNet uses freelancers on most of its "channels" — sites that are not associated with Ziff-Davis magazines.

"That covers a wide area," says editor Stephen Howard, "but we always stick to our core topics of computing and the Internet: Web development, computer help, Windows, Linux, e-commerce and the like.

"We use news stringers from time to time to cover special topic areas or events. Mostly we're looking for detailed features on new technologies, business cases, plus news-you-can-use tutorials and backgrounders. We are least interested in product reviews; we get plenty of those from our various technical labs."

Unlike others, Howard suggests that prospective writers pick up the phone. "E-mail inquiries are not as effective as

a personal call."

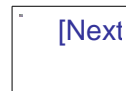
As always, study the site. "Most writers' pitches are badly aimed and ignored," he says.

Also, be aware that you can contact other ZD properties directly, such as [PC Magazine](#) or [ZDTV](#).

Pay: ZDNet News uses a flat-fee structure of \$300 per story; articles run 500 words or fewer. Other ZD sites generally assign features or analyses, which run longer and pay from 50 cents to a dollar per word, depending on experience with the freelancer, level of expertise and shortness of deadlines, Howard says.

Contact: E-mail [Stephen Howard](#) or call (415) 551-4842.

[Freelance opportunities at 7 more sites](#)



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