

Freelance Writing & A Conflict of Interests

What constitutes a conflict of interests when you're freelancing?

Hi There!

I would really love to hear the advice of experienced freelancers out there!

I was given a wonderful opportunity with a new glossy magazine to write freelance for them about 18 months ago. I am currently finishing a degree in Eng & Literature through UNISA, and I have always loved writing. When I started submitting my articles, they really loved them and today I write between 8 - 10 articles per month for them. I understood immediately how lucky I was to find this opportunity - I have now written over 120 articles, that range from purely factual articles, to real-life stories, to the cover stories, to book reviews and exercise columns. I have even supplied photographs with my stories on more than one occasion (and they've also been published).

I started off earning R1.50 per word, but they then offered me a retainer - for X amount of articles I would receive X amount per article. In other words, for peace-of-mind and knowing that I would receive a set amount of work, they wanted a reduced rate per article. This was only ever a verbal agreement - nothing has ever been signed. But it came into existence from about the third month of writing for them.

Since then (for the past 15 months), I earn an average of 54c per word and I work my butt off to research, interview and write 10 articles per month. I am dedicated and ensure that anything with my name next to it is excellently written, informative, inspiring and memorable. I know that I do a great job though because I am by far the most featured writer in the magazine (although that could also be because I'm so 'cheep'). About a year ago, they designated me to 'Deputy Lifestyle Editor', even though I don't do any editing function at all, and do not even take part in idea generation for future issues.

The bottom line though is that I am working very hard, but not earning what I need to earn to keep food in my children's mouths. I know I'm hard worker and that I write well, and I have absolutely awesome article ideas, but I am (quite honestly) loath to 'give' these to this magazine because I know I'm going to paid a pittance for them.

However, my experience, my ideas and my contacts lie in the specific field that I write in. Would it be totally unethical for me to approach other publications in the same field with my ideas and sell articles to them in the hopes that I can earn at least the minimum amount per word?

The bottom line is that I feel as though my 'freelancing' capability is kind of curtailed by the designation I have been given and the retainer that I'm working in.

How can I grow and earn more without insulting my current magazine?

Any advice would be greatly appreciated!

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