

# CONSULTING WITH THE CONSULTANTS: CAN PW GRADS MAKE IT AS ENTREPRENEURS?

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## WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

By exploring our own entrepreneurial opportunities, we hope to create a new niche for professional writers where we can consult and offer writing services to new and

existing businesses. Effective writing skills are crucial to successful business, yet these skills are sometimes lacking in the workplace. Professional writing graduates can use their degrees to establish consulting programs that would educate employees on how to efficiently communicate in today's fast-paced work environment. This report intends to offer a base of knowledge that business leaders would want taught to their employees.

## WHY WOULD THIS WORK?

With the suffering economy, the foresight of a job in the state of Michigan can look pretty bleak. Many students, including professional writing majors, plan to leave the state to pursue their careers elsewhere, where the demand for jobs is higher. With so many students wanting to leave Michigan after graduation, something needs to be done to restore some of the state's job possibilities. Luckily, as professional writers, we have the necessary tools to create our own way of contributing and helping Michigan. By creating and expanding this new niche for Professional Writers, we have the ability to generate jobs which can potentially spur the economic growth.

On a slightly smaller scale, writing proficiency skills are very important for today's successful business. With the mainstream use of emails and reports as the primary source of information-sharing,



businesses require strong writing skills to survive. In today's business world, mistakes in writing can be costly. Annually, writing mishaps cost businesses an estimated \$3.1 billion in lost revenue<sup>1</sup>. With such a large amount of money being spent on developing writing skills, more emphasis on these concepts is necessary.

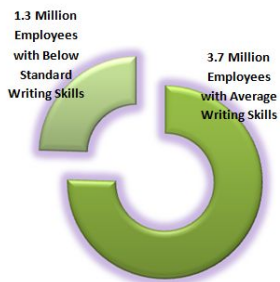
One example where writing skills were extremely crucial to the success of a company occurred when a contractual disagreement placed \$15 million at stake. The contractual detail, which involved when stock options would be issued, boiled down to two clauses and differing interpretations of the meaning of "subsequent" versus "consequently."<sup>1</sup> \$15 million lost—because of one word.

This kind of disastrous scenarios helps us illustrate that writing skills are still lacking in the workplace. In our consulting business, we would like to provide seminars and workshops that can help employees learn the basics of business writing; we'd offer one-on-one consulting to help improve focus on specific projects; and we could assist employees in bettering one-time pieces of writing as well.

Lack of basic writing skills is a major problem in the modern workplace; in a recent survey of 120 major corporations, where 4 million employees were evaluated, 1.3 million fell short of employer's writing expectations<sup>1</sup>. With over 30% of employees below the typical standard for writing skills, the chances for miscommunication in the workplace are drastically high.

At major universities today, the emphasis seems to be shifting to technical writing, and too many classes focus less and less on the quality of the written word. Linda Barrington, author of a 2006 report, "To Read or Not to Read," detailed the glaring deficiency in reading and writing in new employees coming out of college. Barrington pointed out that, "It's nice that they are reading e-mail and reading comics, but if they can't turn it into a communication tool, that is where the breakdown happens on the employer side." It is for this reason a consulting firm would be useful for businesses and their employees so to help educate new college graduates entering the workforce on the writing communication skills they may be lacking in. Our consulting firm would not only offer it's services as an outsourcing opportunity, where our professionals could help businesses with specific projects, but also offer individual employees help with their own writing.

Survey of Employees' Writing Skills



## HOW WOULD WE DO IT?

Professional consulting firms meet with many different businesses to solve glaring

issues within the company as a whole. Using a step-by-step approach, professional writers can use specific tools and techniques to contribute to businesses regarding competent writing in the workplace. Tools such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, presentation planning, and any other areas of concern will be discussed and displayed in many different ways, depending on the client's (business') needs and requests. And, coming up with an informative program so we could teach employees to utilize the skills we're striving to learn in our classes today, would be a good way to fit professional writers into the future of Michigan's economy.

Businesses often hire these consulting firms to host writing seminars, presentations, and meetings with individual employees, as well as construct projects in order to assure constructive, positive communication and solidify strong business. These seminars can be held in large-scale meetings or in small-group settings, as well as individual mentoring sessions. Our business would also take on some outsourcing projects from companies that would be looking to hire for short term projects that might need to be done quickly and effectively.

In an interview conducted by Whitney Broach, Linda G. Gallagher, and Deb Lockwood from the Rocky Mountain Consulting and Independent Contracting Communities, three panelists from various consulting and independent contracting firms sat down to discuss ways other

entrepreneurs could branch out in order to be successful on their own. The following participants represent similar services in technical writing, and all three said how important networking was to the success of their businesses. Brian Berry, of Berry Technical Documentation went to so far as to say 90-95% of his revenue came from referrals and networking<sup>2</sup>. The writing program at MSU might be able to play a role in helping a PW student network with businesses and other PW students to create a revenue base for a consulting practice. Maybe Michigan policy makers could help as well.

## CONCLUSION

In this report, we've detailed a potential business: why we believe it's beneficial and how it would run. Starting up this business will not necessarily be easy, but with the resources available, it can be well-worth the work. To get started, many communities have short, starter courses available. In Lansing, "Linking Lansing & U," is an entrepreneurial mentorship program designed to guide potential entrepreneurs through the planning process. Programs like this can help people get started on pursuing their own independent business opportunities.

Below are helpful links for those interested in a start-up a business like we've discussed:

- [http://www.lansingmi.gov/invest/linking\\_lansing\\_and\\_u/entrepreneurial\\_mentorship\\_program.jsp](http://www.lansingmi.gov/invest/linking_lansing_and_u/entrepreneurial_mentorship_program.jsp)

- <http://www.startupnation.com/steps/5/10-steps-open-start-business.htm>
- <http://www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/index.html>
- [http://www.gatlineducation.com/entrepreneurship\\_course.html](http://www.gatlineducation.com/entrepreneurship_course.html)
- <http://www.grantsnowusa.com/?gclid=CJOWtayx8ZYCFQazsgodJhITYg>

## REFERENCES

1 Huff, Charlotte. "Why Business Can't Write - and What to Do About It." *Workforce Management*.

2 Broach, Whitney, Linda G. Gallagher, and Deb Lockwood. "Marketing and Advertising for Independents." *Intercom*, March 2006, 12-15.

3 Smerd, Jeremy, "New Workers Sorely Lacking Reading, Writing Skills, Report Finds" *Workforce Management*



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<http://kairos.wide.msu.edu/~sue/townhall/town.html>



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