

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF FREELANCERS

By Kim Pittaway,
Editorial Consultant, 2008

Good freelancers can be hard to find. But develop a reputation for treating them well and you'll make your job much easier.

EVERY EDITOR I KNOW, NO matter how big or small their editorial budget, has the same worry: it's hard to find good help—good writers, photographers, illustrators. And if Ms. Big Budget is worried, then hey, shouldn't you, Mr. Tiny Bucks, be panicked? Well, not necessarily. Because the truth is, freelancers don't always go where the money is (though a trail of toonies can help). Buy a freelancer a drink (no, really, I mean it, head down to a bar now and buy one of us a drink) and then, after the alcohol hits the bloodstream, ask your designated freelancer which editors she loves working with. I'll bet you a drink it'll have more to do with being well treated than being well paid. (Again, not that money won't help but...) And as the editor or art director of a small magazine, figuring out what "well-treated" means can help you make your magazine the publication of choice for the freelancers you'd most like to feature on your pages.

What are you offering?

If your answer is "lots of money" skip ahead to the next section. Still reading? If you're not in the position to pay well, you need to articulate what you offer to a freelancer that's worth almost as much as cash. Maybe it's the chance to write about a subject few large better-paying magazines would cover. Maybe you're a great place for new photographers to break into the business. Or perhaps you'll devote more space to a great story than wealthier magazines will, or let an illustrator or writer experiment with form or style. All of those things matter to freelancers. But even if you can't check off a single item on that list, there's still hope.

The ABCS of R-E-S-P-E-C-T

What do freelancers want? In a word: respect. How do you express that respect? It's simple.

Assign clearly: What are your expectations for the story or image? For stories, what angle, approach and tone are you expecting and what is the ballpark length? What will the fee be? What rights are you buying? What is the deadline? Discuss it voice to voice with your freelancer, and then put it in writing—you'll be amazed how easy it is for both of you to forget ex-

actly what you agreed to by the time that deadline rolls around. A quick email at assignment time will save headaches on both sides later on.

Be realistic: This one's a bit tough to nail down, because what looks realistic from behind the editor's desk sometimes looks like a freakin' nightmare from the freelancer's side. Try this. When it comes to mid-stream changes in story direction, your 4th request for a rewrite, additional research without additional word space ("Can you add an update on the impli-

cations of Canada's foreign policy in Afghanistan and still keep the whole thing to 300 words?"), fixes assigned on Dec 24 that need to be completed by Dec 27, etc., ask yourself if your request

is fair. Not whether it makes your life easier. But is it fair? And if it isn't fair, grovel a bit. Pay a bit more. And try really hard not to do it again.

Call back: Return phone calls, especially from freelancers mid-assignment (there might be a problem you need to know about). Shoot over an email saying you've received the first draft, the contacts, digital proofs or sketches and give a ballpark date on when you expect you'll be able to get back to the freelancer with feedback.

Don't ditch 'em: Few things are tougher for a freelancer than shifting editors or art directors midstream. If possible, the person who assigned the job should see it all the way through.

Edit (and art direct) well: Books have been written on this one. Here it is in shorthand: It is better to lead than to impose.

And a P.S.

Pay promptly: That means pay on acceptance, not on publication.

Spread the word: Want to enter the bonus round with your freelancers? Unless you have enough work to occupy them fully, recommend them for other work within your publication, company or wider circle of editors. And let them know you've passed their names along.

**What do freelancers want?
In a word: respect. How do you
express that respect? It's simple.**

The Hotsheet Series provides tips and advice to small magazines from people working in the field. The series is produced by Magazines Canada and is funded by the Canada Council and the Canada Magazine Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Canada



Canada Council
for the Arts

Magazines
Canada