

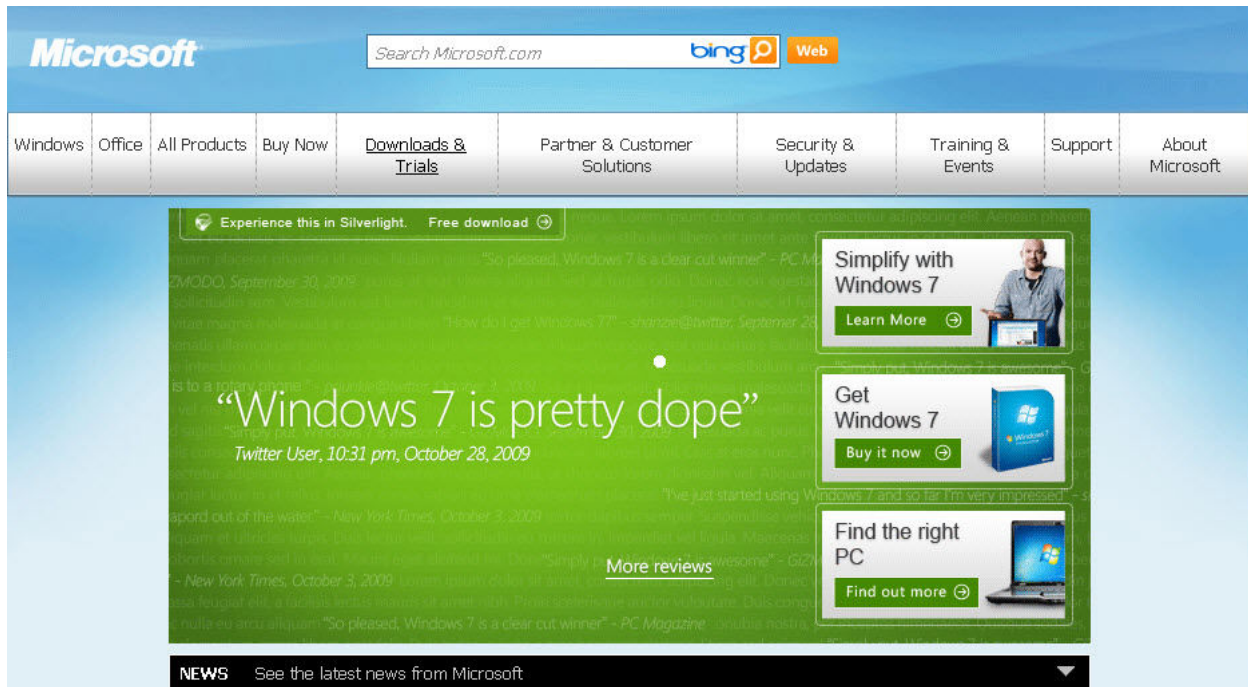


# 2010 Writing Trends

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**Writer's Job Guide**

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Microsoft Web Site Snapped Nov 5, 2009

This image captures the issue for writers entering 2010 and beyond:

- Global company ...
  - Picks a headline from an *anonymous* person
    - Who uses can't ...
      - To express an idea ...
        - In a medium that didn't exist two years ago ...
          - (And the global company calls it a review.)

With Microsoft turning over its most precious home page real estate to anonymous, nonprofessional writers, what are the rest of the 300,000 working writers in the US actually working on?

If you are one of these writers, this question affects you directly. And this paper is written for you.

New York Times—toasted

As I chronologue this topic on a rainy, brisk November morning in Atlanta, change is in the air.

Top writers and content managers are on a new page—one without margins. This absence of borders is a direct result of the digitalization of content, and the fact that information is freer than ever before. And that means it interacts with the audience, and we can see the results.

Results are becoming real—tangible, present, palpable for writers of all stripes, as well as for their managers.

In this bracing environment on the eve of a new decade, **Write2Market** and **WritersJobGuide** scoured practicing writing gurus and content development leaders to bring you the top writing trends for 2010.

### If you've got 5 seconds, here's the skinny:

The experts say the world of content creation is indeed creating itself quickly. Yet today's professional writers are, for the most part, sitting out the big game on the sidelines, discussing style guides, grammar and [linguistic drift](#) while touchdowns are scored by those who put function over form.

If you've got a few more minutes, in the following pages, you'll get no-punches-pulled perspectives from:

- **Scott Abel**, the “Content Wrangler,” who jets from conference to conference speaking on trends around content and consulting the Fortune 50.
- **Peter Shankman**, founder of HARO, who single-handedly reinvented how journalists tell stories (and kicked ProfNet to the curb).
- **Jeff Bezos**, Kindle inventor and Amazon founder.
- **Nona Carson**, a lifetime marketing leader and agency vice president who speaks from the trenches in Huntsville, AL.

Their thoughts are all freighted with sidebars from me, Lisa Calhoun, who asked the question—what does it take to create top content in 2010 that didn't come into play before? Some of their blunt answers will surprise you.

The best thing  
about the future is  
that it comes only  
one day at a time.

*Abraham Lincoln*

Your side of the this story

The beautiful thing about the future is that it hasn't been invented yet, and it's yours to create as you see fit.

This content is public domain. As you judge for yourself the merit of these trends, let us hear from you.

Twitter: @write2market

@writersjob

Writing Trend #1: Gutenberg is **so dead**, even his bones **have rotted**.

- Writers are married to a system and a process that's extinct in most cases. Writing itself doesn't need to respect old formats—but writers have been taught to write a certain way, and are now challenged to separate form and function. Thinking about writing's function is a new idea for most writers, who by nature of their art, are traditionalists.

*Freedom of information, freedom of speech, and freedom of press have all become the same freedom.*

Scott Abel, Nov 2 2009

According to Scott Abel, "Writers need to get over it." Scott is a writer among writers—a charismatic and self-proclaimed Content Wrangler who's created the Web's liveliest online writing community. (Find it at [www.thecontentwrangler.com](http://www.thecontentwrangler.com).) He spends his time jet-setting from conference to conference, discussing how to improve content development today. Scott touches more writers in a week than most editors marketing managers do in a decade.

For Gutenberg and those who used his press to communicate, the reader was invisible and the writer, or author, was lord of the page. Even before Gutenberg, illuminated manuscripts still gave power to the wielder of the pen, which created phrases in our lexicon like, "the power of the pen" or "the pen is mightier than the sword."

Here on the eve of 2010, the page doesn't exist and even its ghost is up for grabs. So what happens to all that latent power?

It's bleeding into form, when it should empower function. Writers are imprisoning themselves in a static, long-form, narrative content that has more to do with **the medium** that delivered (past tense) content than the message. Writers are swaddled by their own education and ego, wrapped in the grave linens of essay form, report form, and paragraphs with topic sentences and great transitions. That's not how today's audience necessarily reads.

"Back in the day, it was all about the printing press, the play, the novel—things that could be delivered by the quarto," says Scott.

And then there came the PC—badly named, because it made writers feel it was "theirs," a true, "personal computer." Even worse, Scott goes on, the PC soon sported a "My Documents" folder. "Writers take that nomenclature much too seriously," he says with a smile.

And writers started to horde digital content, while still delivering static long-form work:

- The white paper
- The article
- The essay

- The page

Is the page user friendly? Scott dares to ask. Top writers in 2010 go off-page into the wilds of what content consumers want.

“Let’s say you go to the doctor,” he says. “You like your doctor—she’s a great person, and you keep bringing her your troubles. But time after time, your condition just doesn’t improve. What do you do?” Scott pauses. “You STOP going to that doctor.”

He relates that today’s professional writer is no different. Businesses and companies turn to the writer, and ask to be healed of their lack of connection with audiences. And writers think because they went to school, love language, know their grammar and swing around a stellar vocabulary, that they have the answer. They churn out pages, papers and pap that have been done for decades, just like they learned in school.

“Writing is becoming a commodity. High level writers in 2010 won’t be known for the writing—they’ll be known for the thinking that went into it, and the usefulness that delivered to the reader,” he mandates.

For example, he pointed out how marketing firms are known for pegging 1-3% ROI as the typical success of direct mail campaigns. “Ridiculous. Great campaigns have 18-20% ROI. The difference is, smart writers weed out unresponsive people using PURLs or other scientific techniques, so the overall ROI of their message is much higher than the traditional benchmarks you’re used to seeing.”

His advice to writers is straightforward:

- 1) Learn a field beyond grammar and vocabulary.
- 2) Apply your verbal skills to that field in deep, rich ways that broaden human understanding.
- 3) Apply math and science to your results so you know your ROI and the people who pay your bills have every reason to pay you what you’re worth.

In 2010, Scott foresees lots of jobs that require writers—but few that mandate English students and grammarians that pay above minimum wage. “Writers want success to be about writing. It’s not—it’s about the publishing process and the end result—the engagement with the reader. Until writers start focusing on readers, they’ll be chained to Gutenberg and suffer the same fate—burial.”

- Writing itself doesn’t need to respect old formats—but writers have been taught them and are now challenged to separate form and function.

### Writing Trend #2: Mastering the immediate

Founder of one of the most successful e-tailers, Amazon.com, and the passionate inventor of Kindle, Jeff Bezos has spent some serious time thinking about ideas and their distribution. So how does that play out in his every day business strategy?

"We base our strategy **on customer needs instead** of what our skills are," Bezos [told CNET](#) last year, speaking with Dan Farber, Editor of CBS Interactive News. "Customers will eventually need things that you don't have skills for, so (you) need to renew yourself with new skill."

Dan Farber got this from the interview:

Regarding the fate of physical books, Bezos said the vast majority of books will be read electronically. Just as horses haven't gone away, books will be around, he quipped. "We see Kindle as an effort to improve the book, even though it hasn't changed in 500 years," he added.

Content is not hoarded and updated on a strict schedule—it's always on. The sifting and judgment of editors and "the worthy researcher" is removed—allowing the person seeking knowledge to directly interact with all the grit, grist and grind of information in its raw and ugly form.

This is where the great writer will shine in 2010—master of the immediate.

There are still knowledge aggregators you can rely on—if you want to pay for the fine tooth comb, or are in a hurry, or like subscriptions. Gartner, Forrester, and the New York Times all come to mind. These outlets are under pressure though.

Jean Avent, Vice President of Communications at Write2Market, relates, "BusinessWeek has laid off 130 people this year. AP has laid off 90. Forbes has cut 100 out of 200. People need to understand that these well-groomed stands of educated writers don't exist like they used to just a few years ago."

Yet for the masses, knowledge is not a luxury as it was in the past—for royalty, scribes, and literati. Now, it's a service industry—and an increasingly public service industry. The content provider that serves it up fast and hot gets the billion burgers served, and with today's channels of information, that superstar is the writer.

### Trend #3: Resurgence in research

So what does it take to serve up solid content today? Relevance. It's not enough to repost, retweet, and mash up information—although this can be valuable. Real value for readers comes from taking disparate sources of information and braiding them into a cogent, creative new piece—fast. There's one secret to doing this well: expert research skills.

Consider today's writer—solidly grounded in their career, 28-48, years old, managing 90% of the ideas that flow through and around corporate America, 100% of the creative copy, 80% of the social media mania and . . . Got that writer solidly in mind? Wait a second. Where did those stats come from?

Exactly. I made them up. Like much of what you read on the internet, material that sounds like research isn't.

In fact, let's look at BLS data from 2008—facts—about writing professionals. The [median hourly wage for a writer](#) of any stripe, technical or media, is \$25.51. There are about 300,000 employed writers—a number not expected to change as a percentage of the population, and BLS coyly calls the writing job market "competitive." [Claire Morgenstern](#), a student writing in the Carnegie Mellon student newspaper *The Tartan*, expresses the frustration talented young writers feel:

*Unfortunately, there are so many fledgling writers out there (and even non-fledgling writers, as veteran reporters from the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, and The Baltimore Sun, to name a few, have been thrust from their offices with floor-to-ceiling windows to cubicles at a temp agency, or more commonly, their own kitchen tables, staring at their laptops, wondering if they have the stamina to make a podcast) who will pitch and write stories to be posted on news sites for free that writers who want their living situation to include walls and a roof can be hard-pressed to find gigs that actually pay. And by pay, I mean not in the form of "experience," "exposure," and "a flexible work schedule and the ability to work from home" — all choice phrases used by publications who solicit this kind of voluntary slave labor.*

### Writing has no barrier to entry

In a world where:

- Hundreds of thousands of "wannabe" writers enter the job market annually, like Claire
- AND many of them are willing to work without pay
- AND the Internet globalizes the industry (India speaks English as a first language, for example)

writers who want to rise to the top are going to have to look for ways to reinvent writing—new and improved for 2010. One of those ways is by paying attention to "source work."

**Source work** is such an old fashioned term that when I googled it just now, it had no links on the first page that were thematically relevant. That even surprised me. Back in the 70s, when I had the joy of hanging around press rooms and breathing in the last exhalations of hot lead type, *source work* was the kind of thing editors screamed at writers about. That one phrase meant a host of things, including relevancy, accuracy and immediacy.

In 2010, writers who want to land on the top of the heap need to do their source work. In the content meritocracy writers live in, better content is the only currency. Real research is one way to tilt the topics in your favor, by covering them with more care.

In the content meritocracy writers live in, better content is the only currency.  
*Lisa Calhoun*

Why will this be a winning **2010 copywriting strategy**?

1) The internet delivers lots of "information," less knowledge.



- 2) Much of what is posted is banal, bland and baloney. (Think: white papers written to sell, not teach—and these are often cited.)
- 3) There's more posting every day.

#### Writing Trend #4: Smart writing

Peter Shankman, serial entrepreneur, skydiver, and the founder of HARO is a hero for journalists and public relations professionals, because he updated venerable and outdated database services like Bacon's, ProfNet, and other services in one fell swoop when he invented Help A Reporter Out (HARO). Help A Reporter Out is an email that goes out 3 times a day to over 100,000 would-be experts and public relations firms, with requests from journalists about what they need to make that all-important deadline. It's self-regulated, entirely free, open to anyone, and completely revolutionary. The one caveat? If you break the rules, you're out. We asked Peter a few questions and here are his responses about what it takes to stand out in the wide open world of writing:

DON'T tell people you know how to use social networking. Imagine if someone told you they were brilliant at looking things up on Google— you'd think they rode in on the short bus.

*Peter Shankman, Nov 2009*

#### **Looking forward into 2010, is writing the same career today that it was 10 years ago? 100?**

No. Writers have to be smarter—quicker—understanding of the fact that the majority of the writing they'll do will be for the digital realm—where they'll need to be much more aware of trends, breaking information, and sentiment—lest they be looked upon as "slow," or "left behind." And even more—they can't be quicker by sacrificing quality, content or integrity.

#### **Writing is one of the world's oldest professions. What makes a writer competitive TODAY that wasn't in play 2-3 years ago?**

The ability to spot trends **before they happen**—previously, writers only had to spot trends to write about them—that made their content compelling. Now, they also have to spot the trends that are threatening to put them out of business, and be better/quicker/faster than them.

#### **What does it take to be a profitable professional writer in 2010? Top three ingredients?**

Stamina, determination and the ability to be relevant.

#### **For established writers, what do they need to add to their bailiwick in 2010 to stay competitive?**

Rather, work on seeing 12 to 24 months ahead—accept that social media will become part of the lexicon—Facebook, Google, Twitter, won't be something you "have to do," but rather, a means to an end—your status updates automatically when you enter a location not because it's "cool," but because that in turn updates @foursquare, which updates twitter, and anyone who wants to find you immediately for a quick money-making freelance job can do so based on your coordinates first—and whether you respond to their text second. That's when we'll know "social media" is what "google" was twelve years ago—and we've finally moved into the new world. And as scary as it may sound, trust me—it's gonna be a hell of a lot of fun.

*Ladies and gentlemen, Peter Shankman. Find him at <http://www.helpareporter.com/>.*

Trend #5 : Agencies ask for more

Let's describe the Average Agency. A group of bright minds working in multiple industries, demanding all sorts of talent on tap, from organic/botanical design to urgent heavy metal inspirations, from insipid to inspired. Average Agency works with a "stable" of writers.

Notice the "work horse" mentality, the implication of drudgery. If you're in the stable . . .

But I digress. The agency says they have a "stable" that specializes in ad copy, web copy, annual reports—in other words, show horses, draft horses, dressage horses, horses that pace and trot and barrel race. (Yes, that's you, writers.) But agencies aren't getting the same mileage out of that arrangement that they used to.

Take Nona Carson, Vice President of Client Services at Cre8ive Partners, an agency working in the heartland of Huntsville, Alabama. She's worked in creative services for almost 20 years, and when I asked this vivacious aristocrat of attention-getting services what it takes to win the horse race in 2010, she said:



"Here's the word for copy in 2010...shrewd. Copywriters need to think like a fox and blend intelligence and craftiness with creativity and artfulness to create engaging content. Foxy copy is transparent. If you're writing ad copy, remember that today's consumers can smell hype from a mile away. Tell the truth and keep it simple.

Foxy copy is intelligent. Consider the medium. Are you writing for a website? Well, bless you if you are, because then you have to worry about SEO and things like keyword density and a SEO guru who believes in **functionality over form**. (And "form" can mean your creative prose as well as design.)

I'm a musician, so I'll close with a music analogy. The notes (words) are the same. The instruments (channels) are changing. And your audience is not in the concert halls and venues they used to be in. They're increasingly online – on Facebook, Twitter, etc. Plus, they are exposed to so much music (messages) every day that they have almost become desensitized to it. Sometimes all the notes run together and sound the same....like a cacophony. The challenge is to make your music resonate.

*“Writing is thinking...*

*...It is more than living, for it is being conscious of living.”- Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1906-2001*

In summary, looking at what it takes to succeed as a writer in 2010, it's simpler and more profound than previous years.

In the far past, writers were philosophers, poets and the companions of kings. In the recent past, they've been the workhorses of the information age. 2010 holds a new promise—a return, for the best writers, to a position of empowerment like never before. The best writers will come from the best thinkers, their work powering the distribution channels they chose to use. Writers have more tools to publish than ever before, when and wherever they want, and also greater access to a larger audience for the work.

### Say goodbye to your style guide

Through widespread adoption of applications like Twitter and Facebook, wikis and blogs, e-books, e-readers, and digital publications, the demand for this sort of always-on content is only growing.

Today's writer will illuminate culture and commerce by applying the right tool, the right approach, and the right message—in a heady, immediate blend that showcases top intelligence, as well as insight.

*“The material in which the literary artist works is the dialect of life— hence a strange freshness and immediacy of address to the public mind.” Robert Louis Stevenson*

So rather than focus on craft—grammar, style, punctuation, topicality—the top 2010 writer will focus on the actual art and science of writing, perhaps for the first time since monasteries illuminated manuscripts. The distribution of that writing will be more flexible than ever, rewarding writers who focus on message and function over form or format.

**About Write2Market**

Write2Market is a team of leading global thinkers and writers who help companies make messages that matter. We're located in Atlanta. Find out more at [www.write2market.com](http://www.write2market.com).

**About WritersJobGuide**

By writers and for writers, WritersJobGuide helps writers produce work more quickly by providing step-by-step instructions and samples of today's trendiest types of work. Check us out at [www.writersjobguide.com](http://www.writersjobguide.com).