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'WRITER FOR HIRE' – HOW NICOLE MADIGAN MADE THE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION FROM SECURITY TO SELF- EMPLOYMENT

My decision to leave the safety of my full-time position was motivated purely by family circumstances. My first child was on the way, following an arduous IVF process, and the hours required to fulfil my role as a broadcast journalist with Channel Nine felt incompatible with my parenting goals.

So while it was with a heavy heart that I said goodbye to a position I loved, family was my focus and I moved

on without regrets.

Before long though I was itching to dip my toe back into the media waters, so having started my journalism career in newspapers, I made the decision to try my hand at freelance writing.

That was nine years ago, and at that time, I was able to leverage off an already established name, forging a successful freelance career, writing for numerous print publications, along with some online magazines and news outlets.

Slowly though, times began to change. Many of the print magazines for which I wrote closed down, opting for online versions only or disappearing altogether. Diversification was a must if I was going to continue to work as a writer, and in particular, a freelance writer.

Not willing to leave my true love of journalism, I continued to pursue freelance leads, but began to consider complimentary services. Public Relations is a common sidestep for many journalists, and though I did dabble, I quickly discovered it wasn't for me.

Around the same time, content marketing had begun to make a name for itself, and an increasing number of businesses were recognising the importance of good quality, credible written content.

So, I decided to capitalise on my tertiary qualifications in communications and marketing, along with my earlier corporate positions and subsequent journalism career, to launch Stella Communications, offering a comprehensive suite of written communications services.

That was a few years ago now, leaving me in the fortunate position of being able to service a diverse range of clients (complimentary to my work as a journalist), fulfilling me on a professional level, while allowing me to work around my three young children.

Of course, the obsession with content has only grown. And while bloggers and pseudo-news sites are abundant, so too is the recognition of quality writing – like diamonds in the rough, good writing stands out.

Being without the safety net of an employer is a daunting but worthwhile experience, provided you carefully consider things like business structure, superannuation, tax and the like.

Obtaining professional advice to set things up properly is advisable, as it's easy for these elements to slip by the wayside as you focus on growing your client base.

For me, the most difficult aspect to the transition was the prospect of chasing work, and my early thinking was that I needed to improve my sales skills in order to sell myself, along with my new business.

Eventually though, I changed that approach, to great fruition. Rather than 'sell' my business services, I simply got better at letting potential clients know I was now a writer for hire.

Remember, just because your business is new, doesn't mean you're new to the business. Arm yourself with the knowledge that you already know exactly what you're talking about, only now you can use those valuable skills to service a diverse range of clients – lucky them!

Platforms such as Commtract are invaluable for expanding your reach, accessing clients you may not have considered nor had the opportunity to connect with.

Finding your niche early is also a good idea, as it helps potential clients know exactly who you are and how you can help *them* specifically. In the early stages of branching out, it can be tempting to spread the net as far and wide as possible, as you attempt to keep the wolves from the door.

However, being a jack of all trades, but a master of none isn't always beneficial, and can leave that large net drifting, catching but a few, less fussy, fish along the way.

Instead, choose the right bait for the right fish, and you might just land the ones you want – hook, line and sinker.

These three key elements – business structure, personal value and niche – have been instrumental in my own successful transition from employee to self-employment.

Nicole Madigan is a widely published journalist and highly regarded content and communications specialist, with 15 years experience in the media and communications industry. She now runs her own business, Stella Communications and is part of the Commtract community.

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