

Writing words for money · Creative writing with an eye on purpose · Using words to sell, inform and persuade · Acting with words · Bringing ideas to life · Telling a story to create a conversion · Writing that earns a response · Making the unreadable readable · Words that change minds · Spinning gold out of straw · Telling lies to strangers for money · The best possible words in the best possible order · An exquisite art of seduction · Taming the intangible · Explaining and persuading · Flinging a big ol' bucket of clarity over a muddle of muddle · Helping people say what they really mean · Inspiring action through the written word · Design with words · Talking to people, not at them · An expression of creativity with patience · Making the complicated simple · Painting pictures with words · Information disguised as a sizzle, not the sausage · Stop the tracks · Word magic · Writing that sells stuff · Writing words for money · Creative writing with an eye on purpose · Using words to

PROCOPYWRITERS

SURVEY 2016

The life and work of
copywriters in the UK

PROCOPYWRITERS SURVEY 2016

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COPYWRITERS'
NETWORK

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Introduction

These days, no copywriter has to be alone.

Even if you live and work in the Outer Hebrides, never meeting a single client, social media makes it easy to build a circle of friendly fellow writers with whom you can share your experiences, thoughts and ideas.

With PCN, we've aimed to take that a step further, by creating a wider, more defined community of copywriters who can all benefit from shared resources and mutual support.

But the truth is that we still don't know that much about the community we serve. There's plenty of anecdote and hearsay flying around online, over coffee and in the pub. But concrete data is harder to come by.

For example, how much do copywriters really earn? Are freelancers charging as much as they'd like? And do men get more than women?

Then there's the work we do. Do copywriters work in-house, through agencies or direct? Do they specialise or do a bit of everything? And what else do they do apart from write?

We created this survey to get some answers, and we were delighted when over 600 copywriters were willing to share their experiences and views with us.

I hope you find the results as interesting as we do.

Tom Albrighton
PCN Director

What is PCN?

Learn more about PCN and its work at procopywriters.co.uk or follow us on Twitter [@procopywriters](https://twitter.com/procopywriters)

Meet up in real life

Find out about our annual conference and book tickets at copywritingconference.com

What is copywriting?

We asked respondents to give us their definitions. You'll find some of their answers throughout this report.

“Copywriting is...
Clear, concise,
persuasive writing”

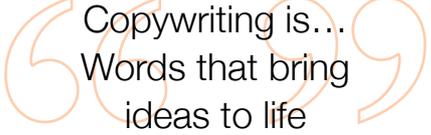
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we thank everyone who took the time to complete our survey and tell us about their lives as working copywriters. We believe the information you shared will be genuinely valuable to your fellow copywriters and the marketing industry as a whole.

We'd also like to thank the organisations that helped us publicise the survey: the Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP), D&AD and several others. On Twitter, many individual copywriters and followers of @procopywriters also helped by retweeting our calls for responses.

Special thanks to Sue Keogh of Sookio (sookio.com) and Graeme Piper of Drop Cap Copy (dropcapcopy.com) for reviewing the survey questionnaire before its launch and offering valuable feedback on how to improve it.

Finally, very special thanks to our co-founder Ben Locker, who stepped down from the hands-on management of PCN in October 2015, having played a central role in making PCN what it is today.

A graphic consisting of two large, stylized, light orange quotation marks that frame the text.

Copywriting is...
Words that bring
ideas to life

A graphic consisting of two large, stylized, light orange quotation marks that frame the text.

Copywriting is...
The voice of a brand

Respondents

About the copywriters who responded to our survey.

Number

We received 610 responses in total.

Age

Respondents' ages range from 19 to 75. The average age (and median age) is 40.

Gender

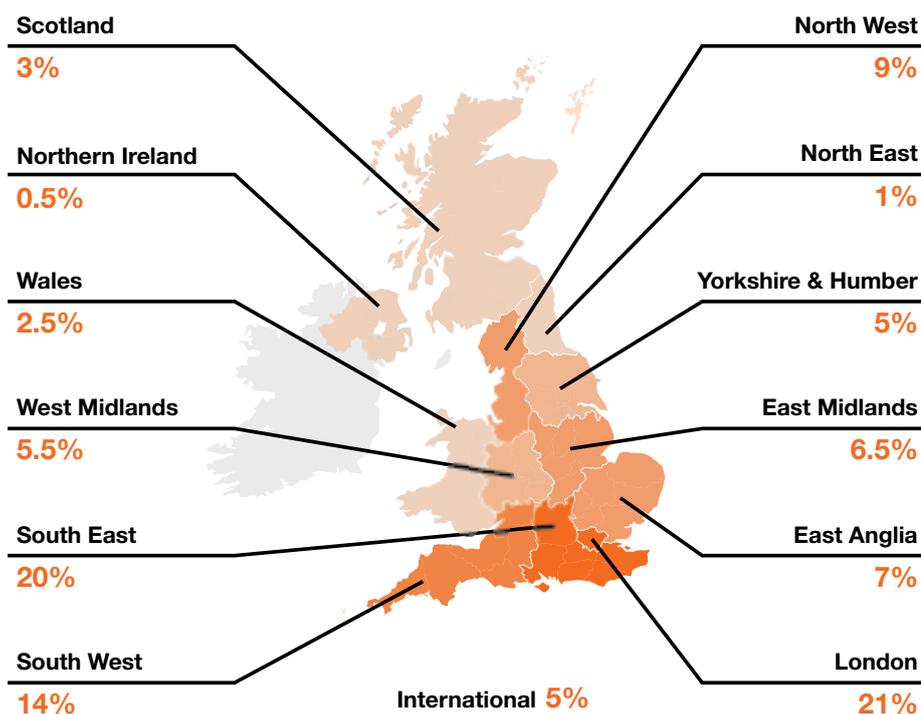
Of the respondents who confirmed their gender, 56% are female and 44% male.

Location

Respondents' locations show a strong bias towards the south and the capital, presumably reflecting the distribution of the creative industries. London accounts for 21% of respondents, while another 20% come from the South East.

We received very few responses from Northern Ireland and the North East, which sadly meant we could not calculate certain statistics for those regions.

'International' (5% of respondents) denotes copywriters based overseas who serve the UK market.



Copywriting is...
Helping people say
what they really mean

Full-time vs part-time

Of the 484 respondents who gave information, 354 (73%) work full-time, while 130 (27%) work part-time.

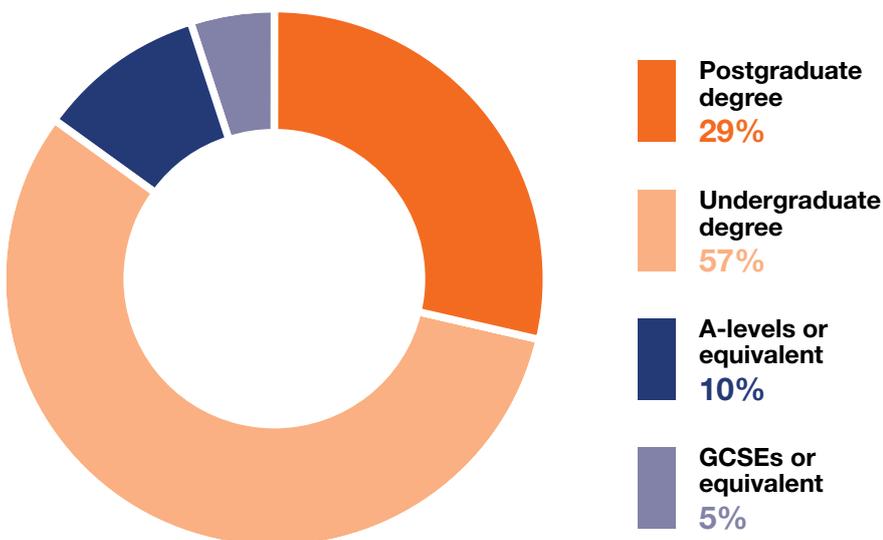
Level of experience

Respondents have a very wide range of experience levels. Their number of years' experience ranges from zero – novices or newcomers – up to 50, representing an entire working life in the industry.

The average number of years' experience is 10.5, and the 610 copywriters in our survey have a total of 6452 years' experience between them.

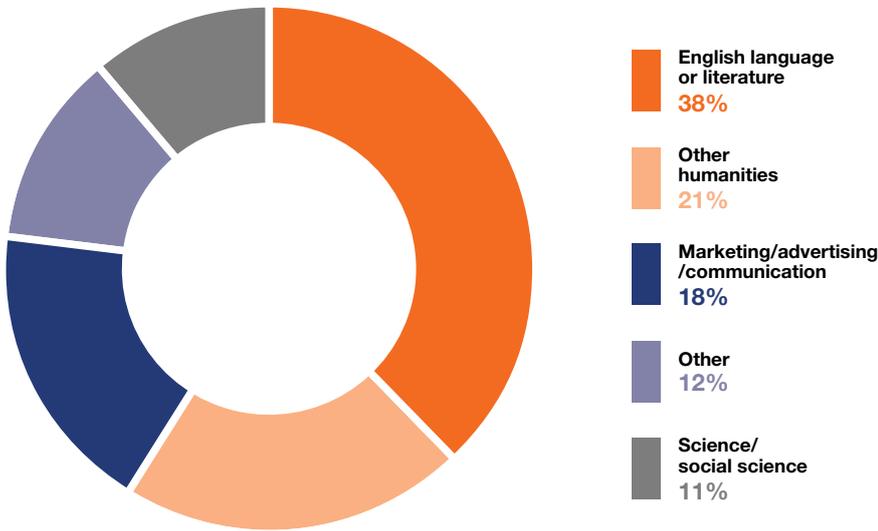
Education and training

We asked copywriters about their highest level of qualification. Twenty-nine per cent hold a postgraduate degree, but the majority (57%) have studied to bachelor's degree level. Ten per cent have A-levels, and 5% have GCSEs.



In terms of what copywriters studied, English language and literature predictably came out top with 38%, followed by other humanities subjects with 21%. Perhaps surprisingly, just 18% have studied marketing, advertising or communications. Scientists, including social scientists, made up 11% of the sample (see graph on next page).





Copywriting is...
Flinging a big ol' bucket of clarity over a puddle of muddle

Was all that schooling worth it? In our sample, 28% say their area of study was very useful, and 56% say it was quite useful. Seventeen per cent see no real value in their studies for their copywriting career.



Forty-five per cent of respondents say they've done copywriting-specific training, while the other 55% haven't.

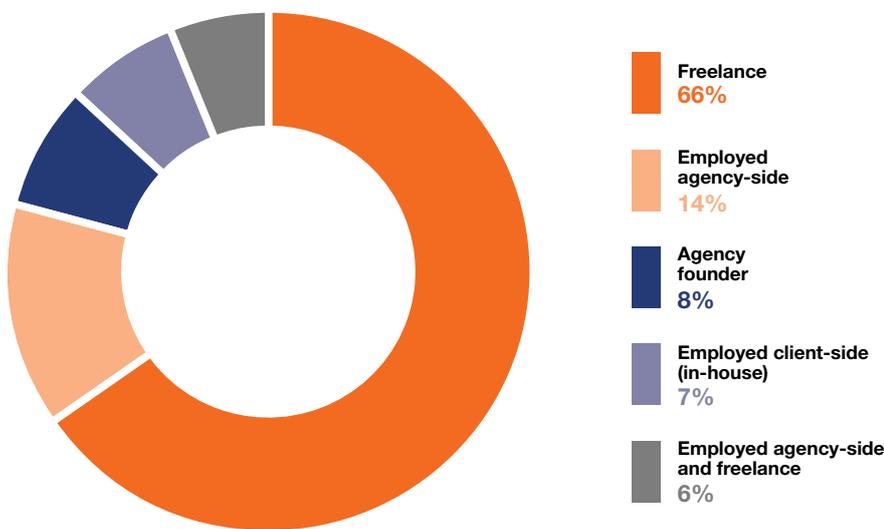


What copywriters do

How copywriters work, what they specialise in and what they do as well as writing.

Nature of employment

The majority of copywriters who responded to our survey – 66% – work as freelancers. Fourteen per cent work in agencies, while 8% have founded agencies themselves. In-house writers account for 7%, and the remaining 6% are employed in agencies but do some freelance work on the side.



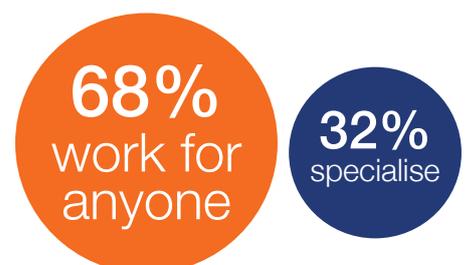
Copywriting is...
Inspiring action through
the written word

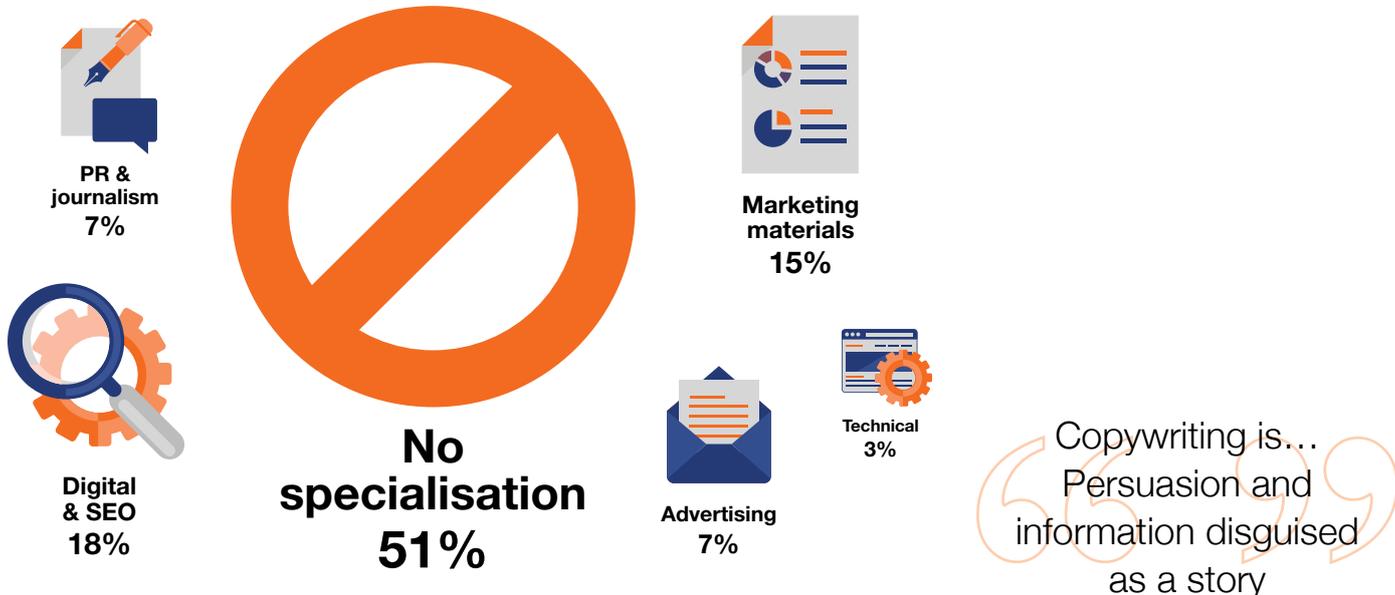
Copywriting is...
Jolly good fun

Disciplines and specialisations

We asked what sort of work copywriters focus on. More than half (51%) say they don't specialise in any type of work. The rest concentrate on digital and SEO (18%), marketing materials (15%), PR/journalism (7%), advertising (7%) and technical writing (3%) (see graph on next page).

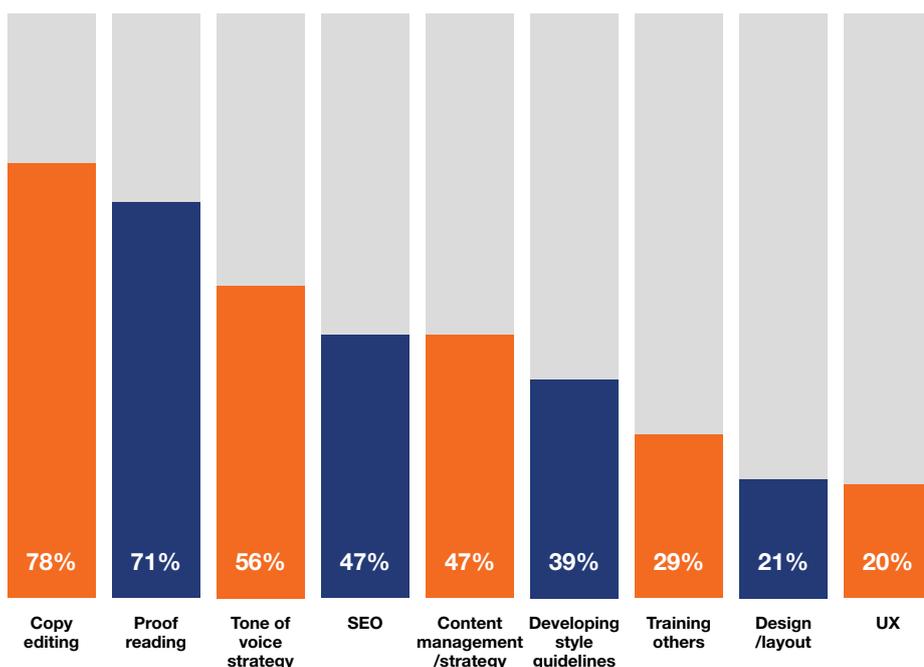
We also asked whether copywriters specialise in any particular sector (without getting into what that sector was). Thirty-two per cent say they did; the other 68% write for all types of clients.





Other roles

Many copywriters, particularly freelancers, find it beneficial to add other skills to their cv. So we asked them what other tasks they regularly carry out in addition to copywriting.



Copy-editing came out top with 78%, closely followed by proofreading on 71%. The growing of interest in tone of voice is reflected by the 56% of copywriters who develop TOV strategies for clients, while on the digital side, both SEO and content strategy are practised by 47% of copywriters.

Almost one-third of copywriters provide training for others, and over a fifth get involved in design.

User experience came bottom of the list, but still forms part of the work of 20% of copywriters.

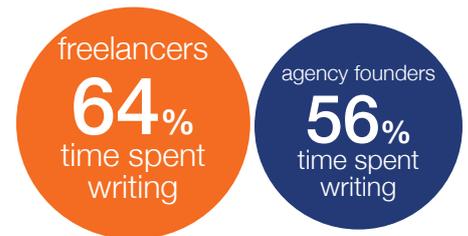
Only 4.9% of respondents indicated that their work was 'pure' copywriting, i.e. that they did no additional tasks at all.

Copywriting is...
Creative writing with
an eye on purpose

Time spent on other tasks

We were interested in finding out how copywriters spend their day. Specifically, how much of it do they spend actually writing, and how much on other things, like email, meetings and admin?

Freelancers came top with 64% of the day spent writing on average, closely followed by agency (62%) and in-house writers (60%). Agency founders, perhaps unsurprisingly, have the least time to devote to writing: on average, they spend just 56% of the day practising their craft.



Working as a freelance copywriter

When people go freelance, how they work and how they find new clients.

Experience before going freelance

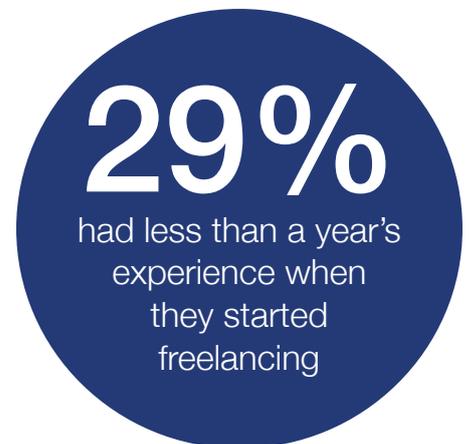
How many years' experience do copywriters get under their belts before they take the plunge and go freelance?

We saw a huge range of responses, from zero (newcomers entering the industry as freelancers) right up to 40. The average number of years before going freelance was 5.6. Twenty-nine per cent of respondents said they had less than a year's experience when they went freelance.

Our data paints a picture of an industry with very low barriers to entry, in which anyone can at least try their hand with little or no previous experience.

Working arrangements

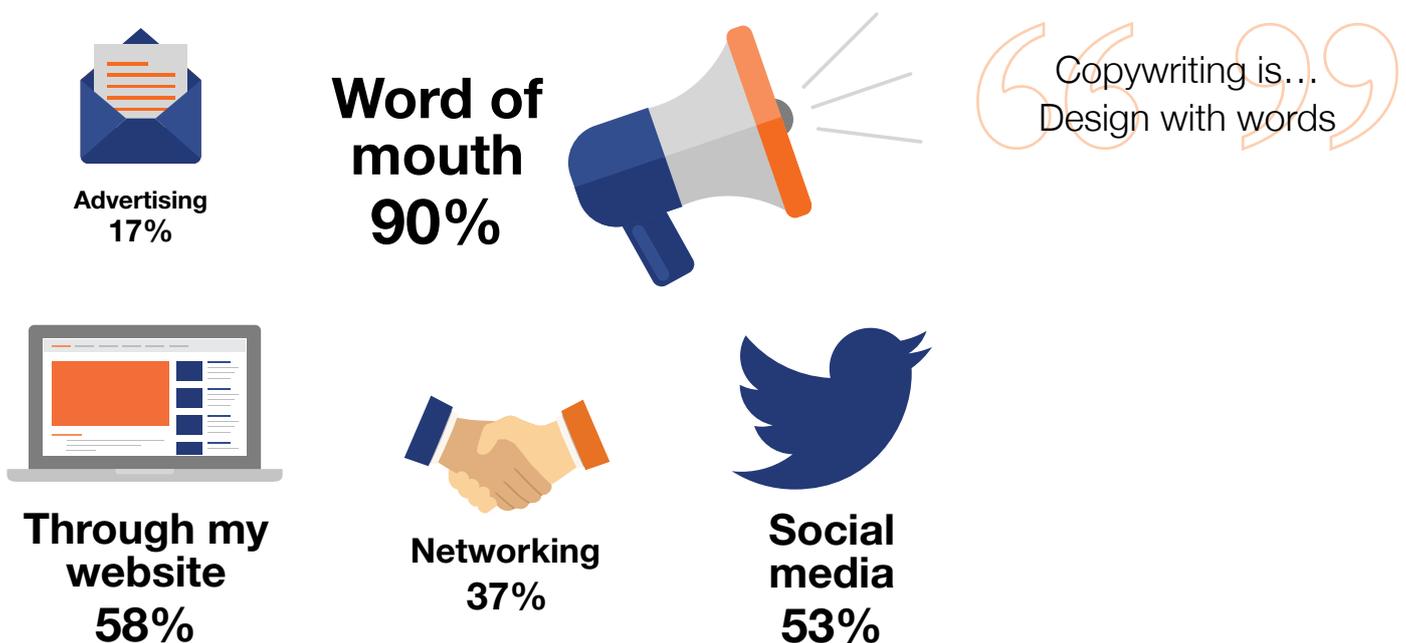
Freelance copywriters generally work either directly with clients, or through an agency. We asked copywriters which type of arrangement was most prevalent for them. Fifty-three per cent worked mainly with clients, 11% worked mainly for agencies and 36% said they had a fairly equal mix of both types of arrangement.



“Copywriting is...
Lassoing the intangible”

Finding new clients

The challenge of finding new clients looms large for most freelance copywriters – especially early on in their careers. We asked them how they went about it.



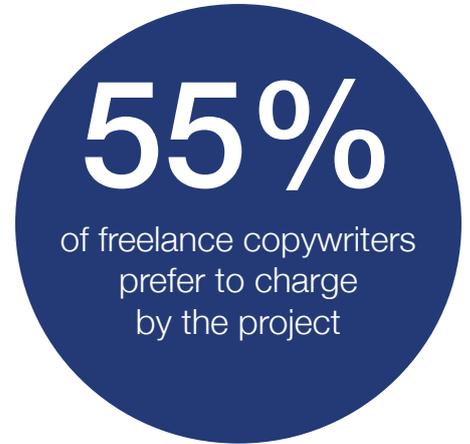
Word of mouth works for 90% of copywriters, while 58% use a website and 53% social media. Only 37% leave the office to go networking. And considering how much effort copywriters put into writing ads for other people, it's perhaps ironic that just 17% use advertising to promote their own services.

Freelance rates

How freelancers charge, what their rates are and what they'd like them to be.

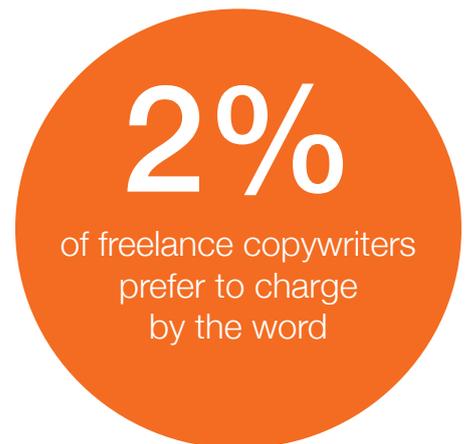
How freelancers charge

We asked freelancers how they charge for their work. Around 70% use a flat, per-project fee, while a similar proportion use hourly or daily rates. Only 9% said they use a per-word rate. (Note that these methods aren't exclusive; respondents might use more than one.)



Preferred charging model

We also asked freelancers which one method of charging they'd *prefer* to use, given the choice. Project fees came out on top with 55%, ahead of daily/hourly rates at 43%, while per-word rates were generally unloved, being preferred by just 2%. (These findings support the guidance we provide alongside our own **suggested rates**, where we endorse project fees as the best method of charging.)



Copywriting is...
Telling lies to strangers
for money

Taken together, these findings suggest that, while most freelancers prefer project fees, many still end up using other methods, including per-word rates – presumably out of commercial necessity.

Daily rates for freelance work

To explore freelance earnings in more detail using an easily comparable measure, we focused on daily rates.

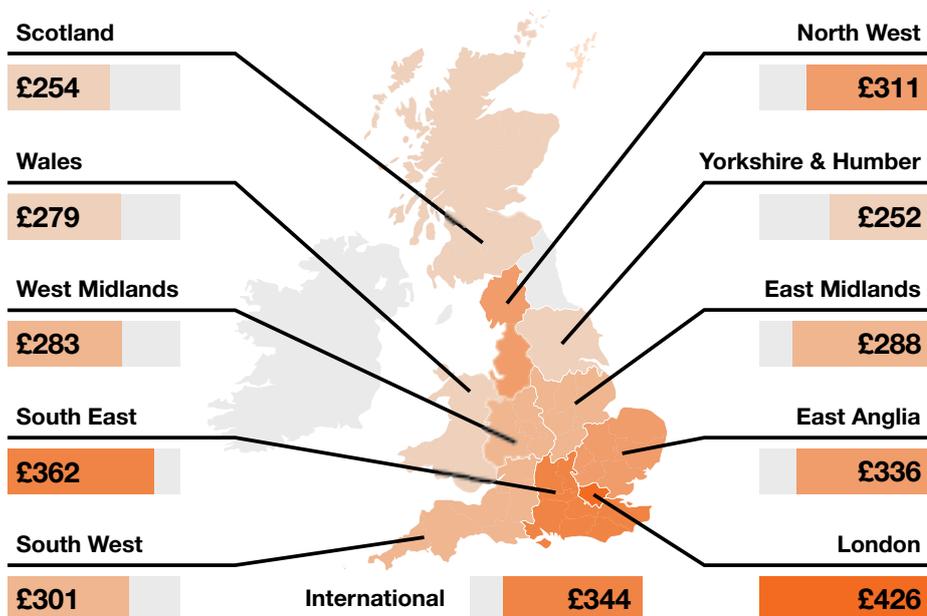
Here, we saw a huge range of responses, from low three-figures well into four. The average daily rate across all freelancers who provided information was £337.

However, there was significant regional variation. London, unsurprisingly, topped the table with £426, suggesting a London weighting of £89 per day (26%) compared to the average rate overall.

The South East came close behind with £362, and Scotland and Yorkshire/Humberside brought up the rear with average rates of £254 and £252 respectively. ‘International’ denotes writers who serve the UK market but are based overseas; their rates are slightly above average. (Unfortunately, we didn’t receive enough responses to calculate averages for every region.)



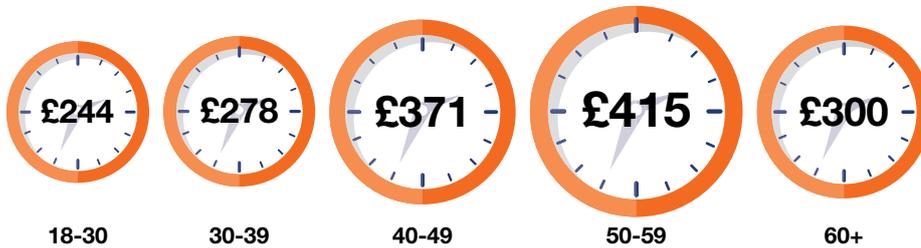
Copywriting is...
The best possible
words arranged in the
best possible order



Copywriting is...
Selling off the page

Freelance rates and age

The breakdown of freelance rates by age shows the sort of pattern we might expect. Copywriters under 30 can charge £244 a day on average, following which things get better over time, reaching a peak of £415 in the 50–59 age bracket.



Copywriting is...
Overlooked and
undervalued

Average rates seem to decline after the age of 60 – much more sharply than salaries do (see page 18). Speculating, this could reflect either marketplace perceptions of older writers or perhaps a scaling back of writers' own earnings targets as they near retirement. It certainly suggests that successful freelancers need to make hay while the sun shines, which seems to be during their later middle age.

Rate aspirations

Finally, we asked freelance copywriters how much they'd (realistically) like to charge. Among those who responded, the average actual daily rate was £323, while the average aspirational rate was £454. That's £131 (or 42%) higher, but still only slightly above the average for London – so not out of reach by any means, and certainly not an unrealistic target for experienced freelancers in the right location.



Earnings

How much copywriters earn, and how it's affected by their working style, age, experience, education and gender.

How we asked about earnings

In asking about earnings, we were aiming for a top-line figure reflecting what copywriters could bring in from their work annually, which would allow direct comparisons between agency founders who do hands-on writing, freelancers and in-house copywriters. We therefore asked respondents to provide a figure before tax and expenses. Agency founders were asked what they paid themselves, in salary and dividends.

Average full-time income

The average annual income across all full-time respondents was £39,850. Stated earnings varied very widely, from a few thousand pounds up to substantial six-figure totals.

Income and type of employment

The nature of copywriters' employment has an influence on what they can earn.

Agency founders, as we might expect, come out on top with an average income of £57,621.

The next highest are 'ordinary' freelancers, with an average of £39,883. Their earnings power may reflect the scope they have to 'turn up the machine' by working extra hours and taking on extra jobs – as well as their scope to negotiate optimum prices for each job and client (in theory, at least).

Agency copywriters come in around £37,300, whether or not they supplement their income by freelancing.

Finally, in-house copywriters (i.e. client-side) get the worst deal, with an average income of £31,481. (See graph on next page.)

Copywriting is...
Better than a real job



Copywriting is...
An awesome way
to earn a living



Copywriting is...
An exquisite art
of seduction

Income and age

The breakdown of average income by age band displays a similar pattern to freelance rates (see page 14). Copywriters under 30 can expect to bring in around £27,503 on average, but should see their earnings increase as time goes by, reaching a peak of just under £50k in their 40s.

Unlike freelance rates, however, earnings in the 50–59 and 60+ brackets decline only slightly following their peak. This could be because these figures include salaries, which may be more resilient than freelance rates. In other words, salaries tend either to increase or stay the same over time, whereas fees must be renegotiated afresh with each new client or job, giving the freelancer less shelter from market forces – or misperceptions about older writers.



Copywriting is...
Making the unreadable
readable

Income and experience

Does more time in the saddle necessarily mean a higher income? We found a moderate positive correlation of +0.4 between years spent as a copywriter and income, suggesting that copywriters can indeed expect their earning power to increase as they rack up experience.

Income and education

One of our most surprising findings came when we looked at income against level of education. While we might have predicted that more educated freelancers would earn more, the actual picture was very different.



Copywriting is...
Word magic

Graduates came out bottom with £37,992 on average, with postgrads and also A-level holders only slightly ahead.

Meanwhile, the 17 respondents who ended their formal education after GCSEs had average earnings of £58,474. Their average age was just over 50, and older copywriters do tend to earn more. However, we might speculate that this reflects a time when fewer young people went on to further or higher education. Another interpretation would be that the ‘university of life’ is an excellent preparation for a career as a copywriter.

Copywriting is...
Wit, pedantry
and patience

Income and location

As we might expect, location has a major influence on income. In our survey, London came top with an average of £49,298, closely followed (perhaps surprisingly) by East Anglia on £47,478 and the more predictable South East on £40,507.

At the bottom of the table, Scottish copywriters told us they earn £25,045 on average – just over half the going rate in London. (Unfortunately, we didn’t gather enough data to calculate average incomes for the North East or Northern Ireland.)

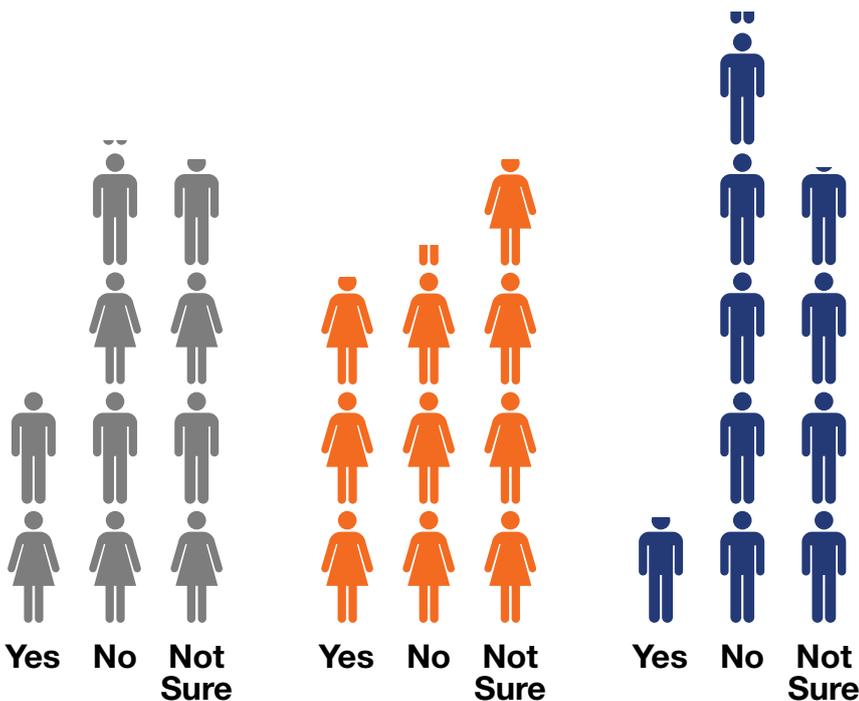


Income and gender

We asked respondents whether they think there's a gender gap in the copywriting industry. The general view is sceptical: just 20% say yes, 41% say no and 39% aren't sure.

However, views on the issue differed sharply between male and female respondents. While 29% of female copywriters think there is a gender gap, just 9% of male respondents agree. ('Not sures' are constant at ~39%.)

Copywriting is...
Writing (and thinking)
that sells stuff



So, what does the survey say? Among all 365 full-time respondents who provided data, the average income is £39,850. But while the average among men is £45,939, the average among women is £33,298.

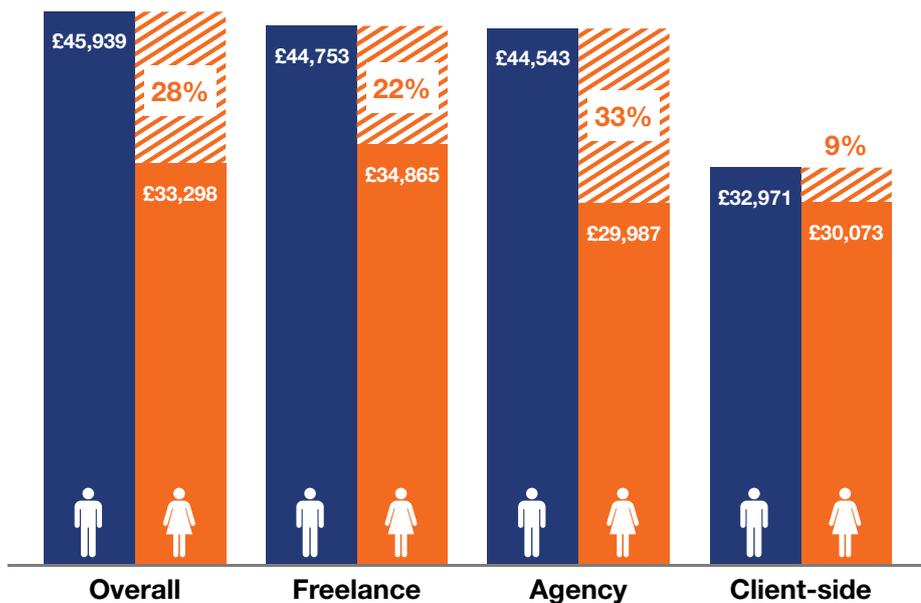
Our data therefore suggests an average pay gap of £12,641, or 28% (as a percentage of men's average income).

For comparison, according to the Office of National Statistics, in 2015, the gender pay gap for median earnings of UK full-time employees was 9.4%; for private-sector full-time employees only it was 17.2%, and for part-time and full-time employees combined it was 19.2%¹. However, the TUC found that the average pay gap for the top 10% of earners was as high as 54.9%².

Our survey data suggests a gender pay gap that varies between different types of copywriting employment, as shown on the graph below.

28%
average pay gap between male and female copywriters

Copywriting is...
Acting with words



For freelancers, the disparity is smaller, though still significant, at 22%. This might reflect the fact that female freelancers can determine their own rates, and are not dependent on an employer or a manager to assess their worth and set their salary accordingly.

Agencies have the largest gap, at 33%. This might reflect the glass ceiling in creative industries documented by campaigners such as the **3% Conference**: until recently, just 3% of creative directors were women.

1. See http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_424052.pdf

2. See <https://www.tuc.org.uk/equality-issues/gender-pay-gap-uk's-top-earners-hits-55-says-tuc>

If female copywriters can't get promoted, they'll probably find it harder to improve their own earnings (or have a say in the promotion and payment of others).



Copywriters employed client-side displayed the smallest disparity in earnings – 9%, which is just below the overall UK average. Here, we might speculate that 'normal' companies are more likely to treat copywriting impartially as 'just another job', without letting perceptions (or prejudices) about gender and writing ability distort the setting of salaries.

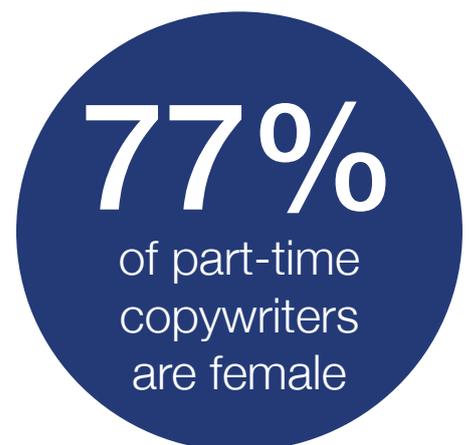
The size of our sample and the nature of our survey mean we have to be very cautious in interpreting these findings. However, the consistent and significant disparity in earnings suggests that there probably is some level of gender pay gap in copywriting – even if it's hard to say for sure how big it is.

Part-time copywriters

We asked part-time copywriters to report their earnings as a full-time equivalent (FTE) – that is, what they would have earned if they had worked full-time. However, with 22% of part-time respondents reporting earnings under £10,000, and an average part-time income of £23,000 (against a full-time average of £39,878), we were concerned that many had actually entered their total, rather than FTE, earnings. So we decided to analyse them separately.

Seventy-seven per cent of part-timers are female, presumably reflecting the fact they are combining family commitments with their freelance work. Interestingly, part-timers display an inverse gender pay gap: while male part-time copywriters reported earnings of £20,569, their female counterparts recorded an average of £24,054 (a gap of –17%).

However, it's important to bear in mind that this data may reflect a mix of total and FTE earnings. For future surveys, we will aim to make it easier to report earnings in a more intuitive way and avoid any confusion.



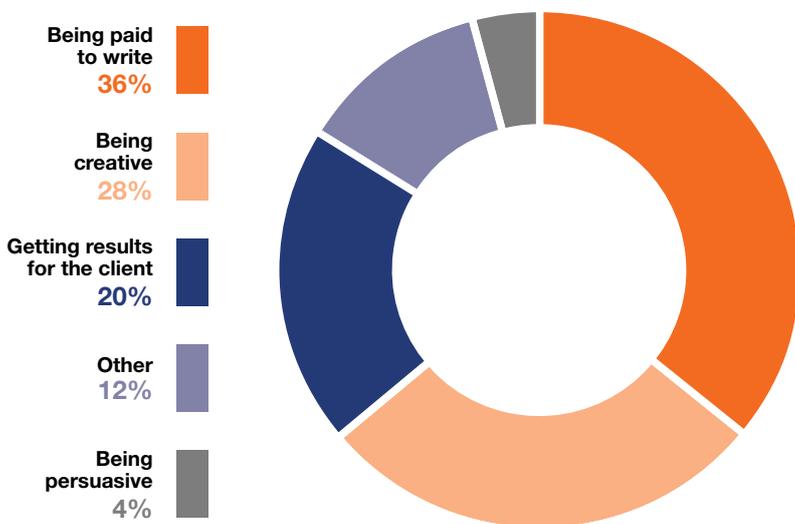
Motivation and aspirations

What copywriters value today, and what they want tomorrow.

Most enjoyable aspect of copywriting

We asked copywriters what they most enjoyed about their work. The simple pleasure of ‘being paid to write’ came top with 36%, followed by ‘being creative’ at 28%.

Direct marketers, conversion-rate experts and indeed paying clients may be disappointed to see ‘getting results for the client’ only achieving third place, with 20%.



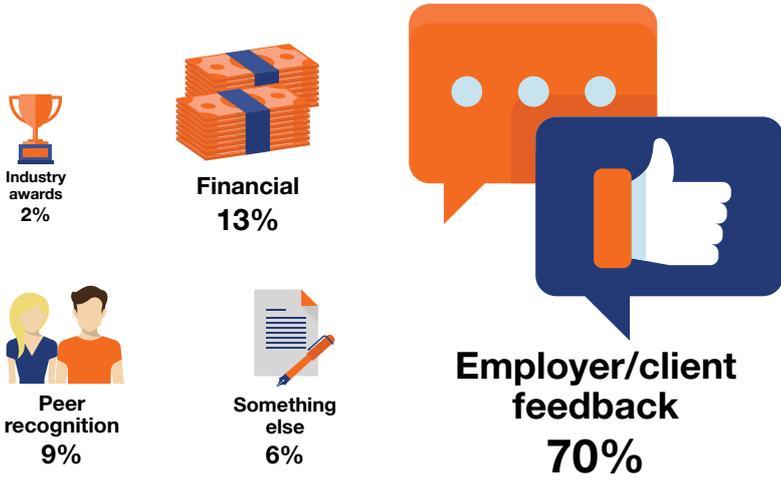
Copywriting is...
An expression of
creativity with a goal

Recognition and rewards

When it comes to recognition, it seems copywriters put most faith in those who set the briefs – and sign the cheques. Feedback from employers or clients was by far the most valued form of recognition, at 70%. Financial reward was insignificant by comparison, at just 13%. (See graphic on next page.)

Despite the social-media revolution, peer recognition is also relatively unimportant, being the main focus of just 9% of writers. And industry awards figure for a remarkably low 2%. (Sour grapes?)

Copywriting is...
A crafted conversation



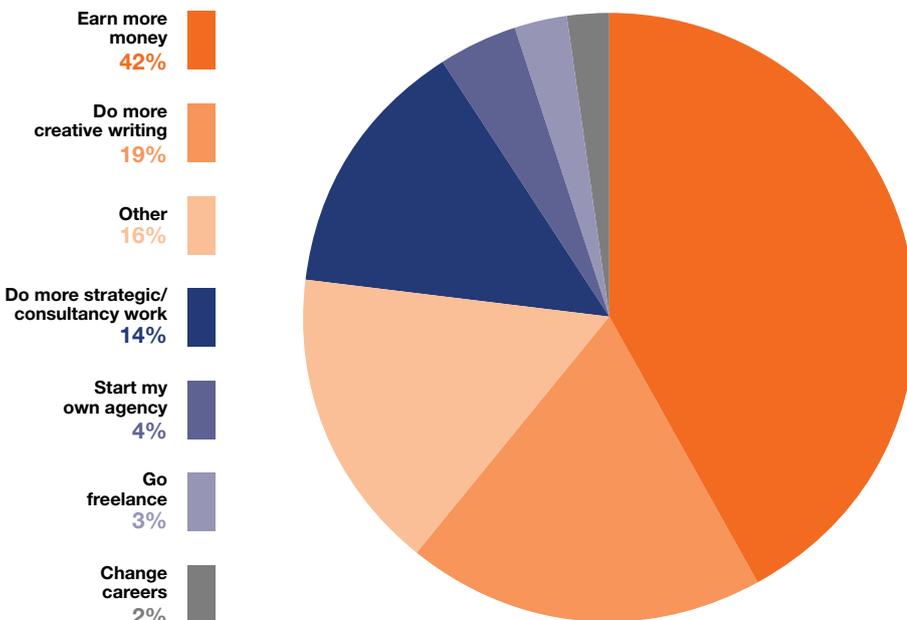
Future plans

We asked copywriters how they'd like to see their career develop over the next few years.

Copywriters might not look to money as a form of recognition, but that doesn't mean they're going to turn it down: 42% said they wanted to earn more cash in future. Nineteen per cent wanted to get more creative in their work, and 14% wanted to get off the keyboard and do more consulting.

Since only 2% expressed a desire to change careers, we have to conclude that the overwhelming majority are happy with the copywriting life.

Copywriting is...
Hard work, but
bloody enjoyable



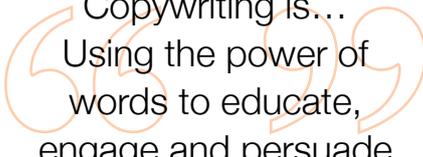
About the survey

What we were aiming for, how we conducted the survey and some points to bear in mind about our findings.

Aim

The aim of the survey was to collect and share information on the working lives of copywriters serving the UK market, including their educational and professional background, how they work, what they do, how much they earn and how they feel about their work.

A secondary aim was to gather empirical data on which to base a revision of PCN's suggested rates for copywriters.

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Copywriting is...
Using the power of
words to educate,
engage and persuade

Questionnaire

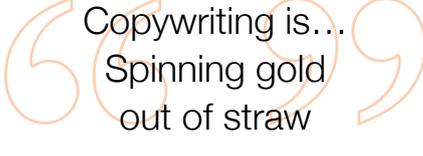
The questionnaire was drafted by Joanna Tidball, PCN Website Editor, with input from Tom Albrighton, PCN Director.

The questionnaire comprised 30 questions spread over a total of 11 pages, and was designed so respondents could complete it in less than 10 minutes. Before launch, it was tested by two copywriters not affiliated with PCN (Sue Keogh and Graeme Piper) and revised slightly based on their feedback.

Data collection and publicity

The survey was hosted online on SurveyMonkey. It opened on 30 November 2015 and closed on 31 January 2016 (an open period of 62 days).

During that period, we publicised the survey via a blog post on the PCN site, Twitter posts, LinkedIn updates, a press release and emails to members. Publicity efforts continued throughout the open period, but were concentrated at the start (early December 2015).

A graphic consisting of two large, stylized, light orange quotation marks. The text is centered within the space between the marks.

Copywriting is...
Spinning gold
out of straw

Respondent profile

Anyone could respond to the survey, and participation was not restricted to PCN members. However, we did stipulate that only copywriters serving the UK market (whether based here, or overseas) should respond – the same criterion as for PCN membership.

Anonymity

All responses were completely anonymous and confidential. No personal information was requested or collected, including IP addresses. This was to maximise participation and encourage the sharing of financial information.

We have opted not to reveal information such as salary ranges, since this would effectively disclose the salaries of the respondents at the two extremes of the range, albeit anonymously.

A graphic consisting of two large, stylized, orange-outlined quotation marks. The text is centered within the space between the marks.

Copywriting is...
Structured play with
words and ideas

Analysis and reporting

Analysis was carried out using SurveyMonkey's integrated tools and Excel. This report was written by Tom Albrighton with input from Joanna Tidball.

Dataset

We received a total of 610 responses.

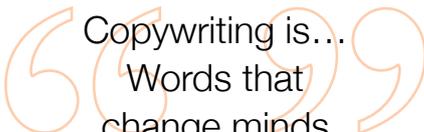
Most questions were obligatory, with a few (such as gender) optional. When analysing the data, we created a new subset including only those respondents who had made a valid response to the relevant question(s). Percentages therefore reflect proportions of these subsets, rather than proportions of the entire data set.

Limitations and disclaimers

This was an open survey conducted in good faith. Participation was anonymous, with no vetting of respondents or any way to confirm the accuracy of their responses. Therefore, we cannot rule out distortions or inaccuracies resulting from errors, misinformation or malice, nor can we guarantee that all respondents fit the profile that we stipulated.

While the SurveyMonkey platform blocks repeated completions originating from the same IP address, we cannot rule out duplicate responses.

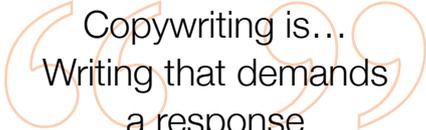
We publicised the survey as best we could, given our public profile and the resources we had available. However, our data may not be representative of the entire population of

A graphic consisting of two large, stylized, orange-outlined quotation marks. The text is centered within the space between the marks.

Copywriting is...
Words that
change minds

UK copywriters, and may over-represent certain profiles over others (such as those that are prevalent in our membership).

The data in this report is provided for information only and does not constitute any sort of advice or recommendation, nor is it intended as a basis for negotiating fees, contracts, salaries or commercial arrangements of any kind or between any parties. PCN accepts no responsibility for any actions you may take, or refrain from taking, based on the information in this report.



Copywriting is...
Writing that demands
a response



Copywriting is...
Beautiful, powerful
words



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