

Social Networking & LinkedIn

Using social media sites to promote your writing, your
business . . . and you!

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Steve Maurer, with Ali Luke – Aliventures.com

Maurer Copywriting

Networking and Using LinkedIn Effectively

Introduction to Steve Maurer and Maurer Copywriting

Ali: I'm sure many Huddlers will be familiar with Steve Maurer, one of our "alumni". I've really enjoyed watching him launch a stellar career as a copy and content writer, and I often see his name pop up on the blogs I read.

Thank you for that kind introduction, Ali!

Maurer Copywriting is my writing business and I'm a B2B copywriting and content marketing writer. I started several years ago, writing for a discount text broker. Now, I work off better job boards and directly with clients that I contact or that have contacted me.

I have an international business, with clients in Europe, Canada, across the United States and in some small towns. While that may sound impressive, it really isn't.

In fact, it's inevitable.

The Internet has truly made the entire world accessible to the writer. From my home office, a converted carport in Arkansas, I can write content and copy for virtually anyone across the globe.

And have.

I actually have only one client in Arkansas at this time. All of my other clients are either out of state or out of the country. Not only that, but I've only visited or even spoken with a less than handful of them. Most of my business communications, from initial contact to proposal to finished product and payment, have been completely done online.

I use a desktop computer; but with my trusty laptop by my side, I can also work from anywhere. I've seen my business grow from penny-a-word jobs, to much larger, more lucrative contracts. I'm not done, however, and continue to learn, grow and expand my knowledge and skills.

I started working hard on Maurer Copywriting when there was a slowdown at work. I lost all overtime and needed to make that up somehow.

I still work a 40-hour week as an industrial electrician, but put in about 30 hours a week with my business.

Steve's Early Days as a Copywriter

*Ali: I didn't realise you had a full-time job on top of the business – wow! So you've explained the "why", but can you tell us a bit about **how** you got started as a copywriter and content marketing writer?*

First, let me say that I mentioned my "day job" to let Huddle members know that it's possible, sometimes preferable, to start your business while you still have a regular income. Good time management allows you to build your writing career on a tight "time budget."

(However, when you get serious about making writing a full-time, self-supporting career, you will need to start making some sacrifices and take some calculated risks. That's where I find myself this year.)

Allow some flexibility, however. I do take breaks and about 9:00 AM, I can expect a visit from my "business advisor." Our granddaughter, Lillie, comes down to chat about the day's schedule. She has a special chair (I dare not have anything on it or I get chastised) and we confer a bit.

I don't always understand what she says; but it's always motivational!

Not only does this give me an oft-needed break, but it reminds me of one of the reasons I'm building this business. Motivation and relaxation and Granddad time, all at once!

Back to the question about the early days.

I've always loved to write. My first online venture was a personal website where I posted tutorials on computer use, hardware and software. I made a feeble attempt at monetizing it with a business card creation service.

I knew I had a book inside me and eventually wrote "The Email Primer – from @ to Zip." Catchy title, right?! I offered it as a free download and during the first five years, it was downloaded hundreds of times a week. I wish now that I had been charging five or ten bucks each time.

Live and learn!

Anyway, the downloads and the email questions that began to pour in got me thinking. *Maybe I should look into writing as a career.* Several years ago I checked out an ad on Craigslist and research led me to Textbroker, an article writing clearinghouse. I still remember my first article, "How to Use a Carpet Seam Iron." It netted me a whopping \$4.95.

Not much money, but I realized that I could write and people would pay me for it. After writing there, I took various writing and marketing courses that honed my skills. [AWAI](#) (American Writers and Artists, Inc.) became my copywriting university. Before that, a class from [Daily Writing Tips](#) led me to the Writers' Huddle and that strengthened my skills as well.

An AWAI course on content marketing, taught by Brian Clark of [Copyblogger](#) fame, led me into the field of content marketing article writing. I knew I'd found my writing type niche.

After finally getting serious about a writing career, things started happening. I set up shop in the room next to Mary's sewing room (she's a seamstress and a home-based child care provider) and it was game on!

We will often be working at the same time, sometimes late into the night.

An office is essential. However, *it doesn't need to be a room or rented facility.* It can be as small as a corner of your living room. I actually started writing in the dining room until we built the addition that would become our joint offices. In good weather, I sometimes use my outdoor office, the picnic table in the yard.

The point is that it helps to designate an office space, *no matter how small. **Keep that area sacred.*** When you sit down, **it's time to write.**

Having a set place to write, even having "writing clothes," helps you **transform** into a writer. When I'm working on a client's project, I'm not wearing raggedy jeans and a T-shirt. I've got shirts and pants that are my writer's garb. When I don them and step through the door, I'm a professional writer.

Ali: I remember writing about Australian college football when I started out – those early jobs can be an interesting mixed bag! I think what you say about finding your niche as a freelance writer is really important; I've specialized in blog posts and that's worked well for me.

Networking Techniques and Strategies

Ali: What techniques have you found particularly useful in networking to grow your business?

Let me start by saying that networking, especially on social networks sites, is only a part of the equation, albeit an important one. If you want to grow your business, **you need to build an overall strategy.**

Think of your business as a wagon wheel. The outer rim is your target market or audience. The spokes of the wheel are your social networking sites, your offline networking and other marketing efforts. The hub of the wheel is your writer's site. That's where the real selling happens, whether it's your product or your service.

Or you.

If any Huddlers don't have a website or have been putting it off, I'd like to encourage them to get one started. It's your base of operations for online . . . and offline business success.

I'd like to mention that while a free site will work, you'll eventually want to get a self-hosted, professional site. It's really not too expensive to get one started.

One that is truly your own property.

My friend, [Nick Osborne](#) puts it this way. "If you want to be successful, you need to get some skin in the game." Nothing spurs success like having something to lose!

And my grandfather always told me, "Don't build your house on borrowed land."

That said, social networking has always been a natural part of life. In a recent article for Uberflip, I mentioned that social networking has been a part of many activities and locations:

- Quilting bees,
- Barber shops and hair salons
- Pubs and restaurants, and
- Park benches!

You've already been networking socially . . . now you can network digitally and with a larger, international group!

Ali: I'm absolutely with you on the important of having a website (Huddlers, you might want to take a look at the mini-course on setting up your blog, which is a very useful and easy-to-update type of website to have.) It's a really good idea to get that in place before beginning any networking efforts.

Handy Networking Tips for Shy Writers

I know a lot of writers find the idea of networking a bit daunting, though (and it's taken me a long time to get even close to comfortable with it!) What would you recommend to writers who are quite introverted and shy?

Get over it and quickly! ;-)

Seriously, though, it's a common characteristic of many home-based writers. Since we work much of the time cloistered away in our private, secluded candle-lit cubicles, slaving away with parchment and quill, we often lack the social connections or skills necessary to come out of our shell.

My advice is to start using social media to build confidence. As you watch others converse, you'll find the poise to begin chiming in yourself. And groups like the Writers' Huddle will also promote self-assurance as you begin contributing to the discussions.

Additionally, find local networking gatherings in your area and begin attending. Start mingling and listening. Find out what other people are interested in and, when you feel comfortable, begin contributing.

Just get out and start talking to people. Let people talk to you as you become a good listener. Never ask closed-end questions; always ask open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer.

When you listen, really listen, folks will promote you as a fabulous conversationalist. And remember, the most important and sweetest word in any language is a person's name. Use theirs whenever you can.

Work up an "elevator speech" about what you do so that you can quickly summarize when asked. *However, turn the conversation back onto the other person quickly.* People love to talk about themselves, so take advantage of that.

And don't forget business cards! I've recently gotten clients with these old-school, archaic bits of cardboard. They still work wonders!

Finally, on that topic of shyness, you should start looking at yourself through different eyes. *You need to start seeing yourself as an expert!* Almost all the world can write . . . *but few are actually writers.* There's a difference.

And if you don't think yourself an expert, consider this. Experts are not those who know it all. They are people, just like you, who chose to keep learning, keep expanding their horizons and keep on growing.

If people are coming to you to write for them, they consider you an expert. It's time for **you** to do that as well.

On the same note: If you write and people pay you for it, you're a professional writer. *Think about it.*

Ali: What a great set of tips! I absolutely agree with you on open-ended questions, and I know I need to get a new set of business cards. In terms of confidence and feeling like an expert, you're right; we writers are a rarer breed than we realise. You might find that writing a blog post or sales page or newsletter comes really easily to you, so you feel like it's not much of a skill – but trust me, that skill is of huge value to your clients.

Networking Tactics That Waste Time / Money

So turning from great ideas to less great ones, are there any tactics you've tried that you felt were a waste of time / money?

The biggest waste of time was not being active enough. Second to that was not automating my social networking efforts. Let's take the first one.

In the beginning, I created a website and then waited around for people to come streaming in by the boat load.

It doesn't happen that way.

My website was static and rarely, if ever, moved up in the search engines. Adding a blog to the site improved my ratings. Every time I make a post, a ping is sent to Google and Yahoo! And several other search engines as well. I need to post more frequently still yet.

To give you a real-world example: I helped start a new [website](#) for our church in October of this year. In three months we've had over **2100 hits from 9 countries**. The most viewed pages – [blog posts](#).

Automation is another key tactic that took a while for me to learn. Now when I post an article, it's automatically posted to my LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Another time-waster is trying to be on too many social networks. Not every social network works for your service. For example, I'm not on Pinterest as the majority of my target prospects won't be there either. Research your client base and you'll find out which will be the most beneficial sites to frequent.

Ali: I use Buffer to schedule social media updates and find that's really handy. It's definitely a good idea to get some automation in place – especially as your business grows. And I agree that not all social networks are created equal! It's best to pick one or two that are relevant to your clients and focus on those, rather than spreading yourself too thinly.

Networking on LinkedIn

So with social networks in mind, I thought we could move on to talk a bit about LinkedIn. I expect everyone in the Huddle has at least heard of LinkedIn, but just in case anyone's not familiar with it, I'll try to explain it briefly.

LinkedIn is a business-focused social network, where your profile lists things like your previous jobs and roles. You could think of your LinkedIn profile as an online resume or CV. On LinkedIn, you can connect to other people (they have to approve the connection) – e.g. friends, past colleagues, clients. You can also search for people and businesses – e.g. by searching "copywriting". The more people you're connected to, the more visible you'll be in searches.

So the first step on LinkedIn that writers might struggle with is writing their profile. It can feel a bit weird to "blow your own trumpet" – do you have any tips for writing a good profile on LinkedIn?

It's a misconception that you're blowing your own horn. That's not what a profile is all about. A profile is used to present your skills, for sure. But more importantly, **it shows that you understand your prospect's concerns, needs and challenges**.

And that you have the ability to help them with those issues.

In word, marketing.

Think about how you would look for a doctor, dentist, lawyer or other professional. You'd look for their **service offerings, recommendations** and other **information**. A LinkedIn profile is no different.

Your LinkedIn profile is a marketing tool, plain and simple. Marketing themselves is difficult for many people. One of the reasons is that they don't feel comfortable talking about their skills. They feel like they will come off as bragging. Nothing could be farther from the truth . . . when done correctly.

The best way to overcome this fear of promotion is to place your emphasis on the prospect, not yourself. For example, I don't sell writing services. I offer content solutions. Show a genuine concern for your target market prospects and you'll become a likeable expert to them.

Don't forget that you can use LinkedIn to find vendors and partners as well. Need a publisher or graphic designer? Check out LinkedIn. Remember that bartering is alive and well on the Internet.

Clients via LinkedIn

Ali: I think focusing on the audience and what you can do for them, rather than on yourself, is a great tip for almost any kind of marketing (and for overcoming public speaking fears).

I wondered whether you've had any clients as a direct result of LinkedIn?

Yes, I have. In fact, I'm in talks with one that contacted me recently. He had seen one of my posts on LinkedIn referencing an article I wrote for Uberflip, in Canada. He read the article on Uberflip and then clicked the link to my website. Filling out my contact form, he started the dialog. I've had others contact me after viewing my LinkedIn profile.

One of my current Canadian clients found me on LinkedIn. I now write two articles a month for their blog.

Common LinkedIn Mistakes

Ali: That's great to hear. You're obviously doing it right ... so what mistakes do you see other writers making with LinkedIn?

Probably the first mistake is not filling out the profile as completely as possible. This is particularly important when writing the summary. It is your LinkedIn business card. You don't need to do it all at once and what you've written is not set in stone. I've changed the summary on my profile several times as I learned more about the business and myself.

Another mistake I feel many make is not having a good photo on their profile. A pretty graphic might work for some folks. But, in my opinion, the photo humanizes you, makes you more real and accessible. Some believe that you need a professionally done photo. And that's all right; but it didn't work for me. The photo I use is of me, sitting in my office with a coffee cup in my hand. I'm looking right at the viewer with a smile that (hopefully) promotes trust and concern.



It was taken, by the way, by my wife Mary.

That photo is actually the only one that I use for identifying myself anywhere. It's a form of branding. You'll see the same photo on my twitter page, Facebook wall and my website [Gravatar](#). I use it on my Google+ account as well. It's also the photo that shows up beside Google search engine results that pertain to me, even if the topic is on other websites.

I do see some LinkedIn members use photos that I feel are not appropriate for their profile. Nothing really embarrassing or rude. *Just wrong.*

For instance, one new copywriter asked me to look at her profile and make suggestions. Going there, I saw a photo of her, sitting on a couch with a drink in her hand. The rest of the photo indicated she was at a party with friends.

Again, nothing inappropriate was shown. But it didn't give the impression of a serious writer. Her new profile picture showcases a more professional, more thoughtful side of her personality.

Lastly a major mistake I see many new LinkedIn users make is not expanding their presence. Obviously, the first people you'll connect with are family, friends and people you know already. And if you're going to start a LinkedIn profile, feel free to connect with me. But don't stop there.

Eventually, you need to branch out and make new connections.

You should also join some groups. While groups for Huddle members will include writing groups, you should also search out groups in your target audience. Even if you don't comment on discussions, you'll discover what's important to them.

It can give you great ideas for your own blog topics as well.

Ali: I think these are great tips not just for LinkedIn but for other social networks too. I know something I could definitely be doing better is participating in groups (not just joining them and forgetting about them, which is what I tend to do!)

Getting More Recommendations (Testimonials) on LinkedIn

Testimonials – what other people say about you – are a really powerful marketing tool. How do you encourage clients to leave you a recommendation on LinkedIn?

Simply put, I ask them.

I use the same technique on my website. After working with a client for a while, it's reasonable to ask for a recommendation. I've never had anyone say no; however, I've had a few ask me to write the recommendation for them, forwarding it to them for final approval.

I would like to make a distinction here between **recommendations** and **endorsements** on LinkedIn. Anyone can endorse you for a skill you have listed or for one that they believe you have. Most of these are legitimate. However, some are done merely to get an endorsement in exchange.

My rule of thumb is that I must know the person and recognize their skills before I endorse them.

Ali: I have to say I'm not too convinced about the new endorsement feature. Like you, I only endorse people when I feel I can actually say I've seen their skill in action. I've been endorsed by people for things I'm not even sure I do!

More LinkedIn Tips

When we talked about common mistakes, you gave us some great tips on using LinkedIn effectively, like making plenty of connections and joining groups. Is there anything else you can suggest?

Spend some quality time on your profile, including the headline (title). When people search for services on LinkedIn, they will use the same words and phrasing that they use on Google or other search engines. Capitalize on that.

I have my name as the main title, followed by the headline: **Professional B2B Writing – Plain and Simple. Press Releases, Case Studies, White Papers and Content Marketing.**



Steve Maurer  

Professional B2B Writing - Plain and Simple. Press Releases, Case Studies, White Papers and Content Marketing.

Fayetteville, Arkansas | Writing and Editing

Current Maurer Copywriting

Previous Tyson Foods, Steve Maurer Publications

Education American Writers and Artists, Inc

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236 connections

Next create a good summary of your experience and include portfolio pieces if you have them.

Do post updates on your LinkedIn profile, just as you would on Twitter. In fact, you can have your LinkedIn updates automatically post to Twitter. Automation once again!

As for joining groups, you have several options. First, look for groups in your area of expertise. You can learn from your peers and help out as well. Comment when appropriate, but don't get too "salesy."

Then, you should join groups that relate to your target market or audience. Again, make well-thought-out comments. Your comments will often lead to people searching you out.

For example, I made a comment on a post on our local Chamber of Commerce LinkedIn group. That led to two more connections. One of them actually contacted me, telling me he was working with a local nonprofit group. They are going nationwide sometime in January 2014 and will need some press releases.

Ask for recommendations from people that you know will be honest. You don't want them to be too flowery (Mom thinks everything I write is gold). I believe that recommendations are more important than endorsements. They carry more weight.

Follow up with people who've viewed your profile. They've opened the door; don't be afraid to step through and offer your services!

Finally, start with the free LinkedIn profile. That's all many folks need, especially in the beginning. If you feel the need, you can upgrade to the various paid accounts. The free account works well for many people. There are some limitations, but not many for people just starting out.

By the way, here's my LinkedIn profile address:

www.linkedin.com/in/stevemaurecopywriting

If anyone has other questions that I didn't address, they can feel free to email me and I'll try to get back with them as soon as possible.

Ali: Thanks Steve, that's really kind of you – and thank you for all your great networking and LinkedIn advice. If anyone leaves questions in the forums, I'll be glad to alert Steve to those.

As well as LinkedIn, you can find Steve online in these places:

www.maurer-copywriting.com (where he has an excellent blog)

plus.google.com/+SteveMaurer

twitter.com/SteveMaurerMCW