Freelance of the month

Andrew Don tells Nikki Wicks what he loves about freelancing

Andrew Don started his career with the Fleet Street News Agency in the early Eighties, going freelance in 1990 after features, news editor and deputy editor roles on drinks and grocery titles.

He has written for the FT and The Times, specialist magazines such as The Grocer, Retail Jeweller and Press Gazette, and on subjects as varied as quarantine kennels (London Evening Standard), special educational needs (The Independent) and personal finance (The Observer).

How long have you been a freelance?
I have traded as Don's Hard News for 20 years as of 20 October this year.

Why freelance?
I am freelance by nature, highly self-disciplined and committed to my craft. Freelance journalism has been good to me. I get out what I put in. I suppose it is a bit like being on performance-related pay. I put in hard daily graft from 4.30am every day and reap the rewards. I am what I call a 'professional' freelance. This is an important distinction to make. I love the sale – the pitch for the job. When you send off 10 ideas and two of them are bought, it's a great feeling.

Which are your main sources of work?
I've written for hundreds of publications both in the UK and overseas – nationals, regionals, consumer magazines, B2B, online publications and corporate/trade association websites. I supply daily news for Estates Gazette Interactive, and have, in the past,


Andrew Don: Up at 4.30am

provided similar services for William Reed's hospitality websites and RBI's Farmers Weekly Interactive and Chemical News and Intelligence. I tap into a network of freelance journalists for website news digest work.

What's been your best-ever gig?
My editorship of Salon Focus, which ended last month, was exhilarating and taught me so many new things, not least about working as a team – a big challenge for someone who is by nature a lone wolf.

Interviewing the late Bernie Grant at the House of Commons was enjoyable, and taking supermarket managers on a study tour to Germany, Canada and the USA when I worked for SuperMarketing. So was fighting for a phone box pre-mobile days at 3am when I covered a siege... oh and the Brixton Riots – magic!

And what's been your worst?
When I worked for SuperMarketing, from 1986 to 1990, the Danish Bacon and Meat Council invited a load of the trade journos to Copenhagen and treated us to a slaughterhouse tour. Denmark was great, but the slaughterhouse! My trade colleagues commented that I had turned a nasty shade of green. I've been vegetarian ever since.

Have you done anything ridiculous for money?
I worked in Lloyds Bank when I left school. I walked out after a week. I was so traumatised by the experience that I vowed to go back into education and get my A-levels. Thanks Lloyds – I would never have made it without you.

What's the secret of keeping the wolf from the door?
An impeccable work ethic.

What are your commissioning editor gripes?
I don't have any. I love my customers. I'd be nothing without them. To be a good professional freelance you have to offer an exemplary service. I aspire to provide the best service I possibly can to every customer all of the time. I have no time for freelance journalists who whinge. Journalism is a privilege. Stop moaning and get on with it. ●

Email: Journalist.don@virgin.net
Telephone: 020 8959 7358
Website: Launches this autumn/winter

Perfect pitch GET IT RIGHT WHEN MAKING A PITCH

The monthly title Mother & Baby describes itself as the pregnancy and parenting magazine for modern mothers

Circulation: 53,399 (Source: ABC)
Publisher: Bauer Media
Editor: Miranda Levy
www.askmum.co.uk

Pitch to: For real-life and emotional features, jemma.Walton@bauermedia.co.uk, for health-related or news-driven features, rachel.liddle@bauermedia.co.uk. Email a headline along with a tight paragraph describing the story.

What types of article do you look for? Real-life first-person features on different aspects of motherhood. Also health and emotional features, in-depth special reports and humorous opinion pieces. Look through the magazine and try to match what you are selling to a particular section.

Post-pitch? Email after a couple of days if you've not heard back from us.

What will impress Someone who has read our magazine and thought carefully about the kind of material we like to run, and how we like to run it.

What will NOT impress Someone who suggests an article on 'cradle cap'. We like freelances to approach us with fresh, original and considered takes on parenting topics.

Rates Discussed with individual writer, but generally £200 for opinion pieces and up to £600 for six-page, expert-heavy guides.

Will writers be expected to provide images with their articles? Not always.

