

Expert Insight

Shared Learning for Faster Business Growth



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Writing for Profit

>> Japan is not typically seen as a country where you can change careers, let alone make it as an entrepreneur, but for New Zealander **Jonathon Walsh**, the country has become a place for reinvention where he is challenging the notion that writers cannot be entrepreneurs, and running his own rapidly expanding writing/editing business. Can a foreigner forge a career as a writer-entrepreneur in Japan? For Walsh, writes **William Steele**, the answer is an emphatic “Yes!”

Times magazine. He soon became a contributing writer for two other magazines and the newly established *Entrepreneur Association of Tokyo* (www.ea-tokyo.com) Later that same year, Walsh launched *Business Grow*, an innovative, profitable and rapidly growing company specializing in providing high quality writing, editing and advertising services to clients.

Is it expensive to start a writing/editing business? “The start-up costs have been extremely minimal. Basically, 100,000 yen to buy a laptop and very minor ongoing expenses for operational supplies. This kind of business can be very cost-effective, and if you do well, you can make some very healthy profits.”

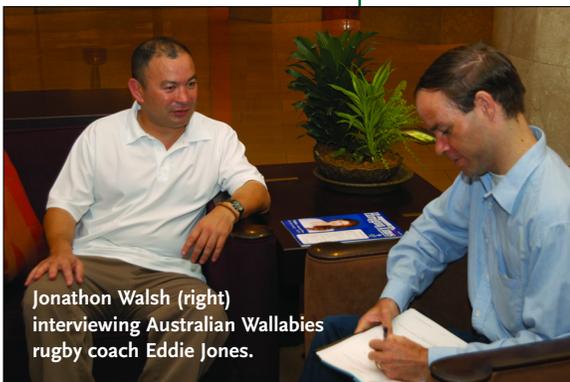
Where does the work flow from? “The majority comes through referrals, not through straight advertising.”

As a writer-entrepreneur, what characteristics has Walsh found most important to thrive in the Japanese market?

- **Creativity**—There is ample room for innovative, new writing products.
- **An eye for a market niche**—Many opportunities exist outside the traditional, visible areas of publishing.
- **Demonstrable skills in your chosen field.**
- **Credibility**—It is very important to position yourself as a credible writer. That means you have to be able to back up your words with proof that you have been published.

Strategy for success

For budding writer-entrepreneurs with reasonable editorial skills looking to enter the industry, Walsh advises them to select their target. “Do you want to write for magazines, newspapers, or enter the world of corporate communications?” And after that? **PTO...**



Jonathon Walsh (right) interviewing Australian Wallabies rugby coach Eddie Jones.

In only a few short years Walsh, a former IT specialist with no previous publishing industry experience, has established himself as one the most prolific and widely published writers in Japan’s English-language market. More than 200 of his articles have been published in 13 different

Japan-based media and despite not yet being fluent in Japanese, he has successfully interviewed company presidents, ambassadors, entrepreneurs, national-level sports coaches, entertainers, and many others, proving that perseverance and desire can overcome seemingly impenetrable obstacles.

Walsh now splits his time between writing for magazines and foreign organizations, and working as a corporate editor for a number of corporate communications companies.

Minimal start-up costs

How did it all happen? Halfway through a 6-month Japanese course he attended soon after moving to Japan in 2002, Walsh took on a part-time proofreading/writing job at *Hiragana*

“You’ve got to be happy working 7-day weeks. Otherwise, don’t even start. Stay with your office job.”



From left to right: Hir@gana Times, J Select and Eye-Ai magazines.

- **Take the first step**—Unless you have passable Japanese skills, try proofreading or editing and then start spreading the word that you can write.
- **Begin building your portfolio.**

“Providing you have reasonably sound writing skills, your first task is to get something published. That means submitting your article ideas to websites, magazines and newspapers, and then building on your successes one step at a time. The easiest initial target to approach is websites, in particular since many are looking for quality content but are faced with a dire shortage of capable writers. Although definitely not advisable for the long term, you may have to offer your services free to get your foot in the door. Aside from having a story with lots of sizzle, an important key to getting published is to make the editor’s job as easy as possible.”

[See www.ea-tokyo.com/resources/expert-insight/ATT00168.pdf for more information]

After getting your first article in print, you need to continually produce good work. “In Japan, there is a unique situation where the English-speaking market is so small that if you do a good job as an entrepreneur, people will tell their friends and colleagues. Conversely, if you produce poor work, people will talk, and it could stifle your business. So every job has got

to be your best one, which puts the pressure on.”

Boosting business

TO INCREASE YOUR BUSINESS, WALSH RECOMMENDS:

- **Advertise your services**—Make up a service package to market your writing and editing skills.
- **Rub shoulders**—Join various industry groups, attend their meetings and make yourself known.
- **Increase your contacts base**—A positive message spreading through the grapevine can result in significant benefits—and work—for a growing business.
- **Proactively promote yourself**—You are never going to get business from a company that doesn’t know you.
- **Expand your services menu by building partnerships**—If you want to offer services other than writing/editing, in particular in the Japanese language area, form mutually beneficial partnerships with other professionals who possess the skills you want to market.

The best aspect about being a writer-entrepreneur, Walsh says, isn’t just the money. “It’s the sheer enjoyment and creativity involved in the work; the challenge and the sense that I am creating something that didn’t exist before – it is extremely fulfilling and certainly adds to the quality of life.”

Power in the passion

All that said, you are unlikely to succeed in the sea of entrepreneurship without the strength to stand up to the buffeting winds—and the occasional cyclone. “You’ve got to have a passion for it. Passion is the crucial X-factor, the bottom of the iceberg. If you want to start your own business, simply ‘liking’ the work isn’t good enough. You’ve got to be happy working 7-day weeks. It’s got to be bordering on obsessive. Otherwise, don’t even start. Stay with your office job.”



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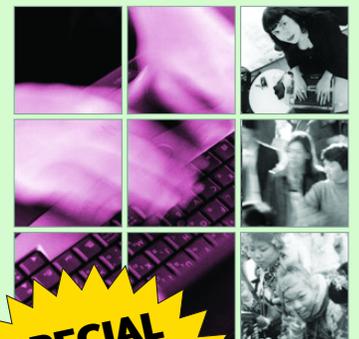
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KEY LEARNINGS

- **CREATIVITY**—There is ample room for innovative, new writing products.
- **SELECT YOUR TARGET**—magazines, newspapers corporate communications?
- **GET PUBLISHED IN A WEBSITE FIRST**, then move onwards and upwards from there.
- **PROACTIVELY PROMOTE YOURSELF**—Get your name out into the marketplace.
- **PASSION IS THE CRUCIAL X-FACTOR.**