

Bucks company has the write stuff

By **CRISSA SHOEMAKER DEBREE**

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So you have a deadline coming up on that big company report. You're running out of time. To make things worse, you don't know the difference between "they're," "there" and "their."

Well, you're not alone in the business world. And there's help.

The National Writing Commission, in a 2004 survey, found that businesses spend \$3 billion a year to improve employee writing skills.

Said one survey respondent: "Writing skills are fundamental in business. It's increasingly important to be able to convey content in a tight, logical, direct manner, particularly in a fast-paced technology environment."

Still, the employers who were surveyed complained about poor grammar, spelling and sentence structure, along with long-winded writing filled with technical jargon — or worse, abbreviations better used in e-mail messages.

That's where Andrew Smith hopes to come in. Smith is a ghostwriter and the founder of Executive Ghostwriting Services, which he runs out of his Upper Makefield home.

Since March, when he launched the business, Smith said he's had 40 to 50 clients who've asked him to anonymously write everything from company memos to fundraising letters to presentations.

"People just don't have the time," Smith said. "Throw on top of it [that] they're not comfortable with their writing skills; it's a problem for them."

Smith was a journalism major at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. After graduation, he went into public relations, most recently working with Temple University's hospital system. Public relations let him hone the craft of ghostwriting on behalf of executives and others, he said.

"I was good at it," he said. "I just did this for people, put two and two together and said, 'Boy, there seems to be a need for this.' "

His business partner is Gwen Coverdale of Doylestown Township, who also worked for Temple.

Among their clients was a talent scout from Los Angeles, who wanted to send a letter to a Hollywood celebrity he wanted to narrate an audio book. Smith said he hasn't heard if the pitch was successful.

He does know, however, that the awards nomination written on behalf of a doctor was a success. The original proposal was little more than a resume regurgitation, Smith said. With the rewritten application, the doctor won.

Prices start at \$90 an hour to clean up what you've written. Letters start at \$250 and speeches at \$1,000. Other services vary and include television proposal writing (using television producer and Upper Makefield resident Rickie Gaffney) and press releases.

Yvette Taylor-Hachoose, an attorney in Upper Makefield, said she hired Executive Ghostwriting Services to write presentations and some marketing material for her practice, which focuses mainly on estate planning.

"I can provide the substantive information," Taylor-Hachoose said. "But it's all in the presentation these days. It takes time to get it to whatever level you might want it. That's their professional expertise. I can do something else that can be a little more valuable for my time."

Taylor-Hachoose said she also found a need for a different writing style when it came to marketing.

"I'm an attorney. I keep things clear, concise, for a judge or jury," she said. "When you market to the public, you want it clear and concise but also to draw their attention in. I looked for somebody that would provide that for me."

Peter Killeen, director of the nonprofit group The Po-lice Connection, hired Executive Ghostwriting Services to write fundraising letters on his organization's behalf.

"I don't have the time," Killeen said. "And sometimes you're too close to a situation. It's too emotionally driven, and you need somebody with objectivity to write and be creative in their writing."

Communication is key, Smith said. Bad communication can cost serious problems for your business, even losing money if your instructions aren't followed.

"There's still that written communication," he said. "A lot of communication gets done without knowing the person. What you write really is all they have to go on."

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