

FREELANCE OF THE MONTH

Just bite the wolf's head off . . .

. . . that's the secret. Freelancing is not for the faint-hearted says **Rob McGibbon**



How did you get into journalism?

I spent a year getting drunk in Cardiff in 1984-85 while popping into journalism college. I then joined the Wimbledon News, but got sacked just over a year later for moonlighting on The Sun. So, my Fleet Street career started with full-time shifts when I was 21, which was ridiculously early. It was thrilling, if terrifying, working for Kelvin MacKenzie at his demented best. The Sun in the late 80s was like a borstal, with people getting mentally roughed up all day and every day.

How long have you been a freelance?

My last job was as a staff showbiz writer at The Sun, which I quit in February 1990, and I've been on Freelance Island ever since. I'm doing a longer stretch in solitary than Papillon.

Why freelance?

The way of life suits my character. Every day I drive to my office against the flow of the traffic. The upsides easily outweigh the downsides, but I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I'd stuck it out to become an editor. Without doubt, Colin Myler is my hero. All those pay-offs.

What is your main line of work?

I am an inveterate interviewer of celebrities. I think of myself as a desalination system. The garbled, messy outpourings of celebrities go through me and re-appear in a newspaper as



Rob McGibbon: once interviewed chimpanzees

pure little sips of clarity for people to enjoy.

Who are your main sources of work?

Last year, I created two new interview columns, My Tube and The Definite Article, for the Daily Mail's brilliant Saturday magazine, Weekend. I set-up and write the interviews for both columns each week.

How much do you charge?

Huh, as if! Interviewing is a labour-intensive exercise that produces essential exclusive copy for newspapers, so all interviewers should be well compensated.

What's been your best ever gig?

Having two columns in Weekend is pretty good. I am reliably informed that The Definite Article is the most widely read newspaper interview column of its kind in the world!

And what's been your worst?

Going to Malibu in 1993 to interview Steve McQueen's son Chad. He was an A-list prat who gave me and the photographer the runaround for a week. We started off staying at the Beverly Hills Hotel and ended up in a festering Holiday Inn. I never got paid – but the Malibu sunsets are the best I've seen. Always take the positive out of every experience.

Ever do anything ridiculous for money?

Thanks to my surname, I interviewed some chimpanzees for the Daily Star in 1988. The piece worked so well I was then sent to play football with some pigs. "Franz Baconbauer" is still the high point in my pun-writing career.

Any ambitions beyond freelance writing?

I founded the interviews aggregation website Access Interviews.com in 2008. It is my passion project and I have grand plans for its expansion. The IPO is only years away.

Secret of keeping the wolf from the door?

Just open the door and bite the wolf's head off. Freelancing is not for the faint-hearted, but don't be afraid. Read lots, keep your ideas original, and never celebrate until the money is in the bank. Freelancing is about managing disappointment.

Contact: All praise and offers of lucrative work can reach me via www.robmcgibbon.com

Perfect pitch GET IT RIGHT WHEN MAKING A PITCH

Sainsbury's Magazine's is a monthly title sold throughout Sainsbury's stores. The magazine feature content covering food, lifestyle homes, families, health and holidays.

Publisher: Seven

Editor: Helena Lang

ABCs: 255,072 (Jan 2011 - Jun 2011)

Where to pitch: general features – Michelle.Dickson@seven.co.uk; travel – Francesca.Syzcesca.syz@virgin.net; food – Sarah.Randell@seven.co.uk

What to pitch: general topics of interest to our readers – women in the 30-50 age-range. Most features run to around 1500-1800 words in total.

How to pitch: send a short synopsis of the idea by email – including suggested head and sell.

Post-pitch: it's best to send a follow-up email after a week or so if no you don't receive a response.

What will impress: anything that demonstrates that the writer is familiar with the magazine and has specifically targeted their idea to our readership.

What will NOT impress: any idea you know has been sent to 20 commissioning editors simultaneously – and has the commissioning editor's name misspelled at the top!

Rates: rates vary according to writer and nature of feature.

Will writers be expected to provide images with their articles? Usually not, although travel images are sometimes welcome.

Other useful info: remember we are on sale only in Sainsbury's stores and can't feature products/stories from other supermarkets or competitors.

