**Heather’s Current Revenue and Expenses**

**Revenue**

**Freelance Writing Clients (which is not part of the PR business) = $500 to $1000 a month**

**PR clients - $0**

**Expenses (minimal)**

Website through weebly.com that costs about **$50/year (variable)**.

Hired graphic designer for business cards, a logo and website updates = **$500 (fixed)**.

Ongoing costs such as printer ink, printer paper, etc. **(variable).**

**FreelanceMom.com Business Development Plan Worksheet**

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**Use this worksheet to evaluate your business idea, think through some factors that will affect your success, and sketch out a strategic path to implementation.**

**1. Why are you starting a business?**

*Consider anything that is motivating this change, positive and negative. Do not respond as if you’re talking to a potential client or investor; be honest with yourself.*

I want to have something to call my own – something that I can build from the bottom up and be proud of my accomplishments. As a result, I want to illustrate to my kids that hard work pays off and be a role model for them.

I worked in an office for several years before becoming a stay-at-home mom, and it was hard to give that up. I want part of that back.

**2. What goals do you have for your business – personally and financially?**

*Include realistic short-term goals and “end game” goals that portray your fully functional business in one, two, and five years. What can you get by on financially in the first six months and what monthly income will you need after a year to be financially solvent?*

**Short term:**

* To build my client base and recognition of my business.
* To get my name out there and recognized as the “go to” freelance writing/PR professional for companies in the health and fitness industries.
* To have members of the media calling on me, like they used to when I worked in an office, to connect them to experts that they need to talk to for their stories.

**Long Term: 3 year plan**

My ultimate goal is to have a full-time business from home when my kids are in school all day (about three years from now). I want the flexibility of being able to work at home, continuing to build my client base, while still being available to my kids (i.e. for school sports/activities or when the school nurse calls about a sick child). Financially speaking, I would like to be making at least what I made when I left my fulltime office job **($50,000K).**

**3. What problem will your product/service solve?**

*Give some serious thought to this! This is the crux of your business. What is unique about the problem your business will solve? If other businesses offer similar solutions to a similar problem, how will your solution stand out?*

I offer **freelance writing** and **PR services** to companies **in the health and fitness industries**. I can help them with everything from building website content to developing press releases and pitching stories to the media. A common mistake that many smaller companies make is to pay for their advertising. Many do not realize that they can achieve the same publicity goals by writing and distributing press releases, but without the cost of paid advertising. There are a number of companies in this industry who are good at what they do, but do not know how to promote themselves or what makes for good publicity, particularly when it involves the media. My goal is to help them garner the attention they deserve.

**4. How are YOU uniquely qualified to run this business?**

*Do you have a knack for understanding business and finance, and can you take multiple ideas and turn them into a successful enterprise? Do you have one unique perspective and idea that will help you keep the vision alive but need assistance from others to take care of the day-to-day? How have your past experiences made you the perfect person to start this business and develop trust with potential customers?*

I have nearly **20 years of experience in healthcare public relations** and have served in a variety of capacities, from media spokesperson to writer/editor and special event coordinator. I have a number of **working relationships with local reporters** and **know what makes a good story for them**. I have developed comprehensive media relations campaigns that have included writing and pitching press releases, coordinating media interviews and managing press conferences.

I have nothing but positive feedback from those with whom I worked in an office setting as well as freelance clients. I feel that going above and beyond – like exceeding the client’s expectations with deadlines – helps to build client confidence in me, and ultimately, it makes for a more comfortable, relaxed relationship.

I am a very **competitive person by nature**, so I naturally want to be better than the next person. I want to build more client relationships and work harder than my competition so that clients feel comfortable with me.

Right now, I don’t know that I need assistance with day-to-day tasks. Everything I am doing to this point can be done by me, but eventually, I would like to have a need for an intern who can “learn the ropes” from me.

**5. Who are your customers?**

*Who has the problem you identified in question 3? Consider how you expect to price your product or service. Who will be willing to spend money to use your solution to their problem?*

My target customer is anyone who works in the health and fitness industries – personal trainers, physicians, nurses, other healthcare professionals, gym owners, etc. The individuals in these industries have the skills and knowledge to succeed, but not necessarily the know-how to promote themselves.

**6. Where will you find your customers?**

*Once you have your ideal customer in mind, list the kinds of places those customers can be found (physically or virtually). What kind of publications and websites appeal to that kind of customer, and how can you advertise or submit content there? Can you sponsor or provide a free service to an organization with a web presence that influences your type of customer?*

Publications like Hospital News of Western Pennsylvania and Western Pennsylvania’s Guide to Good Health are perfect publications in which to advertise because they reach my target audience. Hospital News will allow me to submit articles on a client’s behalf, but I have not yet identified a suitable opportunity. Also, my budget prohibits me from paying for the advertising at this point.

In addition, I also have been interviewed by websites like Launch, Grow, Joy about my business and have placed an ad in the directory of Macaroni Kid. None of these have resulted in business.

I also submit articles to sites like freelancewriting.com and socialmoms.com.

**7. How will they find you?**

*Where will you offer your services – virtually and/or in a physical location? Will you need your own website to offer your product or service or can you start by having a presence on an existing platform like Facebook or LinkedIn? How will you use the web to direct customers to your site or page?*

I have my own website, where I have bio information and a page of writing samples, testimonials and a contact me page. I would like to update this site at some point, as well as hire someone well-versed in **Google analytics** who can help me to optimize my site.

In addition, I have **a registered profile on freelance sites like guru.com and odesk.com**, from which I have gotten some long term clients/work. These are good sites to find some well-paying jobs, **but my main goal is to find more local clients** with whom I can meet with on a regular basis and have face-to-face conversations.

**8. How do you know people will pay for what you are selling? How can you find evidence?**

*Conduct a web search to see how similar products or solutions are currently priced, and talk to friends or colleagues who have paid for competitor services in the past. You do not want to low-ball your price– try to gauge what the customer’s perceived value will be on top of the direct costs of labor and materials you will incur. Consider surveying customers who match your profile to evaluate that.*

People want to see their name in the public’s eye. My experience is that people just don’t know how to do this. They want to see their name in a newspaper so they end up paying hundreds for an ad and do not realize that they may be overpaying or not using the right approach. There is a huge need for education in this area – to educate the people in my targeted industries about how I can help them, about what types of publicity methods are available for them.

As for price…my challenge in this area, particularly with the freelancing websites, is that I am up against many newcomers or those who have only a few years of experience and can charge much less per hour. My hourly fee is $25, and I have been told by several people in my field that that price is much too low. But to attract new clients and to beat the competition, I have to keep my price low, with the hope to increase as time goes on.

**I had a client – a personal training studio in Atlanta – who I found on guru**, which is a site that emphasizes a price per project format, rather than a price per hour. After working with them on several projects, I realized that by the time we were done going through revisions and changes in thought processes, I was getting paid a very minimal hourly rate. I finally told them that I needed to change my fee structure to hourly instead of per project, and I didn’t hear from them for several months. Then, about four months later, they came to me with a rush job that needed done within 24 hours. I ultimately helped them, but I struggled with allowing them to “push to the front of the line,” ahead of other clients. Fortunately, the job was relatively simple and I was able to complete it in a short amount of time. They then came back and asked me to do a follow-up to that project, needed in a rush, and I told them that, while I would be happy to help them, I did have other projects that I needed to get done ahead of this one. They said they understood and would just work on it themselves. But I still struggle with how I handled that. Owning a business is much harder than working for someone else, and I am not known for my tactfulness. I REALLY need to learn how to handle delicate situations – to put a smile on my face when I would like to do otherwise.

**9. How will you develop your brand?**

*Your brand should reflect something important about your business. If you plan to try out a logo or tagline, will you hire a person or firm to assist you with that? How will you test out the brand on your customer base?*

I work with a graphic designer who has developed business cards and a logo for me as well as update my website. I can go to her on an as-needed basis; **I just need to identify what those needs are!** ☺ At this point, I do not know how I will test out the brand.

**10. How are your competitors communicating to their customers? How can you learn from that?**

*What words, phrases, and images are your competitors using to brand their product – that will tell you what emotion or logic these firms have determined appeals to your pool of potential customers. Are they offering expertise or knowledge to generate trust with customers before trying to make a sale, and if so, what pieces of information are those customers showing interest in?*

I am the only one I know of in the immediate area who is a dedicated health and fitness freelance writer/PR professional. There are several other freelance writers I am familiar with, but none in my niche. That said, there are a few avenues **I would like to pursue to increase my visibility, including social media.** **I know I need to further my education in this area so that I can also feel comfortable offering that as part of my portfolio.**

**11. What can ONLY you do and what can you outsource?**

*Start with your business tasks – which tasks are simple and do not need to reflect the individual flair or spin of your business? Consider outsourcing things that do not create risk for you right from the start. You may not feel comfortable outsourcing much of anything at first – you can create a progressive plan toward more outsourcing depending on how much business picks up. Also consider what personal (non-business) tasks absorb your time and if any of those can be outsourced as well.*

Professionally speaking, there is not much I can outsource at this point. I need to establish myself and get my name out there. And hopefully I will be able to hire an intern or assistant to help me grow my business. Personally speaking, it is not out of the question to hire a babysitter who can help take care of the kids while I get some work done, though we do have a strict budget, and it is not always possible to incur this type of expense.

**12. How do you plan to schedule your work?**

*When can you work, and how will you balance that with taking care of children and/or childcare costs? If you will work on a project basis, drill down to the profit you’ll need on an hourly, daily, or weekly basis to determine how many hours you’ll need to dedicate to your business in the beginning, when you will spend more time trying to get business, and 6 months down the road, when you will be juggling more work.*

I work first thing in the morning, **about an hour or two** before the kids wake up. I also am beginning to work for an hour or two in the afternoon while teaching them that they need to entertain themselves for a while. And, I work after they go to bed for an indefinite amount of time. In addition, I always have my iPhone and iPad with me, should someone need to reach me immediately, or should a job assignment come through. Ideally, **I will need to increase my hourly rate to make it worth my while to pursue this work**, given that much of what I make is paid in quarterly taxes each year. My struggle is pricing myself out of work, though with my amount of experience, it would not be out of the question to double my hourly rate.

**13. What are your costs going to be in the first 6 months, 12 months?**

*If you do not already have start-up costs figured, use the start-up and ongoing monthly expense*

*calculator at http://www.businessknowhow.com/startup/startup.htm to identify your expenses.*

My costs to date have been minimal. I have a website through weebly.com that costs about **$50/year (variable)**. I also paid a graphic designer for business cards, a logo and website updates…the total was about **$500 (fixed)**. And I have ongoing costs such as printer ink, printer paper, etc.(variable).

**14. How do you plan to make money? First 6 months, 12 months, 2 years.**

*Where will your first revenues come from? Consider if your pricing will be consistent from the start (if you are a freelancer and your pricing is not publicly available, you may consider offering lower pricing at first to get experience and customers hooked, but you will not want to rely on lower pricing for long). How will you get your foot in the door and how many sales will you expect at the 6, 12, and 24 month thresholds to maintain enough growth to support your enterprise?*

My main source of revenue to date is as a **freelance writer for a community magazine**, for which I write a number of articles each quarter. I also write for another high-profile community magazine for which **I do not get paid**, but I do it **for the name recognition**. I also have work I do for clients acquired from freelance websites. I am not sure how I will attract new customers. My thoughts have centered around creating a postcard that can be mailed to health and fitness companies in my immediate area. I also have done some advertising in local media outlets, like macaronikid.com, but that has not generated new business.

***15.* What unique ways will you attract your first customers? How do you plan to maintain them?**

*How can you show your customers you are the expert who can add value above and beyond what they can expect from your competitors? Where do your customers go for information and services and how can you establish a presence there? Since your existing customers are the easiest to attract and least expensive to market to dollar for dollar, think carefully about how you will keep them coming back to you as your competitors are trying to lure them away.*

Ideally, I would like to **join local professional organizations**, like my local chapter of Public Relations Society of America, but it is cost-prohibitive at this point, and I don’t know that I have the amount of time available with two little ones at home to make a membership worth my while at this point. I know I need to be creative to get my foot in the door of these companies.

**16. In what areas do you need knowledge and how do you plan to close that gap?**

*Consider accounting and legal issues, making the most out of Internet marketing, web optimization, and anything you read about here that you still have questions about.*

I know I need much education in the **area of social media.** While I have profiles on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, I need to take time to make the most of these profiles and learn how to best use these sites. I would like to enroll in an online social media class that will teach me the basics.

**17. List five people you really admire, ideally within your genre.**

*For each, list ways you will connect with them and begin building a relationship. Are these individuals potential mentors? How can you genuinely approach them and show them the value of spending time with you?*