

THE RACE TO THE BOTTOM? WHY YOU MUSTN'T WORRY ABOUT EDITORS WHO CHARGE LESS THAN YOU

The topic of editing and proofreading rates is always hot in our community.

And the 'race to the bottom' especially has been known to garner more attention than an Olympic 100-metre final.

So what should we do about it?



Competing with cheap

Here in Norwich there's a mall. In that mall is a discount store selling techie stuff ... phones, tablets and whatnot. You go into that shop expecting a deal.

It's where people go when they're price-shopping. Not because they're terrible people who are always looking for cheap but because the coffers are low.

Maybe the car failed its MOT and they had to find an extra seven hundred quid that month. Or they recently lost their job. Or something.

In that mall on the floor above is an Apple store selling shiny things for shiny people. You don't go into that shop expecting a deal. You go in expecting to pay what you have to pay to get the shiny thing you want.

It's where people go when they're product- or service-shopping. The coffers are flush. The car passed its MOT and the job is secure. Or something.



All clients are *not* the same

Now, Apple could decide not to have a store in that mall. It could say, 'This is ridiculous. No one's going to buy our stuff when they can get similar products from the shop on the floor below for one fifth of the price. Being in that mall is a race to the bottom.'

But Apple doesn't say that. Why? Because it knows that the customers who come into the mall **aren't all the same**. Some won't come near its store because the prices are too high. But others – those who are looking specifically for an Apple product, those who are Apple fans, those whose cars passed their MOTs – might pay Apple a visit.

If it doesn't have a store in the mall, Apple knows it will lose the custom of all the people who'd like

to buy there but can't because it's decided not to set up shop ... and all because it got the hump about the race-to-the-bottom store on the floor below.

In fact, Apple doesn't focus on the store below. It doesn't care what that store is charging. That store can service the price-shoppers – those customers whose budgets are limited – because those customers are NOT Apple's customers.



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Instead, Apple invests its energy in making the service-shoppers – its fans – have an amazing experience ... lots of knowledgeable, passionate staff on hand, a Genius Bar, technicians out back who'll fix or replace a product in-store or replace it, and lots of lovely shiny stuff to play with while we wait.

Apple knows that there's room in the mall for both types of store and both types of customer.

It's the same for editors and proofreaders.

Standing up for the market or hiding behind a curtain?

If you decide **not** to make yourself visible in particular directories or other online spaces because you know there are colleagues charging what you consider to be unacceptably low rates, and you think no one will hire you because you're charging more, you're assuming that all clients are the same. But they're not.

Some clients will have low incomes or busted cars that need expensive repairs, and they will be attracted to the discount editors. Some will have more flexible budgets and will be focused on finding the right-fit editor first and foremost. Price will not be the clincher for the latter group.

However, clients can only commission services from an editor **whom they know exists**.

If you have the hump about the race to the bottom and have decided not to join the party, you're not standing up for the editorial market. All you're doing is hiding behind the curtain, making yourself invisible to those clients who would have liked to work with you if they'd been able to find you.

And don't forget that Google is the biggest directory of all. There's no other online space with more editors in it. Some of them are cheap as chips. Has that stopped you having a website? No.

The same logic should apply elsewhere.

How to be the Apple editor

Of course, we can't have it both ways. If we don't want to compete with discount editors then we need to get attention in a way that **shifts the client's focus away from price**.

Expecting to benefit from the same footfall as the discount editor without offering a compelling alternative is just wanting to have our cake and eat it.

We need to stand out for some other reason. We need to make the client think: *That editor looks perfect for me, seems to get me, is really generous and knowledgeable. I hope she's available and that if I save up I can afford her.*

To be the Apple editor we need to present potential clients with an amazing experience – a story that says we have solutions, that we have their backs, that we can help them achieve their goals ... a story that persuades them we're worth waiting for and worth paying for.

It's about the **words** we use to convey our understanding of our clients' problems.

It's about the **images** we use to convey our professional values. Blurry headshots with our mates or kids in them won't do.

It's about how we **instil trust**. Telling them that we know our stuff – that we have the skills, the knowledge and the experience – is one thing. Showing them with free resources and a knowledge base that helps them more easily walk the publication path ... that's quite another.

Time well spent on standing out

Every minute we spend worrying about what other editors are charging is a minute in which we could be building our own compelling brand identity and creating **our own valuable resources**, stuff that helps our potential clients feel we're the right fit.

Every directory that we don't advertise in because we think it's a race to the bottom is another tick on our invisibility list.

If you're invisible, it doesn't matter how high your prices are. No one will hire you. Not because your prices are too high but because you can't be seen.

Being invisible is of no economic value to any editor or proofreader.

So charge what you want to charge.

- If you want to compete on **price**, go ahead.
- If you want to compete on **compulsion**, go ahead.

The compulsion route isn't easy. It means investing time and effort in standing out – all that content marketing stuff I bang on about! It means thinking deeply about how every word of your directory entries and every page of your website helps a potential client and makes them feel that you're just too wowser to ignore.

All that hard graft pays off though. You can sit beside the cheaper editors without fear. You can let them have the price-shoppers while you work with those who can afford you.

Just like Apple and the discount store, we're dealing with two different markets.

The idea that your business could be undermined by a colleague charging way lower than what you deem to be acceptable is, says Jake Poinier, 'nonsense. Creative freelancing is a market, and only you can establish the value you bring to it. I don't view the low end of the freelance rate scale as my competition' (**'Stop worrying about freelancers who undercharge'**). I agree with Jake.

Honestly, there's room for everyone. Don't waste your valuable time on the issue. Instead, build your **business**, your **brand identity**, your **visibility** and your **value**.



ABOUT LOUISE

Louise Harnby is a professional fiction proofreader and copyeditor. She specializes in helping independent authors prepare their novels for market. Louise worked in-house for two international publishers for 13 years before setting up her editorial business. She has also published several books on the business of editing and proofreading. You can find out more about her at www.louiseharnbyproofreader.com

