



How One Writer Earns \$120,000 per year: Laura MacPherson

- Carol Tice: Laura, I feel like the last check-in we had, you were like, I'm earning 120K and my head is ready to explode. What happens now? Obviously, this has exceeded your expectations. I just want to, A, make sure the recording is working, yes. I kind of want to start at the beginning of your story and just sort of quickly talk about where you came into Den 2X, where your business was at, and what's happened? What was the road to this level of income?
- LauraMacPherson: I had done freelancing for about eight years, and was making around 50K, which was fine. Then, I got an opportunity to work as a marketing manager for one of my clients, and I took it. Did that for two years and realized this is not my cup of tea. I wanted to go back to freelancing. I had gotten used to making more money, so I wanted to figure out how to at least maintain that. That was why I joined Den 2X.
- I had done no marketing before, so this was a whole new thing with marketing. I mean, I had done marketing for a company, but not for myself. For me, it was mainly LOIs, that was the ticket for me-
- Carol Tice: Talk about what industry, what niches, what [crosstalk 00:01:41]
- LauraMacPherson: I sort of fell into Check In Software. Not because that was where I particularly wanted to be, but I just had a lot of referrals coming in, so I thought well, hey, I'll just run with it. I started targeting mostly SAAS companies. That's kind of where it's gone. It's been good.
- Carol Tice: Did you start with ones in your region, or you were looking nationally?
- LauraMacPherson: I started looking locally, and then quickly realized that the money was not in the south. I mean, my clients are all over the place. I have a couple in California, DC, just all over. Yeah, I didn't limit myself regionally, at all.
- Carol Tice: What was the basics of your ... What was your LOI formula for reaching out to people?



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LauraMacPherson: My secret ... There were two elements that I feel like really jacked up the response rate. One was, I super, super personalized it. I found a piece of content that the person had written, or contributed to, or something. So it was more about the person rather than just the company as a whole, and then, the person I was emailing. Then, second of all, because I was targeting companies that fit the exact client profile of work that I had already done, and I could say, I've worked for these people that they knew, and, did this piece, and this piece, and da-da-da-da. It was a lot of social groups just writing an LOI, I felt made a big difference.

Carol Tice: Here's how I made a difference for your similar company, is often just for the win. It's like this is the easy way, to do this. I get people who are like well I want to, I have four different types of things I want to do and I want to go here and there and I don't want to be tied down to one niche. I want to be a generalist. And I just want to say that it's harder, than if you just mind your furrow that you're...you know, go down the row you're hoeing. I think it's so much easier. Often I really have students that I just kinda can't talk into it. They're just like, no, I want/need to go here and there and here and there. I'm like, okay, I've tried to make this go fast and easy.

So did you evolve what you charge, how you charge?

LauraMacPherson: Oh, yes, we do. I raised my rates by three what I was previously charging. So now, my floor, well that was one reason that it was so much easier to make more money as I stopped doing a small projects. I think Amy is really good at this, she has that \$1000 minimum, and I want to have that too.

Carol Tice: Absolutely, yeah.

LauraMacPherson: I feel that that attracts better clients because you can eliminate all the cheapo people. And then it's just easier because you're not sending out invoices for \$300 here and \$200 there.

Carol Tice: There's just a ton of people out there who ding you and they are like, I want you to write a blog post and I'm like, no. And I think that every client analysis we do in Den 2X at the beginning, that is what we conclude. We look at people's sheet, who all did you work from the last year? And there's all these literal \$300, \$500, \$800 clients and that's all you earn from them all year. And like, just doesn't add up to a business.



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Well, I'm really relating to this cause you know, I ended my staff writing job at 60K, and I was like well that's the income I need to replace. I always didn't have a sort of poverty, oh, if I can make 25, 30K and eke out a living, you know...I was never in that boat, cause sole supporter of my family of five.

I was always focused on this needs to earn a lot and I think it's amazing how different that mindset is. I just took an email this morning from someone who was like, I can't seem to get more than a penny...I'm forced to take jobs that are only a penny a word. And, I'm like, no. No one is forcing you to do that. That's a choice you've made, to accept really really low pay, and mindset that that's okay.

So, why don't I just scan down this list of questions that I got. Because you're at such a high income level I'd love to hear about work-life balance and prioritizing and time and how do you still do marketing. Or at this point is it kinda inbound? Talk about how you organize your time and your day.

LauraMacPherson:

I had especially, because the writing was really taking off while I was at my full time job. So, I had to get really, really disciplined about this and I felt like that helped me a lot when stuff really started taking off. I schedule everything including lunch, including breaks, including laundry in a google calendar. So, I have my entire day broken down. Now, [inaudible 00:07:23] it can be stressful when something happens to mess up that schedule. But, the thing I like about it is, you can drag and drop. So, I'm always re-arranging things and moving it around and, Oh, I need to do this and I'll just put this here. I've learned to schedule margin in as well that I can then plug in where I need to.

But I tell you, that Den 2X really saved me because I can never get all this done if I didn't have that.

Carol Tice:

Time blocking with was a life changer for me. And now our family is using the Cozy App, for all of the kid coordinating, all of the, Oh, Arie needs to go to trapeze class, and Eyli has a doctor appointment, and I'm going to do homework help at the library on Thursday at four. You know, all of that stuff is now in one place too, that we don't end up with conflicts. I see my husband posting something, like, I actually made a mistake on this recently, I switched whether I was reading to our service to a different date and now my husband's shooting a wedding at the same time. So, I don't know what our kids are doing.



But, usually we can avoid that by using the App. What I love about putting it in, is then, at the end of the day I just review. All the items I haven't done get moved to the next day, so it keeps them from just sort of sliding off of my priority list. And I leave Friday open. I try and book nothing on Friday. And that's my catch up day of whatever has been pushing through the week, it's Friday, is my deal. I love the time blocking. I need to leave more gap space. That's a really good idea. I need more open space.

And, I would say, the common thing for everybody is be more realistic about how much you can get done in a day. I know, I'm not.

LauraMacPherson: I make that mistake a lot. I'm like, oh, that will only take me two hours.

Carol Tice: One question Kimberly had was how long did it take you to replace your income and to go from there, to where you are now? So, you quit the full time job, you were freelancing a little on the side of it...how long did it take you to replace your income?

LauraMacPherson: Yeah, so it was really, really fast. I remember I was about to lose my mind there because I wanted to give my employer, because they were great, and I wanted to keep the bridge intact. So, I wanted to give them a month's notice. I was the marketing department for the company. So, I was like, I'll stay on for another month. But, I was like how am I doing to do this because it just took off so quickly. And I really, I mean it really was Den 2X, because I didn't know how to get business as a freelancer before. I would sit around and wait for referrals. And so, I sent out 100 LOIs and started getting a bunch of work.

Carol Tice: So, you did a 100 LOI challenge.

LauraMacPherson: Yes.

Carol Tice: And you send out 100 pieces of marketing. When I tell people to do that, they're just like...every jaw drops. If you do a lot of marketing a lot can happen. I'm sorry, it took how long to go to I replaced my income?

LauraMacPherson: I replaced my income before I left.

Carol Tice: OK.

LauraMacPherson: I was at 50K, I was earning over 50K in my freelancing while I was...



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Carol Tice: You and Even Jensen need to talk, cause that was his scene where he was like really earning two full time incomes and then he dropped that one finally.

LauraMacPherson: Yeah, because I'm not good at risk taking. [crosstalk 00:11:28] I want to make sure that I can do this.

Carol Tice: I love that you said that, because I think people think of freelancing as really risky. And I'm a super risk averse person, too. Had a husband with a seizure disorder, needed to feed our three kids. I was looking for retainers and looking to start every month with five or eight or ten or fourteen grand already booked as we get on. I wasn't looking for any, I would hear people say what do you do during the down months? And I was like, I don't have down months. That's not a thing. That can't happen.

And so how long did it take to then go 50 to where you are now?

LauraMacPherson: Let see, so it was not quite a year, to get to 120K. And then, this year, fingers crossed that I'm going to hit 150. I'm on track. But, anything can happen. I don't want to count my chickens too quickly.

Carol Tice: But that's the projection?

LauraMacPherson: Yeah.

Carol Tice: You did my formula where you take your first quarter and multiply by four.

LauraMacPherson: Ya.

Carol Tice: Ya. That's what you're going to make. Likely.

The other question I just had, and then we will go to Emily, what types of writing, what types of projects do you do?

LauraMacPherson: I feel like this was key also, because the small projects were killing me. I was so stressed out doing those small projects, because, the research you have to do for them is just the same amount as writing a blog post. And I'm still trying to figure out how to get more of these types of projects. I'm definitely not one hundred percent there yet. Especially last quarter, I did three white papers and that was like the best thing ever. I'm really trying to do more of that. I have one client that, they just like crank out white papers like crazy.



Carol Tice: The dream. What kind of length on the white papers?

LauraMacPherson: About 2500 words, 3000 words something like that.

Carol Tice: So, like five pager kind of thing, five, seven pages? Cool, I love it.

Well, you know, advice for people who are struggling. What would you like to tell people?

LauraMacPherson: My three big recommendations are, A, jack up your rates. And when I jacked up my rates I did it just based on what I thought the client would go for. And then if I knew they wouldn't go for it, oh well, they can leave. And then, no small projects. It took me a long time to learn that, because I hated to say no. But, it's super important. And then, trying to do those bigger value projects, like white papers and case studies because your internal hourly rate, you can make three of four hundred bucks an hour that way, versus blog posts you just can't charge that much.

Carol Tice: Yeah, the high end is like five hundred or six hundred bucks for maybe a 2000 word post, or something, 1000, 1500 words. Even at the high end of blogging rates I think of blogging as kind of the entry level work of our business unless you are doing in real specialized situations. I'm ghosting for someone on Forbes and I have a track record of getting a million views on a Forbes post and I can charge a lot as a result. Where you've done their exact type of traffic they want. I don't know if that ... C O Z I is what it is.

How many clients do you have at any given time, says Delia?

Oh, you said between four and eight.

LauraMacPherson: Ya.

Carol Tice: Cool. And Amy says increasing rates made the difference for me and also for Mandy. You have been able to get more white papers. Yes, to everything you're saying, Laura. I actually only have three retainer clients. Interesting.

Julia says did you pitch your white paper right off the top for clients or did they want a smaller project to start. I get this question a lot, can you get a white paper sort of off the bat?

LauraMacPherson: Yes, and I used to think you had to start with a small project. But, by accident I discovered my biggest client that I have right now, the one that I do three white papers a quarter for, I just started out right off the bat with a white paper and



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blog post series. And another client, a new client, this is a cold client that I'm sending LOI's to get these people, so they don't know me from Adam, they were interested in a larger project, and I was like, I'm going to go for it. So, we did a big project, like right off the bat. I stopped suggesting let's start with a small project, because why don't I just jump in. As long as your contract is good and you have a good feeling about the person and da da da da, I think you can jump right in. If it was like 10,000 dollars or something like that then maybe not. I feel like anything five grand and below, for most of these, especially bigger companies it's not really that much money to them.

Carol Tice:

That perspective is so important. People need to, they're thinking 10,000 dollars, but you need to benchmark that against the cost of say, a billboard, TV ads, print ads, radio ads, doing online Google ads and understand that we are the best deal in marketing. We are the best deal there is, even at those kind of top rates. I saw, I think Anne Marie is on the call, and she was like, I dunno, I can't get above fifty to seventy-five cents a word. Stop thinking a word, is the biggest tip I can give you. Stop thinking earning per word and start thinking about selling client value.

Thinking about the value to the client is what changes everything. And, obviously getting out of writing for publications if you're doing only publications and finding more company pubs and trade pubs and more stable and good paying publications.

Did you find that inspiring?

I hope so! As you can see, it's definitely possible to earn more as a writer than you do today.

Interested in growing your freelance writing income? Check out my Freelance Writers Den 2X Income Accelerator

