

Vegan Professionals: MAT THOMAS

Mat Thomas is a San Francisco-based freelance marketing content writer and editor. Learn more about Mat's business at ultrawriting.com and his animal advocacy at animalrighter.org.



This year I celebrated two major milestones: my ten-year vegan anniversary and the birth of my first business—ultraWriting. Through ultraWriting, I help companies, start-ups, entrepreneurs, and non-profits prosper by providing them with customized website content, brochures, blog posts, newsletter articles, press releases, and whatever other communication materials they need to succeed. I believe that good writing and vegan advocacy have the same root: empathy. Meaning, writers and activists must empathize and connect with their audience to effectively get their message across.

I've been writing professionally (i.e., for a living) since 2000, but I never considered myself the entrepreneurial type. So, until now, I've always worked for someone else as salaried staff while freelancing on the side for vegan and animal rights magazines and nonprofits—jobs that usually came to me by someone simply asking me to write something. But running a business is completely different: to be viable, I must go out and sell myself and my services directly and aggressively to those who would benefit from them.

That's one reason why becoming an entrepreneur has been

transformative: it's changed how I see myself and who I am in the world. Like many writers, I'm temperamentally introverted, somewhat shy, and uncomfortable with self-promotion. But identity, like the human mind, is defined by plasticity: the ability to adapt to new circumstances, experiences, and information. And so I now find myself regularly attending networking events to schmooze and mingle with people from various industries, exchange referrals and business cards, and make new contacts—as well as friends. As a naturally reserved and quiet person, I'm certainly relieved that an inner extrovert was waiting in the wings for just such occasions.

I had a similar experience a decade ago when I became vegan: a decision that radically changed my identity and worldview. Becoming vegan forced me to think more critically, take responsibility for how my actions affected others, be more outspoken about my convictions, and have compassion for people who hadn't yet been sensitized to other beings' sentience. It also opened me up to new relationships, roles, and collaborations within the diverse vegan community and inspired me to become a better writer. To paraphrase Marcel Proust, my vegan voyage of discovery consisted not in seeing new landscapes but in having new eyes.

As someone who's written a lot about veganism and animal rights over the years, most of my clients have been vegan, and I enjoy helping them have more impact through words. Yet one of the most vital lessons veganism has taught me is the importance of standing up for my values with dignity and grace to help people see more clearly. I've tried to apply this lesson in all areas of

my life, and in my business that means welcoming opportunities to work with non-vegan clients as a respectfully diplomatic representative of the Vegan Nation. However, my conscience is crystal clear on where to draw the line: meaning I won't write anything that promotes animal exploitation.

Since so much of my professional experience has been in the animal rights field and ultraWriting is a relatively new enterprise, I hadn't had to deal with this ethical dilemma until recently, when a colleague referred me to a potential client with a food-related business that promotes meat eating. Now, as a professional, it's not my place to pass judgment on others, so I politely explained to this nice woman why I wasn't the writer she needed. However, as a fellow entrepreneur, I still wanted to help her succeed, so I proposed an alternative service—writing whatever vegan-related content she may need (I even provided specific ideas customized for her business). Veganism is one of my areas of expertise anyway, and, as a pragmatist, I believe that promoting vegan products and concepts for non-vegan businesses is not only ethical but beneficial to both veganism and my clients.

That was about three weeks ago, and she hasn't responded yet. But I'm still hoping she will, because it would give me a chance to enhance her business and our cause by providing her clients with useful information about the benefits of veganism. That's a win-win for everyone—just like I want my business to be.

ultraWriting