

How To Get Paid Writing Simple Greeting Cards

Most of us enjoy getting greeting cards from time to time. Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, the birth of a baby, and other occasions mean even more to us when we are remembered by friends, relatives and colleagues. A well written card can make a genuinely personal statement for any occasion. That's why greeting cards continue to be a sincere and effective means of communication. In fact, the demand for greeting cards is such that it is now a multi-billion dollar industry and still growing.

Since there will always be birthdays, holidays and other occasions appropriate for card sending, the market remains stable and prosperous for talented and creative writers. Besides the ever popular traditional greeting card messages, greeting card companies are constantly looking for fresh and innovative ideas and concepts. And although most companies employ staff writers and artists, the opportunity for free-lance writers is very real and substantial. Many greeting card companies actually encourage free-lance writers to submit a regular stream of card ideas.

Writing greeting cards on a free-lance basis is a creative way for writers to make excellent part-time money. In some cases, extremely talented and prolific writers can write greeting cards full time and make a comfortable living. Of course, the amount of success a free-lance writer can expect from writing greeting cards depends on talent, initiative, knowledge of the industry, and time devoted to creating new ideas and concepts.

Many free-lance writers are attracted to writing greeting cards simply by the nature of the work. Everything is usually accomplished from the writer's own home. All that's needed is a typewriter and a fairly consistent supply of new ideas. There are no agents, or complex contracts to deal with, and most business transactions are done by mail.

As a rule, writers who have success in the greeting card industry are creative people who not only love to write, but also understand what other people want in greeting cards. These writers have learned the secret of "marketability and sendability" and as a result are able to express, in a minimum number of words, a multitude of sentiments.

Getting started writing greeting cards on a free-lance basis is not at all difficult. You don't have to possess a college degree, or live in New York. What you will need is the ability to create messages that people want to send and receive. You'll also need to be familiar with what is already on the market; what people are buying and sending. Then you'll need to know which companies are most likely to accept your particular type of submissions.

This report will offer information and suggestions about the greeting card industry and how to create and submit material that could earn you \$150 or more per idea. It is not intended as a guarantee against rejection. Even the most successful writers are familiar with editor's rejections. But, if you are creative, enjoy writing, and are willing to follow specific company guidelines, you could soon be making good money doing something that is both fun and challenging.

WHAT GREETING CARD COMPANIES ARE LOOKING FOR

While the greeting card industry is not stagnant, and new ideas and trends are frequently being developed, the three basic card categories remain the same -- traditional, studio (or contemporary) and alternative. And when publishing a line of greeting cards, in any category, a company must cater to the people who are most likely to buy and send cards. In most cases, that means women between the ages of 18 and 50. So the majority of companies are looking for cards that target issues these women care about; relationships, success, religion, money, health, and so on.

Even though traditional and contemporary cards continue to be a staple of the greeting card industry, there may be an even better opportunity for the free-lance writer in tune with relevant issues. Issue oriented, or alternative cards, are becoming increasingly popular even with smaller companies that are expanding their lines in order to reach this growing market.

Alternative cards offer a response to non-traditional card-sending situations and can be just as viable a means of communication as traditional cards. Some of today's best selling cards are non-traditional cards commemorating new jobs, promotions, and salary raises. Other top selling alternative cards deal with relationships, even the break-up of marriages. Still another significant line of alternative cards is aimed at people who have experienced, or are experiencing, drug and alcohol addictions. At least one greeting card company has already created a complete line of such cards, in cooperation with a drug and alcohol abuse foundation.

Whether the sending situation is traditional or non-traditional, it's safe to say most companies prefer a personal, conversational style message rather than a verse of rhyme. However, rhymed verse is often used for inspirational cards, which also have a fairly large market. Most companies specify their individual preferences in their writer's guidelines. That's why it is essential to know what a specific company is looking for before you make a submission.

Another ingredient many companies are looking for is humor. Cards that convey a message with humor are very popular, especially with the baby boom generation, which makes up a large portion of the card-sending market. The preference, even with humor, is for short messages that are immediately understood and funny. The ideal is to have an attention-getting, one-sentence lead in on the outside (or front) of the card, with an equally brief, but effective, punch line inside. The intention is to get the potential buyer/sender hooked by the lead-in message so she/he can't resist opening the card to get to the punch line.

Companies that are looking for humorous card ideas are usually emphatic and clear about the kinds of humor they will accept. As a rule "corny" or sentimental humor is not preferred. Most companies request humor that is "off-the-wall," "laugh-out-loud," "irreverent," "outrageous," and in many cases, "risque." In other words, try to make your humorous ideas as "cliche'-free," unpredictable, and funny as you can.

In general, most greeting card companies are looking for cards that are appropriate for traditional sending occasions, as well as cards for newer "issue" oriented situations. Here are several of the most sought after types of card ideas:

(1) Birthdays. Since there's never a shortage of birthdays, the market for original birthday cards, both humorous and serious, remains a steady market for writers. Birthday cards can make us laugh about getting older, or they can be sensitive, serving as a reminder of the positive side of life, past and future.

(2) Friendship. Good friends are hard to find, and keep. That's why friendship cards continue to be a profitable part of the greeting card industry. Most friendship cards deal with the general value of friendship, or the significance of a specific friendship. Again, both humorous and serious card ideas are acceptable to most greeting card companies. The main thing is that the ideas must be original and genuinely and clearly express some positive aspect of friendship.

(3) Get Well. Like birthday cards, the need for get well cards remains constant. Most people with not-so-serious illnesses appreciate humorous get well cards. But, prospective writers should be cautioned to stay away from over-used and worn out hospital humor concerning hospital gowns, hospital food and so on. Greeting card companies are looking for fresh ideas, not a re-working of old ones.

There is also a need for non-humorous get well cards that express appropriate, and sensitive sentiments toward someone experiencing a serious illness. What greeting card companies are looking for here is a sensitive approach to a serious, and even grave situation. Sometimes the sentiment "get well soon" is not appropriate, even for get well cards.

(4) Sympathy. Unfortunately, sympathy cards are always needed. To fill that need, a writer must be able to address the loss of a loved one with good taste and sensitivity.

(5) Love And Romance. Writers of love and romance card ideas will do well to address all kinds of love and different aspects of romance; first love, long-term romantic relationships, marriage, sharing, trust, commitment, renewing an old romance, and so on. The market is good for both humorous and serious cards addressing the themes of love and romance.

(6) Support And Encouragement. This type of card has increased in popularity over the past decade and offers creative writers a good deal of opportunity. These cards can be given to friends, relatives, colleagues, lovers -- anyone who might need to know that they are not alone. The most common message with this type of card is "I'm here for you." These cards offer both encouragement and support, and can be treated in either a serious or humorous manner.

(7) Inspirational Cards. Most companies looking for inspirational cards request messages that address spiritual or human potential. These cards normally deal with some aspect of personal growth, are non-humorous, utilize sensitive language, and require an understanding of the spiritual and human

condition.

(8) Alternative Cards. These cards are designed for non-traditional sending occasions. The most common card ideas in this line are those offering congratulations for a new job, job promotion, or raise in salary. More serious issues, such as divorce, terminal illness, and substance abuse, are also top-selling themes in the alternative card line.

The main thing a writer should remember is that greeting card companies are all looking for fresh ideas and messages, not time-worn cliches and sappy sentiment. Greeting card messages should be immediate and clear. Writers should avoid wordy or complex messages, and be direct and original. In short, most greeting card companies are looking for ideas they haven't seen or heard before.

HOW TO SUBMIT IDEAS

Most greeting card companies have their own specific guidelines for submitting editorial, verse, and artwork. You can find out what each greeting card company requires by writing a brief letter, asking for a copy of their writer's guidelines. You should always include a Long Self-Addressed, Stamped Envelope (LSASE) with your request. And if the guidelines are available, you should receive them in two or three weeks. Your request letter need not be more than a simple, polite request. For example:

Jane Doe
Locust Lane
Jackson, OH 45640

American Greetings
10500 American Rd.
Cleveland, OH 44144

(Your letter does not need to be addressed to a specific person.)

Please send me a copy of your writer's guidelines. I have enclosed an SASE for your convenience. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

In order to send your request letters, you will, of course, need a list of greeting card company addresses. You can get this information from several different sources. One good source is the Writer's Market from Writer's Digest Books in Cincinnati, Ohio. Another source is The Writer's Handbook published by The Writer, Inc., Boston, MA.

Both of these publications contain sections on greeting cards, featuring alphabetical listings of many companies with assorted information, including addresses and the availability (or not) of writer's guidelines. Some libraries have these books in their reference sections, but if not, be prepared to spend \$20

to \$25.

While both the Writer's Market and The Writer's Handbook" are valuable tools for free-lance writers, there are a couple of more economical ways to get the information you need. One way is by writing to: Artist and Writer's Market, The Greeting Card Association, 1356 New York Ave. NW, Suite 615, Washington, DC 20005. Be sure to include an SASE with your request. You can also visit card racks in various stores and select the lines that appeal to your particular creativity. Jot down the companies that interest you and send them a request letter.

Trade magazines such as Greetings, published by Mackay Publishing Corporation of New York, also offer specific greeting card company information, as well as information about the latest trends, trade shows, and seminars.

While submission guidelines may vary from company to company there are some generalizations that can be made.

(1) Each message or verse should be typed on a separate piece of paper (8 1/2" x 11"), or 4" x 6" or 3" x 5" slips of paper or index cards. Most companies require submissions on 3" x 5" index cards, but in some cases studio-card submissions may be required on 9" x 9 1/2" folded paper.

(2) In most cases you will be required to use only one side of the submission card or paper. Your name, address, and phone number should be placed in the upper left-hand corner of each submission, and the message or verse in the center.

(3) Most companies will allow from 5 to 15 separate card ideas with each submission. If you are not sure how many ideas or verses a specific publisher will accept in one group, send no more than 10.

(4) Each submission should be accompanied by a brief cover letter. The letter should be addressed to the editor or editorial staff, and briefly indicate what you are submitting. The cover letter should be no longer than a short paragraph. Also include an SASE for return of any submissions not accepted.

(5) If you make a lot of submissions, you'll need to keep organized. The best way to do this is to create your own coding system. Your system doesn't have to be elaborate or complex -- just something you will understand. One simple coding system is to place your initials, the company initials, and a number in the upper right-hand corner of each submission card.

Here's a sample card submission:

Jane Doe
Locust Lane
Jackson, OH 45640
(Phone number)

JD-AM-1

ANOTHER BIRTHDAY!

I'm Glad I Haven't Known You

All Of Your Life

I Couldn't have afforded FORTY Birthday Cards!

Most greeting card company writer's and artist guidelines will follow the general format outlined above. However, you should never take submission guidelines for granted. Before you submit, get the company guidelines and follow them to the letter.

ARTWORK

It's not necessary for free-lance writers to furnish artwork as well as the editorial for card ideas. As a rule, greeting card companies have artists on staff, or they commission artists to illustrate accepted new card ideas. That doesn't mean writers cannot submit their own artwork too. Many companies are pleased to hear from creative individuals who can provide both the editorial and the artwork. Again, you should refer to each company's writer's and artist's guidelines to familiarize yourself with individual company policies.

If you are an artist, illustrator, designer, or photographer, and wish to submit some concept to a greeting card company, you should understand that most companies do not accept original artwork of any sort. Instead, you'll be required to submit slides, photocopies, photos, promotional pieces, or some other reproduction of your work. Generally, greeting card companies like to see an artist's style before they ask for an original work or contract for an assignment. So don't send any original artwork unless a company specifically requests that you do.

Whatever representations of your artwork you send, you'll most likely be required to reduce your submissions to standard sizes -- 5" x 7" or 4 3/4" x 6 1/4" for cards, and 4 1/8" x 5 1/2" for postcards. Photographs are often required to be submitted in the form of transparencies. And color, or hand-colored work is usually preferred over black and white.

Every piece of artwork you submit should include your name, address, and telephone number. And while it is not necessary, you can place the copyright symbol next to your name. You should also include an SASE if you want your material returned. Make sure the envelope is large enough to hold your submission, and be sure it's stamped with the proper amount of postage.

Usually, the relationship between copy and artwork is significant. It's a good idea for writers to think of, or plan, the card as an entire concept. Even if you are not artistically inclined, most card company editors appreciate intelligent suggestions from writers about an overall concept.

NOVELTY IDEAS

Writing messages and verse for greeting cards is not the only way a free-lance writer can use such a talent to make money.

There's also a good market for writing messages for posters, t-

shirts, buttons, telephone answering machines, wedding invitations, and other items. In fact, many greeting card companies also feature a line of novelty items. Some of these companies pay the same flat fee for a novelty message as they do for a greeting card idea.

The greeting card companies also involved with novelty items are usually in need of editorial and/or concepts for buttons, mugs, key rings, plaques, bookmarks, refrigerator magnets, and other such items. In most cases novelty humor as well as serious themes are accepted.

Mugs, which are popular gift items, work best with strong personal me-to-you messages. Some popular themes companies look for include birthday, get well, and personal relationships. The messages are similar to greeting card messages, but must be expressed in one line since the message is only on the outside of the mug, rather than the typical two-line greeting card.

In general, slogans, sayings, or any copy for non-card products should follow several guidelines. First of all, a novelty product must accurately reflect the lifestyles, attitudes, and personalities of the people who use or wear the product. That also means that the written message must be some catchy and relevant statement about a multitude of life experiences. The messages on novelty products are usually philosophical statements about relationships, dieting, school, sex, work, men, women, hobbies, etc.

When creating slogans and statements for novelty products, it's important to keep in mind that the end result should be a means of self-expression. People use or wear such products as a fun way to make personal statements. In many cases novelty products are humorous items that allow us to make fun of life's ups and downs as well as ourselves.

SUCCESS ANALYSIS

Eight contributing factors are measured on a 1 to 10 basis (with 10 being excellent) based on analysis of this opportunity.

1. Time Investment	7
2. Start-up Costs	10
3. Gross Income Potential	5
4. Net Income Potential	5
5. Income in Relation to Investment	8
6. Stability	5
7. Overall Risk	9
8. Potential for Growth	7
Overall Potential for Success	7.00

POTENTIAL EARNINGS

Since greeting cards is a multi-billion dollar industry, there is good potential for substantial earnings. Most companies pay from \$25 to \$150 for each free-lance idea or verse they buy. Some pay as much as \$500 for a single idea or verse. If your work is especially original and creative, a submission of ten card ideas to one company could bring you anywhere from \$25 to \$1,500

(or more) depending on how many of the ideas the company buys, and how much they pay per idea.

In most cases a company's writer's guidelines will tell you how much they pay per idea. That information is also available for most of the companies listed in the Writer's Market and The Writer's Handbook. If you feel your ideas are worth more than \$25 apiece, submit them to a company that pays more. The choice of companies you wish to deal with is entirely up to you. Just make sure your submissions fit the specific guidelines and needs of the company you are sending them to.

Usually, if an editor buys 2 or 3 ideas out of a batch of 10 to 15 submissions the writer is doing very well. But it isn't unheard of for an editor to buy most, or all, of a writer's ideas from one submission. Admittedly, for that to happen all the writer's ideas and/or verses must be highly original, creative, and exceptional. And they must be exactly what the company is looking for.

While most companies pay per card or idea, a few pay small royalties. Other companies may prefer to test a card before buying it. In that event, the company will pay a small fee to test the idea before they make a final decision. Many companies also give a writer's credit on the back of the card. Some companies will even include free samples if they accept your idea(s).

How much a company pays per card is certainly a consideration when deciding where to send your ideas, but it's not the only consideration. You must also be reasonably certain your ideas fit the particular needs of the company. You should also consider whether the company pays on "acceptance" or on "publication."

Being "paid on acceptance" simply means that shortly after a company accepts your idea(s) for publication you'll be getting a check. On the other hand, being "paid on publication" means you'll most likely have to wait a good deal longer before you get any money. The time that elapses between acceptance of an idea and its actual publication can be several months. That's why most experienced free-lance writers prefer to work with companies that pay on acceptance.

The important thing to remember regarding potential earnings from writing greeting cards is that there are no guarantees. Anyone who has ever written anything for publication, from greeting cards to novels, has suffered rejection. Not every editor will find your ideas and verses as witty, original, or creative as you do. But if you are truly creative, prolific, and persistent, you will eventually be successful. To a large degree, your potential earnings from writing greeting cards is only as limited as your imagination and creativity.

SOME TIPS

(1) As a general rule, the most successful greeting cards are those that are short and to the point. Concentrate on creating card ideas that work with a one-sentence front and a one-sentence follow-up on the inside. Since most stores that carry greeting cards have from 500 to 1,000 cards on display, a quick glance is all each card gets. So a short, catchy, readily

understood front-of-the-card sentence has a decided advantage over a more lengthy and ponderous message.

(2) Since birthday cards are usually a company's biggest seller, it's a good idea for beginners to concentrate on birthday ideas and concepts. It's not only a good way to learn what companies are looking for, it may also be the best opportunity for initial success.

(3) When writing card ideas, consider sending occasions such as birthdays, Christmas, job promotions, etc., and imagine someone (a friend, colleague, or relative) to whom you would give the card. In effect, you should look at your card ideas and ask yourself if you would actually buy them and send them to people.

(4) If you think you've heard it before, then forget it. Originality is one of the main keys to success in writing greeting cards. One way to insure that your ideas will be fresh and innovative is to keep in touch with what's going on in the world around you. Read newspapers, popular magazines, go to the movies -- anything that will keep you abreast of the latest issues, fads, and fashions. You'll be amazed at the amount of inspiration you'll get simply by "paying attention."

(5) Even if you are not an artist or illustrator, it's always a good idea to have a complete concept in mind when you create a specific message. It's also a good idea to suggest the entire concept to an editor when you make your submission. Don't worry about artwork. If the overall concept appeals to the editor, a company staff member will take care of the card design.

(6) Send your rejections to other companies. Take a careful look at all your rejected ideas. Eliminate the weakest ones, and send the rest to another company. Rejection of an idea may simply mean that a specific company doesn't need it. That does not mean another company can't use it.

(7) Don't get impatient. If you haven't heard from an editor 3 or 4 weeks after you've submitted material, don't write, and don't call. You should allow at least eight weeks for a response. Some companies may not get back to you for 12 weeks or more. Many companies state their typical response time in their guidelines.

(8) When most card companies buy an idea they "buy all rights." Many of these companies will also require the writer to guarantee that the material they are buying is original and has not been sold to any other company. If a company requires you to sign a release form and/or a contract to sell all rights, make sure you understand the terms of the agreement before signing.

(9) Keep records. Use a 3"x 5" card file to hold duplicates of your submissions. You can arrange your ideas any way you like -- subject, season, prose, verse, one-liners, etc. Keep on file what you send, where you send it, and the date it was sent. Of course, you should also record whether an idea was purchased or rejected.

SUMMARY

How much money can you make writing greeting cards? The answer to that question is really up to you. Certainly a

creative, motivated writer can make excellent money on a part-time basis. But it is also possible to make a comfortable living freelancing for greeting card companies full time. Obviously, the more time you devote to creating new greeting card ideas and concepts, the more money you are apt to make. Just don't expect great monetary rewards over night. It takes time.

Before you make any money writing greeting cards, you'll have to take the first step. Become familiar with the greeting card industry. Browse through card racks and see what the market is offering. Get a list of greeting card companies and send for their writer's guidelines and market list. And before you submit your ideas make sure they fall within the company's requirements.

While there are no guarantees, there is a great opportunity for free-lance writers to make big money writing greeting cards. An initial small investment in index cards, postage, and envelopes, can easily be recovered with one purchased idea. If you are creative, love to write, have initiative, and are willing to make the effort, you can see your words and ideas become greeting cards and make money as well.

SOURCES

Books:

199X Writer's Market -- editor: Mark Kissling, Writer's Digest Books, 1507 Dana, Cincinnati, OH 45207

The Writer's Digest Guide To Manuscript Formats, by Dian Dincin Buchman and Seli Groves, Writer's Digest Books, 1507 Dana, Cincinnati, OH 45207

The Writer's Handbook, edited by Sylvia K. Burack, The Writer, Inc., Boston, MA

Guidelines:

Amberly Greeting Card Company -- editor: Ned Stern, Gold Coast Drive, Cincinnati, OH

Artist's And Writer's Guidelines, by Carol Wilson Fine Arts, Inc., Portland, OR

Creative Guidelines, the Maine Line Company, Rockland, ME

Guidelines, by Style Services, 1120 Royal Palm Beach Blvd., Royal Palm Beach, FL

Kalan's Copy Guidelines, by Kalan, 97 S. Union Ave., Lansdowne, PA

Noble Works, editor: Christopher Noble, Hoboken, NJ

Submitting Artwork, Photography, Editorial And Product Ideas To Hallmark Cards, Inc., by Hallmark Cards, Inc., Kansas City, MO

Twenty Tips For Turning Your Greeting Card Ideas Into Cash, by Greetings, Cleveland, OH

West Graphics, editor: Carol West, 238 Capp Street, San

Francisco, CA

Writer's Guidelines, by Merlyn Graphics Corporation, Canoga Park,
CA

Writer's Guidelines, by Oatmeal Studios, Rochester, VT