

Case Study: Liz Farr Fast-tracks Her Transition from Full-Time Accountant to Full-Time Freelance B2B Copywriter

Ed: Hey Liz, thank you so much for talking with me today.

Liz: No problem. Glad to talk to you again, Ed. Always a joy to hear your voice.

Ed: Well, likewise. It's always fun to talk with you.

We're going to talk a little bit about your experience in my coaching program, but before we get to those questions why don't you tell us a little bit about what you do as a copy writer.

Specifically, what type of clients you work with, what your background is, because I think you have an interesting story there, and what type of assignments do you tend to do a lot of.

Liz: Okay, well as you said I have a little bit of a different background. I am a CPA, Certified Public Accountant. Been doing accounting work since about 2002. A few years ago I decided I didn't want to spend the rest of my life putting numbers in boxes and so I started looking around and copy writing landed in my lap as a possible career change.

I needed something that I could get into without having to go back to school to get another degree. As I discovered, eventually, accountants are really terrible at writing and they're also really bad at marketing. If you look at most accountants' websites and their marketing materials, it's pretty terrible and pretty much all looks the same.

That arena was wide open to me, because I have a very unique skill set being able to write in a way that the layperson can understand and also being able to talk to accountants so they don't have to explain to me what everything they're doing means.

They can just say well I do, we do income tax. I can say well I can write a page on your website on income tax.

Ed: I love that you were able to recognize that you could leverage your background and that, in and of itself, was a strength, but then you also have that unique

marketing and writing ability, which like you said most of your colleagues don't have.

Liz: Right, and a lot of accountants think that marketing is just going out to networking events and handing out business cards. A lot of the times that about as far as they take it, so it's pretty terrible. So anyways, I managed early on to connect with a company out of New Zealand that does websites for accountants all throughout the English-speaking world, which has been really, really fun for me.

I get to write about accountants in Canada and United Kingdom and Australia and even a few in the U.S. It's really fun, it's a lot of fun learning about the different firms and different tax laws and the ways accountants function in different countries.

Ed: That is very cool. We were just talking offline before we hit the record button about how it's so neat that you get to work with clients in different countries and you're exposed to that. It makes it even more interesting than the work already is. I'm curious about where you were Liz, when you first came into my coaching program. Where were you in your business, what challenges were you facing?

Obviously you had some challenges, because you decided to work with me. Can you take us back to that period and where you were?

Liz: Back then, I really didn't have the confidence yet that my business background, my work background as an accountant was something really useful.

I started working with that company in New Zealand but I hadn't really figured out that that was where I really should go. I was just floundering around trying to figure out how to best market myself. I did have a website, but it was kind of crappy.

It's much better now. I really didn't have a good road map for what to do next. I knew that I needed to get some help in that area. I knew that I'd be able to figure it out eventually on my own, but getting somebody to guide me in a group of people that were on the same task. I knew that that would speed up the process a lot for me.

Ed: Yeah. I think you were also constrained by time too, because you go through these seasons where you work crazy hours, right? You don't have that kind of stable, recurring free time to do this little by little, right, you need it to make some things happen.

Liz: Right, I needed to get things going pretty quickly so that come the next busy season, the next tax season, I would be thinking about retiring completely from public accounting.

Ed: Yeah. I'm curious when you first, when we first started working together in my coaching program you had known about me, we had met before. Other than the fact that you knew you needed a road map, and you needed to accelerate your progress, were there any other factors you considered? Because I mean it's a big decision for anybody to invest, not just the money, but also the time and effort into any coaching program.

Liz: Well before I joined your coaching program I bought some of your other programs before, that really greased the treads for me because I knew that they worked. I knew that your Warm Email Prospecting program worked, because that's how I got my client in New Zealand.

Ed: Oh, okay so I wasn't aware of that. That client came, and I knew it was before we started working together, but it came as a result of doing warm email prospecting?

Liz: Oh, yeah. That's how I got him. I knew that you weren't going to make me do anything crazy or uncomfortable, and I knew that everything you did had been tested by you. It wasn't just myths that you had read about somewhere. This was stuff that you had put to test and you had tested yourself and you had worked with other people and seen it work with them.

Ed: Excellent, okay. Makes sense and I can see where you had a comfort level with me, you tried some of my strategies before. We worked together for 4 months. And I'm curious, have you been able to identify some tangible results from that experience? I know you're a numbers person, I'm not going to put you on the spot and say give me some numbers but I'm sure you've thought about, "Did I get a good return on investment?"

Liz: I definitely did. One of the interesting things that I got from working with you, probably the most useful thing was figuring out how to write the website copy for myself. I say that was really useful, because right after I did that first website and got that lesson in the course I was asked to write my first website for an accounting firm in the United Kingdom and I said I have no idea how to do that.

Well let me pull out my notes from Ed's course, because copywriting is pretty similar to being a personal service provider like an accountant or attorney. It's really very similar so I used that as sort of the foundation for the first couple of websites that I wrote.

My contact in New Zealand, after I'd done a couple for him, called me a magician because I could pull words out of nothing. I could put a positive spin on what seemed like nothing at all to him.

Ed: Love it!

Liz: That was really just using the thinking process from the website for how to write web copy. I use that all the time now.

Ed: That's great. That's an unusual benefit, and one that I'm glad you pointed out. You are really good at seeing where and how you can apply something in a different way.

Liz: Yeah. I've found that everything I'm learning about marketing myself, I can apply to helping accountants with their marketing.

It's really the same, so I'm really fortunate in that respect. I'm in a niche that I don't have to jump around. I can try something for myself and then apply it to a client.

Ed: I'm curious if you feel that the program helped you land additional clients. You'd had one client going into it. Based on what you, not just what you learned, but maybe what you were able to refine, has that helped you land more work?

Liz: Yeah, this has helped. What has really helped is just ... were the lessons on how to talk to prospects and how to have that conversation -- those initial conversations about providing services, about projects, about pricing and about just getting the work done.

That was really helpful. That was a place where I was just floundering. I really had no clue what to say to somebody. I really only got my first client, the New Zealand guy, because he was desperately looking for somebody who knew U.S. tax who could write.

He had talked to enough accountants in the U.S. that he knew none of them could do that.

Ed: Hence, you. That's where you come in.

Liz: Yeah.

Ed: So, definitely, in terms of a conversation, you're right. So much could go wrong there, right? It's knowing how to lead that conversation and knowing what questions to ask and in what order and how to limit what you ask. I find that a lot of new freelancers have trouble keeping it contained. They're just asking

things randomly and that can be very dangerous, because it makes you look like an amateur. And whether the prospect realizes it or not, even if it's subconscious, they start feeling like... "I don't know, I don't get a good feeling here."

You want to make sure that doesn't happen. You want to make sure they have a good feeling about you.

Liz: Right, right. That's given me a lot of confidence. Just to be able to have that conversation around what I do and how I can help somebody.

It also gives me the confidence to know when something isn't going to be a good fit. I don't feel like I have to say yes to everybody who comes to me.

I have the confidence to know that I don't have to be low balled. I can ask for good prices.

Ed: You sound, from this conversation that you have a really good foundation in place. You still have a day job, so you're doing this on the side. I'm curious, where do you think ... what are your plans? Where do you think you'll go from here?

Liz: Well, I've been very fortunate that I'm just working part time as a CPA right now. However, come this busy season, I did commit to my boss that I would stick around for at least one more busy season and really that's to help him out because I think that I could probably make more money doing full time copy writing.

I am planning on retiring from public accounting as soon as I can after April 15th. I just can't wait!

Ed: Love it. So one more storm you have to ride, and it sounds like you have great momentum here and that's fantastic. I see a bright future ahead for you, Liz. I couldn't be happier for you.

I'm going to put you on the spot in a bit here with this last question because you don't really know who is listening to this right now. I don't know who is listening to it, but I do know this: I know that a lot of people who listen to these case study interviews are on the fence about getting coaching from me.

Without knowing, what the specifics are of everyone's situation, if somebody is on the fence, what would you tell them to think about or what factors would you tell them to consider?

Liz: Well, one of the big things comes from ... one of the conversations that you and I had when we were talking about this is that you have to view this as an

investment. When I went back to school to get my degree in accounting, I had to take out a student loan. That was around \$20,000 that I had to borrow to do that.

A couple thousand to be able to hit the ground running is a great investment. Plus, you know, working with Ed, he's a nice guy, but he will hold your feet to the fire and he will get you to do what you need to do.

Just do it. You will not regret it one bit.

Ed: Well, I'm humbled by that. I love that you talked about return on investment. I'm very much like you are in that respect.

I invest heavily in professional development every year, whether it's a course or coaching, training program, a consultant. I've hired consultants in the past and I make my decisions very carefully, but they always revolve around return on investment. How quickly can I get my money back, so the payoff and then what is the potential in terms of ROI.

I have a pretty good track record, but I think if you look at it that way it does two things. You're able to make a more objective decision and secondly, you become accountable to yourself because you said look I'm going to invest in this because I'm expecting this ROI.

There's a higher probability that you'll work harder and that you'll be more diligent, and obviously you're proof of that.

Liz: Yes.

Ed: So, Liz, thank you very much for sharing your story today. I truly appreciate you coming on here.

Liz: Oh, you're welcome. Glad to do it.