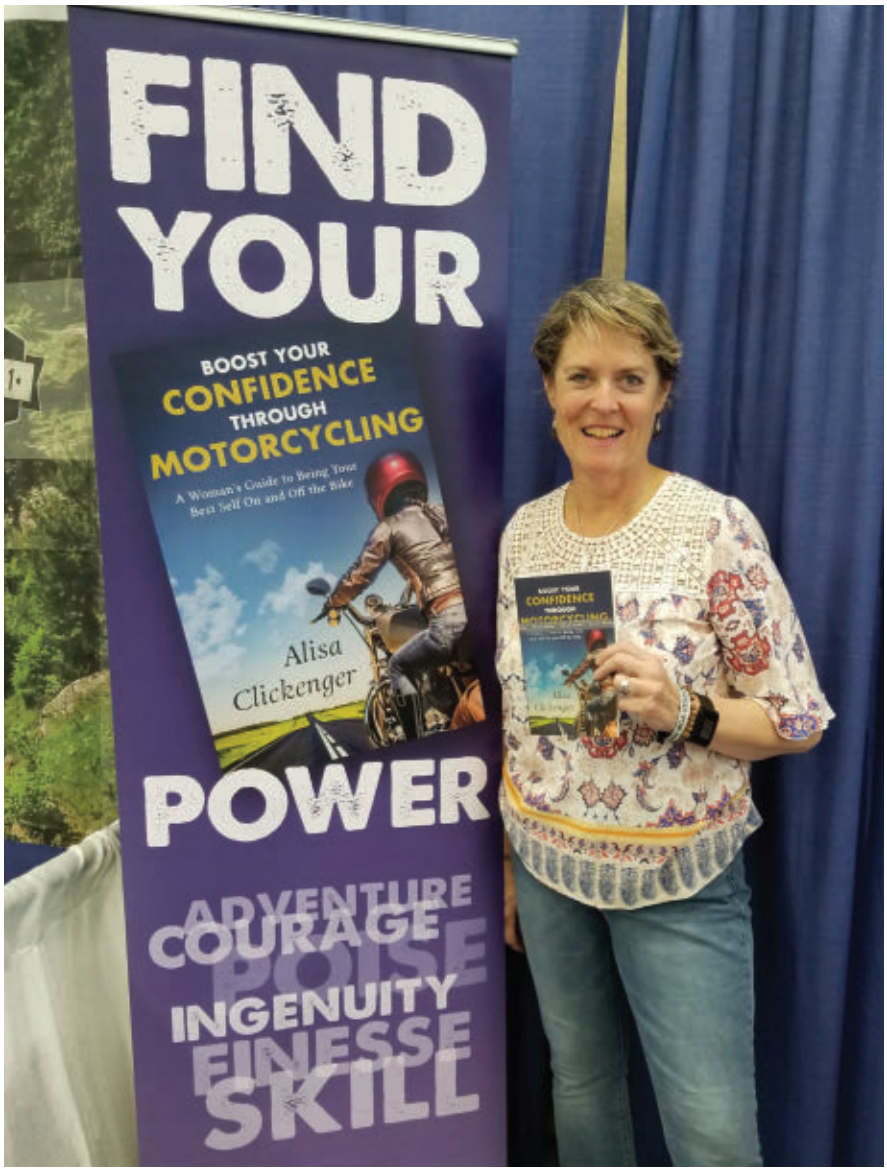
FREE-WHEELIN'

Like a solo ride, the life of a freelancer can be lonely, but it also has significant rewards.

> By **Alisa Clickenger**



Although there is always the pressure to make financial ends meet, following one's passion can develop into a career bound only by one's imagination and determination.

Most motorcyclists ride because they love the freedom, adventure and strong sense of being in the moment. These are my main reasons, but motorcycling has provided so much that I took it a step further and made this passion my life.

I quit my corporate job in 2006, not even knowing that moto journalism could be a career. I wasn't offered a regular column until several years into my writing journey. However, with determination, many errors and a lot of networking, I now have regular columns in a couple of magazines. Freelance writing puts gas in the tank, but it's a difficult way to pay the bills.

Writing for magazines is part of a constructed motorcycle lifestyle focused on doing what I love. It allows travel and meeting diverse and inspirational people, which are unparalleled benefits. Becoming a writer and speaker has opened many doors and led me on many unforgettable adventures.

The freelance lifestyle isn't for the faint of heart. It requires constant adaptation and change, and to always have a side hustle. Here is some advice for anyone aspiring to become an influencer in the motorcycle industry,

FIND A NICHE

Google is more powerful than some governments, and Facebook can be more influential than politics. Data is the new oil, and knowledge is the new currency. The more specific and niche the knowledge is, the more likely it will stand out and make an impact. The motorcycling world has many segments and niches. To become recognized as an expert or influential voice, it's best to have a niche.

I am deeply passionate about empowering women through motorcycling, so my main field of focus is women riders. I guide women's motorcycle tours, create content aimed at female riders, and support women who ride on several other levels.

To distinguish yourself and find a unique voice, choose a topic that sets you on fire, then write and speak tirelessly about it to claim the niche.

EXPERIMENT

Finding and sticking to a niche is essential to become a writer or speaker in

ALISA CLICKENGER

the motorcycle industry. However, this doesn't mean never venture out of the chosen niche, or stitch several niches together.

Much of what I do in the women's riding scene overlaps with work as a motorcycle journalist. Similarly, my book is focused on women, but also speaks to a male audience. Confidence is something practically everybody wants more of.

If the niche is café racers, consider speaking about commuting and safe city riding. If the passion lies in adventure riding, possibly branch into rally racing or specific builds. Don't be afraid to experiment to discover the right niche and any overlapping segments. Create a unique blend of themes, topics and subjects that will bring out the best in the target audience.

WATCH TRENDS

No matter how original your voice is, it cannot operate in a vacuum, separated from industry news and trends. It's important to seek out and blend components of similar niches. Always keep a finger on the pulse of emerging trends in the motorcycling world.

What are the current hot topics among motorcycle media, marketing and promoters? A cursory glance indicates millennials, smaller bikes, women riders and electric motorcycles are currently trending.

By staying informed, even if the trend has little to do with a specific niche, it is possible to offer commentary from a unique angle, for example, "Do Women Prefer Electric Bikes?"

BE AUTHENTIC

The catchword "authenticity" has become a bit of a cliché, hipster slogan in Instagram hashtags. However, the essence of its meaning has not changed, and is as important as ever. Being true to yourself and the target audience is key. There are several reasons for this.

Building a fake persona means having to constantly perform, instead of simply speaking from the heart. It is extremely exhausting, and the shiny surface will eventually crack. More importantly, people are great at smelling a rat. If the message isn't authentic and truthful, doesn't adhere to their core beliefs and values, or is artificially constructed, the audience will sense it. So will companies, magazine editors and marketers considering a partnership with a content producer.

ALISA CLICKENGER

With the vast media options available, influencers may find themselves promoting their product or pursuit in many ways, including on the radio.

Your voice and your opinions might go against the grain, but that isn't always bad. It can even be beneficial, if done for the right reasons. When trying to be scandalous merely to attract attention, the fame will be short-lived. However, when presenting innovative ideas, calling out injustices, or genuinely seeking to improve the niche, your platform will grow organically as more people identify with the cause.

BE PROFESSIONAL

Once you've carved a niche and created a unique, authentic voice, it's time to roll up your sleeves and continue doing the hard work. Professionalism is key, for several reasons. Being professional shows your audience, partners and potential sponsors that you are serious about what you do.

Being professional doesn't mean wearing a smart suit. Rather, it means keeping your word, being consistent with the quality of work and always over delivering. Be religious about deadlines. Never get too comfortable. Always aim to produce stellar content, regardless of whether it's for a dozen or for thousands of people.

Doing your best work and constantly outperforming yourself will get noticed, and make a huge difference.

REACH OUT TO MENTORS

Becoming an influencer is a lonely road. You are your own employer, boss and colleague. Reaching out to others in the same industry or niche can be a great source of support and inspiration. Finding mentors will make a significant difference in the chances of success.

Mentors have already successfully accomplished the same objective, and accumulated vast amounts of knowledge and experience in the process. They are a voice of authority and guidance, not merely emotional support or an empathetic ear. Mentors can see the path more clearly and help find and polish your voice, define a mission and produce an actionable plan. They can also hold you accountable to goals and boost motivation and morale.

Don't be shy about reaching out to people you admire. Everyone is busy; but with the right approach, true mentors will be happy to help and share their knowledge. The world is increasingly moving from focus on competition to focus on collaboration. Mentors are often as inspired by the help they provide as you will be by receiving it.

However lofty and complex the aspirations, keep your focus simple. Determination, hard work, creativity, authenticity and a tribe of mentors are all factors that can make the difference between being a hero or a zero. Do not be afraid to fail, because that's how we learn. Be flexible when it comes to experimenting and adapting.

Freelancing isn't a destination. As with riding motorcycles, there's always more to learn and new roads to explore, and that's what makes it fun. MCN