



Alternate Career Paths for Technical Communicators

By Jack Molisani

President, ProSpring Technical Staffing

Executive Director, The LavaCon Conference



About the Speaker

- **Associate Fellow, STC**
- **President, ProSpring Technical Staffing**
- **Executive Director,
The LavaCon Conference**



Warnings and Disclaimers

- **Group Participation**
- **I am not a Professional Statistician**
- **Speaking in Hypertext**
- **Chinese Artists**
- **Controversy!**



Career Path #1

- **Other Profession**
- **Technical Writer**
- **Sr. Technical Writer**
- **Documentation Manager (maybe)**



Career Path #2

- **Other Profession**
- **Technical Writer**
- **Sr. Technical Writer / Doc. Manager**
- **Contractor Technical Writer**
- **Technical Writing Business Owner**



Career Path #3

- **Other Profession**
- **Technical Writer**
- **Other Profession
(This time in a related field.)**



Related Fields

- **New field is related to technical writing**
- **Uses the same core competencies**
- **You take a specific task of technical writing and specialize in it**
- **Identified not as a “tech writer” but as a “_____”**



Core Competencies

- **Written Communication Skills**
- **Interview Skills**
- **Project Planning and Project Management**
- **Critical Thinking Skills**
- **Conflict Resolution**
- **User Advocacy**
- **Quality Control**



Related Fields

Accessibility

Business/Software Analysis

Change Management

Coding/Programming

Compliance

Content Management

Corporate Communication

Documentation Management

Graphic Design/Illustration

ID/Courseware Development

Localization / Internationalization

Marketing

Product Management

Project Management

Proposal Management

Quality Assurance

Release Management

Training

Usability

User Interface Design

Website Development

Other



Corporate Value

- **My premise: Related fields are more valued by management...**
- **and thus receive better compensation.**
- **Why? Because they are *perceived* to add value, reduce costs or generate revenue.**



Corporate Value

- **Or: Because they are perceived to add *more value*, reduce *more costs* or generate *more revenue* than technical writers do.**
- **Exceptions: Illustrators and QA/Testers**



The Survey

- **I created a web-based survey that asked about transitioning from technical writing into related fields**
- **Presented a predefined list, but also prompted for other answers**
- **Also asked about compensation**
- **Included TWs who haven't transitioned to get a compensation baseline**



The Survey

- **351 self-selecting responses**
- **Compensation answers were given in both hourly rates and annual salaries, so we annualized the hourly rate by multiplying the by 2,080 hours.**
- **Note that this affects the true average annual compensation since not all contractors bill 2,080 hours a year...**



The Survey

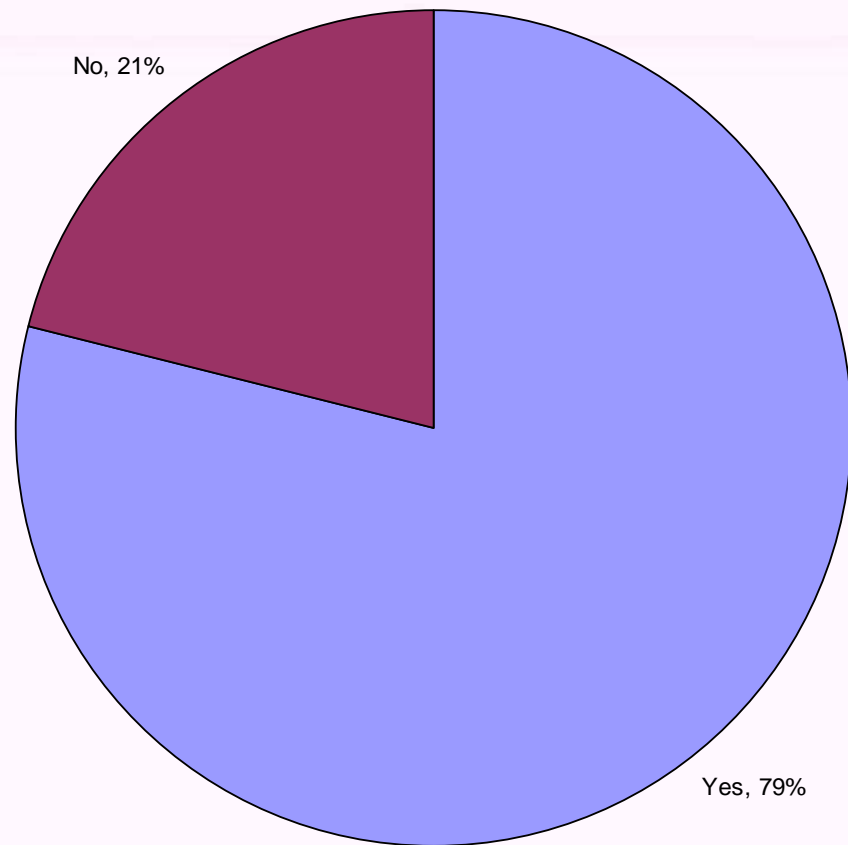
- **...and some fields are more consulting oriented than others.**
- **But since we did the same annualization across all answers, the survey should present relative differences between technical writing and other fields.**
- **(Remember that this is an informal survey with a limited self-selecting audience.)**



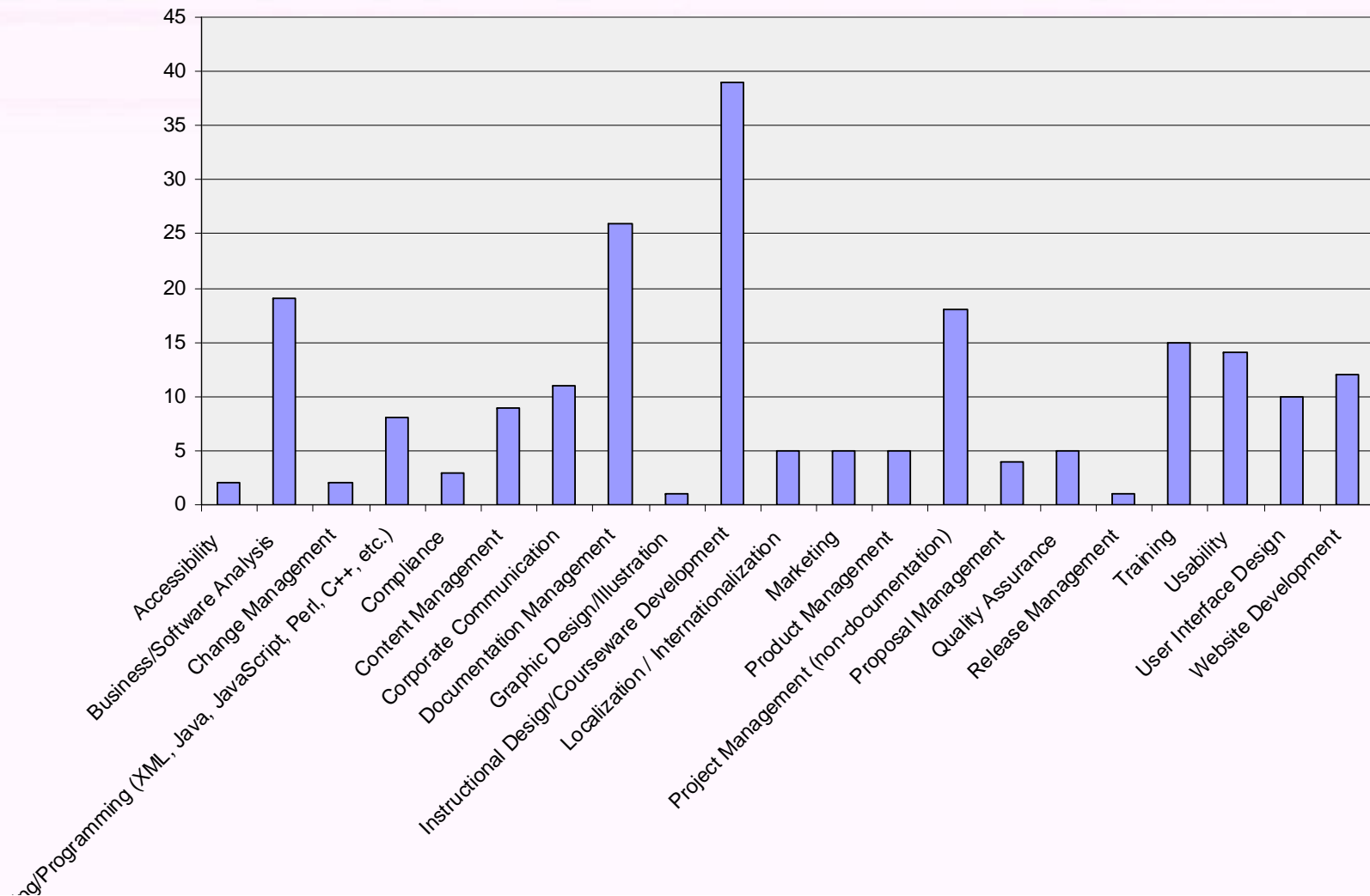
Other Disclaimers

- **I reassigned some “other” responses that were very close (or actually on) the predefined list to make tabulation easier.**
- **We limited respondents to choose only one field for the same reason.**
- **I did not include fields with fewer than three votes or answers that didn’t make sense (such as one person who gave a salary but whose field was “Unemployed.”)**
- **When given a range of compensation, we used the average. (Foreign currencies were converted.)**

Have You Transitioned from TW?



Into What Alternate Career Field



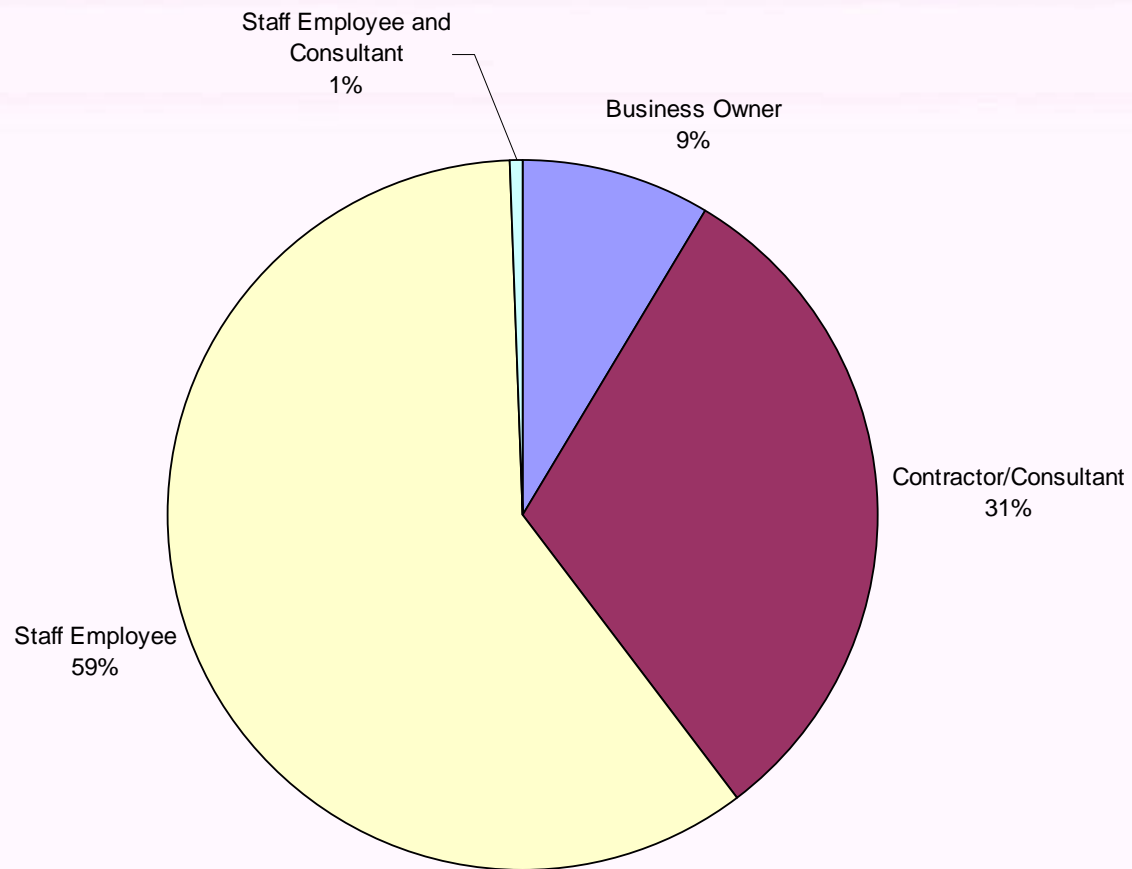


Other:

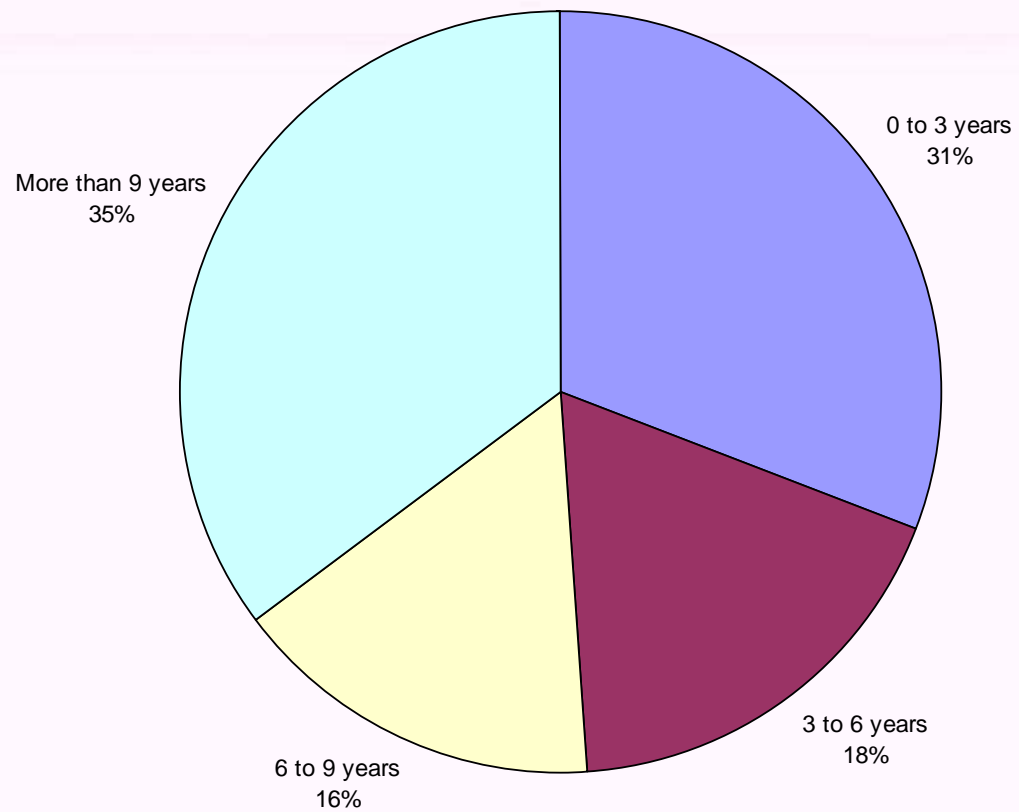
Association Management
Creative Writing
Customer Support (Help Desk)
Database Creation and Design
Editing
Human Resources/Recruiting
Information Architect
Innovation management
Knowledge Management
Lawyer
Parts Sales/Service Manager

Patent Claims Writing
Process Engineering
Program Management
Proposal Management
Publishing
Real Estate
Regulatory Affairs
Systems Engineering
TW recruitment
User Experience Management
XML validation

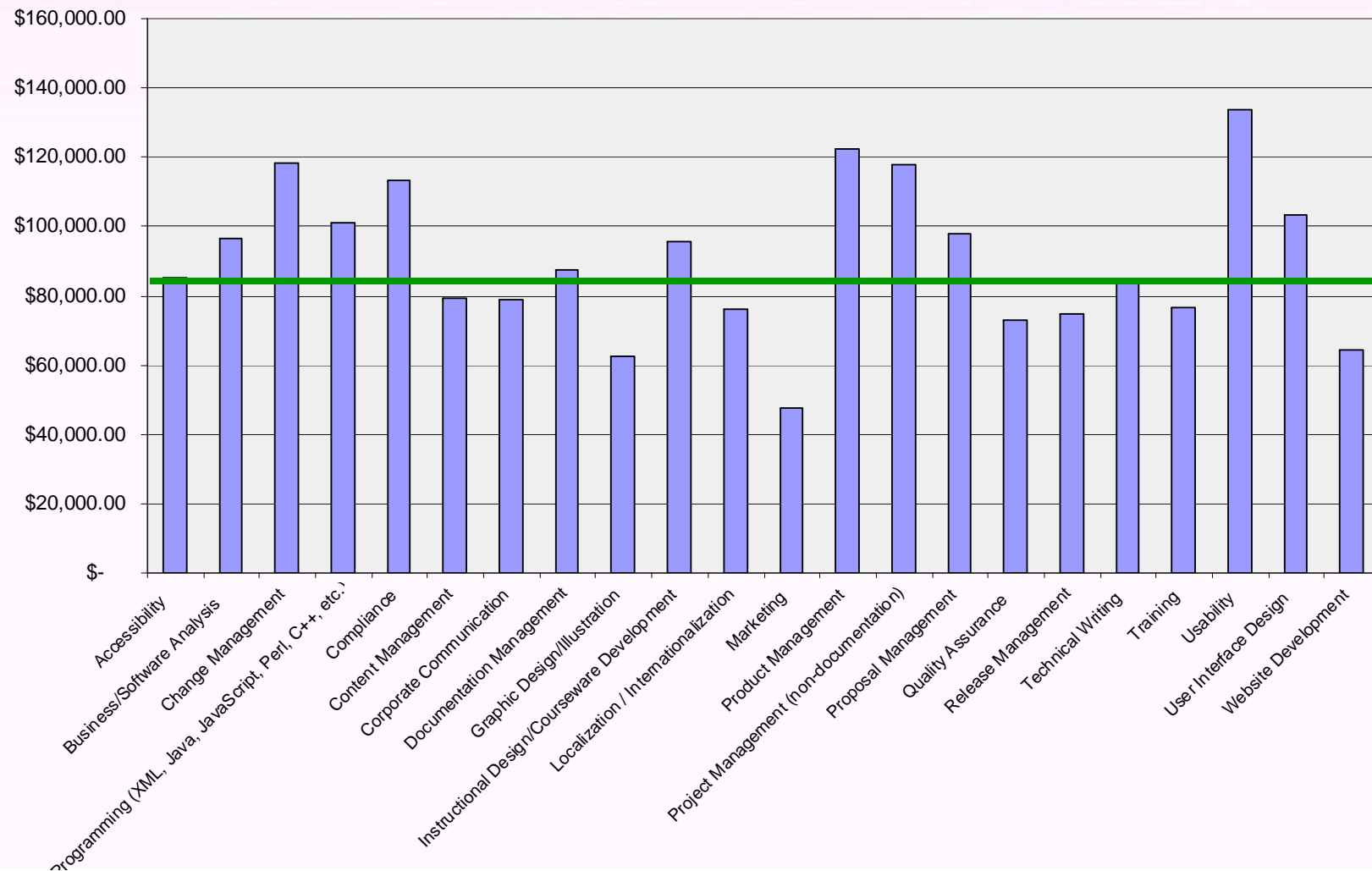
Type of Employment



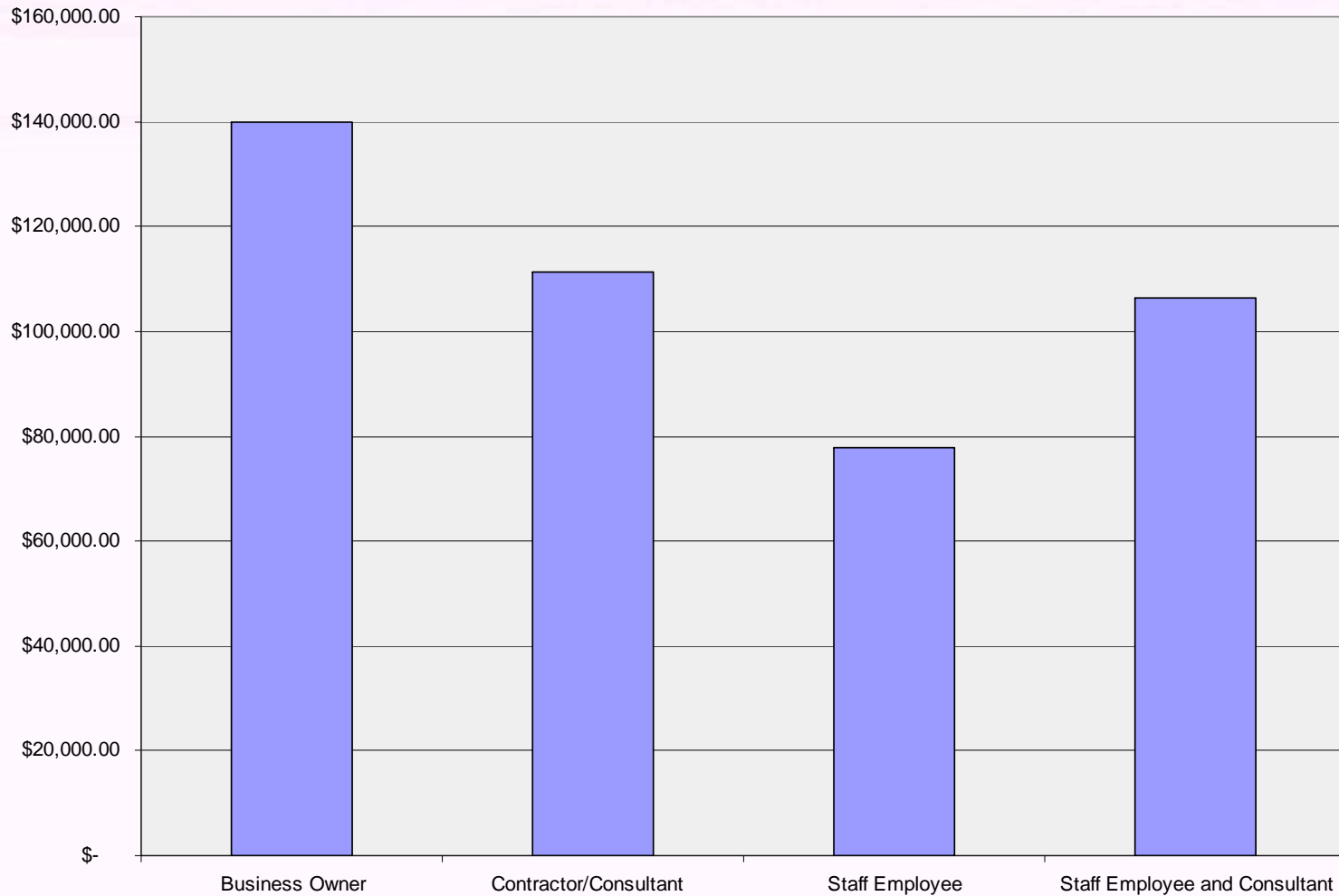
How Long in New Career Field



Average Compensation by Field



Avg Salary by Employment Type





Observations

- **The survey disproved my premise that professionals in related fields are more highly compensated than technical writers.**
- **The relative compensations followed a bell curve:**
 - 11 fields were higher
 - 2 were the same
 - 9 were lower
- **The people who reported the highest compensations were business owners.**



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