

MAY MEETING

Writely Speaking: A "Gab-Bag" of Wisdom for Pros from Pros

BY DAVE EPSTEIN

When ordinary folk are faced with life's ordinary puzzles, they can simply "Ask Amy." But we writers, being far from ordinary, face extraordinary quandaries, like (or should it be "such as"?):

- How do I negotiate a "Goldilocks" price that's not too high, but not too low, and just right to get the job? — or
- Do I need to get an accountant even though I'm not making much money yet? — or
- To incorporate or not to incorporate? Now there's a question!
- I'm lonelier than the Maytag repairman, so how do I get over these deadline blues? — or
- Just how cold does it have to get before I start making cold calls?

Our May meeting will help you answer these and other burning (or freezing) questions about the art, craft, business, and challenges of professional freelance writing. Our panel includes:

Jeff Steele (our moderator), journalist extraordinaire, who has published more than 2,000 articles in magazines and newspapers from coast to coast, as well as numerous corporate communications assignments;
Michelle Beuscher, a

marketing communications maven with more than 19 years of experience, specializing in message strategy, writing, and editing for business, consumer, and internal client audiences;

Diana Schneidman, an experienced business and financial writer in insurance, asset management, mutual funds, and employee benefits, whose "Stand Up 8 Times" coaching helps new freelancers follow a fast-start route that leads to exciting, worthwhile projects that pay; and

Stewart Truelsen, a freelance video writer/producer and voice-over talent with a background in news and association public relations, who is also an experienced op-ed writer and author of a recently published book.

These writing pros will address your questions in three broad areas: tips for beginners, setting prices and getting paid, and "when the going gets tough ..." (i.e., coping with the trials and tribulations of the freelance life). This party is BYOQ (Bring Your Own Questions), but here are a few ideas for starters:

Seriously, what are good ways to start cold calls? How do I find a market niche where I can stand out? How often should I touch bases with current and past

clients, and when can I ask them for leads or referrals?

Where can I find good advice and information about pricing? How can I estimate the time for a given job so that I price it correctly? Do I need to have a written agreement for each job, and, if so, what should it cover?

It's been over a month and still no check—what should I do now? What are some warning signs of a "nightmare assignment" or a problem client? How do I avoid—or deal with—those? Are there techniques to help me write faster and more fluently? It's great not to have a 9-to-5 schedule any more, but please help me structure my time and organize my office.

And *your* biggest question about writing is...?

The meeting will be held in Room 5008 at National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Avenue (across from the Art Institute) in Chicago. Networking with snacks and beverages begins at 5 p.m., followed by the business meeting and the program at 6 p.m. The meeting is free for all IWOC members. Nonmembers pay \$15. Plan to stay for a buy-your-own dinner at a nearby restaurant afterward, where we'll continue our networking over dinner. ☘

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

The Fame Monster

I look forward to the day when the Fame Monster takes his last breath. It's not going to happen in my lifetime; he's been prowling the planet since the dawn of homo sapiens, and every one of us carries inside him or her at least a tiny piece of him... a piece that, like an arm severed from a starfish, can regenerate the whole beast if called on to do so.

We evolved to create social hierarchies and to place some of our human-family siblings above others or at least not to oppose the ascent of those we don't mind seeing in elevated positions. Of course, we also evolved to value systems structured so that any given pedestal can be toppled, if necessary, when the person (or institution) who stands on top of it behaves in a way that is demonstrably detrimental to the health of the whole. Once upon a time, the toppling was performed by angry masses with pitchforks and muskets or political rivals who coveted the view from the pedestal and were willing to kill to make it theirs. These days, when the modern systems are working, it's done at the ballot box... or in the collective turning away from the pedestaled personality or institution.

I think of this every time I see the television commercial advertising subscriptions to the Weekender edition of the *New York Times*. Here are characters whose opinions I'm supposed to value... the young, urban couple who can't agree on which *Times* section brought them together; the young woman who credits the *Times* travel

section with the success of her recent trip to Spain (I'm sorry, darling—but have you ever heard of something called “the Internet”?); the artsy, black-clad hipster who claims to be “fluent” in three sections “actually” (does that mean he not only reads them but can write and speak them, too?); and, worst of all, the late-30s business-type male who says (with a straight face), “The best journalists in the world work for the *Times*...” and, after taking a moment to choke back the esophageal reflux that rises naturally in the throat whenever anyone makes a statement like that, adds, “... and there's no debating that.”

I'm sorry, what? “There's no debating that.” Oh, okay. Let me just fluff out my prayer mat and prostrate myself toward the east, then. I'll let the fog of journalistic veneration wipe clean my memory of Judith Miller and her unconscionable “reporting” in the run up to the Iraq War; I'll forget about Elizabeth Bumiller, the *Times* White House correspondent during the Bush years, who justified her kid-glove handling of the administration by saying (of a Bush press conference), “I think we [the press corps] were very deferential because...it's live, it's very intense, it's frightening to stand up there.” (Y'know what, Elizabeth? If you frighten that easily, go sell ice cream at Cold Stone. They teach you which questions to ask, and nobody glares at you when you ask them.)

Or Jayson Blair, whose fabrications published as factual



in the *Times* in 2002 and 2003 led to his resignation and the subsequent revelation that he hadn't actually graduated from college, as the *Times* management had been led to believe but hadn't bothered to confirm.

“There's no debating that,” avers the businessman in the commercial. Perhaps it's a tongue-in-cheek way of saying, “because it's so clearly false.”

Or what about former *Newsweek* (now *Time*) political columnist, Joe Klein, who in 1996, when he was out-ed as the anonymous author of the book *Primary Colors* by Vassar professor Donald Foster's literary forensic techniques, not only denied authorship (even staking his journalistic reputation on the denial) but publicly ridiculed Foster—then, when the evidence stacked up to the point that he could no longer reasonably deny authorship, admitted doing so, claiming that he had been “protecting sources” and that he “didn't know how his fiction would be received.” Who received a three-week slap-on-the-hand leave of absence for his lie... and bobbed right back up like a Weeble (the roly-poly toy that wobbles but won't fall down) to rejoin the Clan of the Respected Opinionists without so much as an apology or believable mea culpa to Foster.

Some might say this is merely an issue of journalistic integrity and that the fact that the lies come to light at all indicates that
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To Kindle or Not to Kindle, That is the Question

BY TOM MCCAULEY

As IWOC members you are well aware that writing comes before reading. So it is no surprise that developments in writing methods led those in reading methods.

For the most part, advances in writing methods were welcomed by writers because the increased productivity made writing more profitable. There may be a few holdouts, but most writers today use PCs.

Reading methods followed closely behind writing and printing methods. And, again for the most part, the advances were welcomed by readers because they made books affordable for all and very portable in the form of paperbacks. Now we are at something of a crossroads with the arrival of devices such as the Kindle, the Sony Reader and the iPad, to name the best known brands. While writers welcome electronic methods because they make their lives easier and more profitable, readers view things just a little differently.

A book, whether hard covered or paperback, represents something friendly in a very technological world. People like the feel of the book, the smell of a new book (new-book smell is like new-car smell). A book doesn't need batteries. It's more pleasant to read than the print on a computer screen. If you get sand in it, it's OK. So there is a reluctance to switch to the Kindle or its ilk. The logic is much the same as a young child's logic for not eating carrots. "I don't like them," he says. "But you've never eaten them." says his Mom. "I

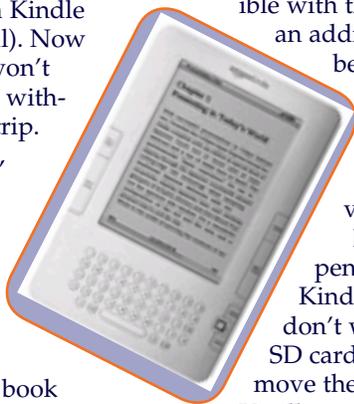
know, but I don't like them."

I thought like this child before I got a birthday present of a Kindle (the original). Now I love it. I won't leave home without it on a trip.

To see why, let's look at how a Kindle compares to a conventional book.

To buy a book you must go to a store or buy it online on Amazon or another online bookstore. So there is a time delay between your urge to buy a new book and when you can actually start reading it. With a Kindle, you can visit the KindleStore online or actually use the Kindle itself to scan through the KindleStore stock, and within a minute or two, you are reading your new book. And at about half the price of a store-bought or Amazon hard-copy book.

When I go on vacation or even on a business trip, I like to take a few books along to read on the beach or in the evening. Before Kindle, this would mean lugging a second bag for books or jamming them into my checked bag, risking added cost by possibly violating the weight-limit restrictions. With the Kindle, I can take up to 200 books with me in something the size (5X7 inches) and weight (10 ounces) of one 300-page paperback. (Compare this to an 8X11 inch, 1.5 pound iPad.) And if I want to get really extreme, I can add a 1 GB, SD memory card (like that in a digital camera) and



take along an additional 500 books. Amazon says that SD cards up to 4 GB are compatible with the Kindle – that's an additional 2000 books

beyond the native 200 book capacity of my original Kindle – definitely enough for a very long vacation.

Now what happens when your Kindle is full and you don't want to add an SD card? You can simply move the books on your Kindle to Amazon's online storage, from which they can be retrieved at any time at no charge. The size of your library accessible on your Kindle is unlimited for all practical purposes. Think of all the trees you'll save. And you won't have to put an addition on your home to store all of your books.

If you've tried to use your laptop at the beach, you know that it's almost impossible to read the screen. With the Kindle's electronic-paper screen, you can read in direct sunlight just as you would a print book. Now, if you want to read the Kindle under the covers at night, you will need a flashlight. With an iPad, you can read in the dark if that's your thing, but you can't read very well in direct sunlight at the beach or on your back porch.

If you are a compulsive newspaper or magazine reader, you can download most of the major newspapers and magazines to your Kindle and take them with. I have not used this feature, so I can't comment on how user-friendly it is.

Later versions of the Kindle allow you to save pdf

files and other documents on your Kindle so that, besides you Blackberry, you can take work with you to the beach to ensure that you don't have a real vacation.

Now so far we've discussed the Kindle as a replacement for conventional books, but as they say on TV, there's more. The Kindle can be your window (a little small perhaps) to the web.

There is an agreement between Amazon and Google that you can read Gmail on your Kindle. You must set up a Gmail account on your PC or Kindle for this to work. If your normal e-mail account is Gmail, then you're set for reading your e-mail free anywhere there is Sprint service. If your normal e-mail account is with another provider, Gmail has a feature called Mail Fetch that allows you to have mail also sent to your Gmail account on your Kindle. For this to work, you may need to contact your regular e-mail provider to get the proper POP address designations to plug into Mail Fetch.

Also through the agreement with Google Reader, you can read blogs on your Kindle. Amazon has about 430 blogs at the moment, but there is a way to access other blog content that you want (see reference book below).

With all electronic gizmos, battery life is always an issue. With the Kindle turned on and left on in the "read" mode, battery life is about seven days (compared to 10 hours for the iPad). It's shorter if you leave the wireless system used for book download turned on but

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Build your Business with a Website and a Free Facebook Fan Page

BY SYLVIA ALSTON

Let's face it: the current recession has been tough for those of us in the writing trade. It's getting harder and harder to land good quality, paying writing assignments, and the competition for those assignments is becoming more and more intense. The freelance market is flooded with new writers who have been laid off from corporate communications departments, newspapers, and magazines.

But there is hope. According to Jay Rodriguez, IWOC's social media committee chair and featured speaker at the April IWOC meeting, you can make your communications practice more visible and attract more potential clients by building your brand profile on the web through a website and a Facebook fan page.

When it comes to websites, "A mere web presence is bland," Rodriguez says. What you want is a website that does more than extol your experience, capabilities, and past successes; it should work hard to raise your visibility (i.e., attract visitors) and generate marketing leads (i.e., convert visitors to clients). A visibility bonus: The more traffic your website attracts, the higher it is likely to rank among Google searches.

To attract more traffic, Rodriguez explains that your website should offer something prospects want—something valuable enough for them to give you their names and e-mail addresses in

exchange. That something could be an information product (e.g., a newsletter, an e-book, a white paper, a guide, or a tip sheet), or it could be a blog that you set up. Whatever the offer, it should be featured on your website's home/landing page alongside a form visitors complete to provide their contact information.

Once you have a strong landing page, you can begin to think about how to leverage Facebook. The second most visited website in the US (right behind Google search), Facebook has 400 million+ active users. Are you tempted to dismiss Facebook as a social site for connecting with old friends and sharing vacation photos? Don't. Facebook is a powerful marketing platform—so much so that more than 1.5 million businesses already have active fan pages! It's worth noting that the average user spends 55 minutes a day on Facebook and becomes a fan of four new pages each month.

Before you build a Facebook fan page for your communications practice, Rodriguez recommends that you have a clear goal and marketing plan in mind. "Your goal might be to increase exposure of your expertise, generate sales, or



grow your list of contacts," he says. Whatever your objective is, it will dictate the way you design your Facebook page, the content you add to it in the form of wall "posts," and the way you connect fans back to your website.

With your goal in mind, you can then create a marketing calendar that specifies how frequently you'll post updates to your Facebook fan page and what form those posts will take. Examples of possible posts would be: links back to your blog, calls to action, conversation starters, or links to other quality websites you want to share.

To create a Facebook fan page, simply visit an existing fan page (such as jayrod-chicago.com), scroll down to the bottom of the left column, click on the "Create a page for my business" link and complete the "Create a page" form. If you have some HTML skills or a web developer/buddy, Rodriguez says you can create a "high utility FBML page" with enhanced graphics, video, and links. Once your page is created, you can invite contacts, clients, and prospects to become fans. As you add interesting content, your fan base will likely expand as

current fans share links with their friends and business contacts.

Bottom line: A Facebook fan page can be a powerful inbound marketing tool that works in tandem with your website to build your brand, generate marketing leads, and demonstrate your expertise as a communications professional. And you can't beat the price: it's free. 📌

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longer if you turn the reader off after each session. Kindle owes its battery longevity to its use of the black and white electronic paper screen. The iPad has an attractive backlit color screen, but that limits battery life.

There is an excellent book on the Kindle by Stephen Windwalker entitled, *The Complete User's Guide to the Amazing Amazon Kindle*. It details how to read e-mail, access the web, and read blogs, along with a boatload of information about using the Kindle to read books. The Guide costs about \$5.00 at the KindleStore.

I can't compare my basic Kindle with its competitors. I haven't used them, but from my experience, the Kindle is a winner. Kindle on! 📌

Our thoughts are with Jim Hodl and Ellen Krupp. Jim's younger brother died suddenly last month, and Ellen lost her mother recently.

President's Column Continued from Page 2.

the self-policing nature of journalism is working. I argue that the issue is much larger than that and speaks to a weakness in the underlying structure of the world today... a structure that places undo value on name recognition... a structure crumbling under its own weight, undermined at every level by a seeping organic element called the "democratizing power of the network."

Reputation is one thing; fame is another. And the distinctions between them are slight but important. Reputations tend to develop and grow naturally as a result of consistent performance in a public arena. Fame, on the other hand, is often pursued for its own sake, brokered by middlemen, attached to no performance or worth of significant value (see Hilton, Paris), and afforded unearned power and meaning by the collective. And since the modern mainstream media industry draws its sustenance from the attention of the collective, it cultivates fame as its staple crop and uses it in all its best recipes.

This rant, by the way, arises in part from my learning the other day that the Discovery Company channel TLC is set to produce an upcoming series, the working title of which is Sarah Palin's Alaska. And forgive the repetition of something I wrote earlier, but... I'm sorry, what?

I mean, seriously... what?!

And no, it's not a joke. According to the Discovery Company website, "Discovery Communications is so excited to help Sarah Palin tell the story of Alaska..."

Oh, really? And what story will she tell? Because unless the series focuses on how to steady your aim when shooting a wolf from a helicopter or how to grow strip malls or how her hometown of Wasilla and the surrounding Matanuska-Susitna area became what Alaska State Troopers have dubbed "the methamphetamine capital of Alaska," there are a few hundred thousand Alaskans who are better qualified to tell Alaska's story.

So why pick her instead of holding auditions in Anchorage to find a suitable unknown host for a show about Alaska? Simple. The Fame Monster has endowed her with name recognition, and the Discovery Company is still operating under the business model that ascribes undo positive value to fame. The model is crumbling but still intact enough that the ploy (and that's what it is) will work. In my opinion, however, the day is coming when it won't... a day the light of which is even now seeping past the seals of the mainstream media in the form of posts on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

The problem here, of course, is that by producing and broadcasting Sarah Palin's Alaska, the Discovery Company networks are not only legitimizing an anti-environment voice, they are placing the hara-kiri knife of fame worship directly over the belly of their collective credibility and plunging the knife in with both hands. If the idea behind the show is to launch a new series about non-full-term former governors and their states, what's next? Rod Blagojevich's Illinois? Mark Sanford's South Carolina? Or if the aim is simply to employ inappropriate hosts, will they soon produce How the Earth Was Made with Pat Robertson? Lock 'n Load with the Dalai Lama? Money Matters with Bernie Madoff? Charles Manson's Homes of the Rich and Famous?

Yes, it's far too early to announce the demise of the Fame Monster. Too many people on both ends of the infotainment trough still have a stake in keeping him alive.

But he's wheezing, and I'm glad about that. ♪

Calendar

MAY 11

IWOC Monthly Meeting. An audience participation event. A panel, moderated by Jeff Steele, will tackle your most pressing questions about being a writer and the business of writing. Panelists are: Stewart Truelsen, Diana Schneiderman, and Michelle Beuscher. The meeting will be held at National-Louis University, Room 5008, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Program 6 p.m. Networking 5 p.m. Nonmembers, \$15; IWOC members free. Buy-your-own dinner follows. Nonmembers welcome. For more information, call 847/855-6670 or visit www.iwoc.org.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted, but call ahead in case of cancellation. The groups welcome nonmembers. If there's no group in your area, why not start one? Contact webmaster@iwoc.org.

MAY 25 (4th Tuesday)

IWOOP Monthly Lunch. Join near-west suburbanites for a noon lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. Check before you come. This lunch is monthly only if there are enough people who can attend. Note: The lunch is now on the 4th Tuesday, not the 4th Thursday as it had been in the past.

JUNE 3 (1st Thursday)

IWORP Monthly Breakfast. Join the Rogers Park IWOC contingent for breakfast at 9 AM at the A&T Grill, 7036 N. Clark St., Chicago. For more info, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

It's Happening on the Web!

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