

NOVEMBER MEETING

The Food Industry: Add It to Your Writing Bill of Fare

BY STEWART TRUELSEN

Professional freelance writers must write so they can eat; food writers eat so they can write. But don't take our word for it. Come to the monthly IWOC program on Tuesday, Nov. 8th, which features two outstanding writers who have much to share with us.

Michael Gebert is a podcaster, freelance writer, and online community builder who reports on the exciting Chicago food scene. His award-winning *Sky Full of Bacon* HD video podcast and blog can be seen at www.skyfullofbacon.com. Lisa Bertagnoli is a society columnist and regular contributor to *Crain's Chicago Business*. She was managing editor for the trade publication, *Restaurants and Institutions*.

During this program we'll explore what it takes to be a successful food writer; how to get noticed and build a brand; how the market for food writing is evolving, and what makes Chicago a great place to write about food.

The food writer's plate is bigger than most of us think. It includes writing about food and beverage trends, restaurants, cooking,


nutrition, agriculture, and more. The common theme is food of course, but the food writer's side dishes often include travel, lifestyle, and culture. There is no limit to where stories about food appear. One can find them in just about everything from blogs and cookbooks to memoirs and novels.

According to Bertagnoli, it all starts with a love of food and an interest in it. That's not too difficult for most of us, but she says you need a good palate and a sense of what's good food and what's not. Bertagnoli also believes the successful writer either needs to put a fresh spin on an old idea or find a new one. One example is a story she wrote about specialty or designer ice served in cocktails at some of the city's top bars.

Gebert got his start in food writing a decade ago by posting on Chowhound, a popular online discussion site. By then he already had a successful career in advertising. Today he still freelances as a copywriter, but food writing is taking more and more of his time. "Sky Full of Bacon" with its 10 to 20 minute features on food enabled him to merge writing with an interest in film. He also

produces the video for "Key Ingredient," a series on the Chicago Reader website. One bit of advice he has for aspiring writers is to become proficient in taking photographs and shooting a little video to go with your stories.

Both Gebert and Bertagnoli are positive about the opportunities for freelancers who want to write about food and the many aspects of it, and what better place to do it than in Chicago with all the diversity in our food culture. You won't want to miss this program.

The IWOC program on food writing takes place on Tuesday, Nov. 8, at National Louis University located at 122 S. Michigan Ave., across from the Art Institute. The meeting is in Room 4020. Networking and refreshments are at 5 p.m. The main program begins promptly at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC members, \$15 to nonmembers (\$10 with a pre-registration at the IWOC website). Following the program, attendees are invited to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to further discuss writing-related topics or continue networking. For more information call 800-804-IWOC (800-804-4962) or visit www.iwoc.org. 

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/DAVID EPSTEIN

Short and Tweet



WRITERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE—To the barricades!!!! Our stock-in-trade (i.e., words) is under attack.

Evidently, words are becoming an Endangered Species. A tragic tweet reveals the danger: "Words — Who has time to read 'em? Do we really need 'em?"

This week I received an e-mail from a political campaign "looking for talented writers to join our digital team in Chicago." If you're interested in applying for this opportunity, which pays "commensurate with experience and qualifications" and includes a benefits plan, call or e-mail me, and I'll be glad to forward the invitation. In fact, I think I'll post it on the IWOC LinkedIn group.

The invitation continues: "We're looking for seasoned, scrappy writers who can capture the feeling of a moment in an e-mail that will compel people to take action or put a person's life story into a moving 300-word blog post. You should be able to write the way people talk, and to do it quickly and concisely -- sometimes in 140 characters or less."

In other words, can you tweet? If not, but you have a talent for "long-form" prose, can you capture the pathos of a jobless single mother, a homeless vet, or an over-taxed, over-regulated small

business owner (e.g., a politically active plumber) in an indignant, heart-wrenching 300-word epic.

The writers of the invitation used only 242 words, totaling 1,446 characters (including spaces) for their pitch. The introductory e-mail used another 267 words, comprising 1,465 words and spaces.

Their team "wrote, set up, and hit send on this e-mail." They also tweeted about it and posted it on Facebook. They considered texting me, too, but decided that was overkill.

This job offer epitomizes many of the challenges independent writers face today.

We must use technology regularly: Virtually (this is an irresistible pun) all of us use basic e-mail constantly, but writers who use twitter and Facebook would have seen the invitation sooner.

E-mail and websites aren't enough: This campaign (and many business and nonprofit clients) want writers who are well versed in e-mail, blog, or social media copy-writing, online organizing, basic HTML, and online content and constituent relationship management platforms (whatever those are).

Above all, the invitation demonstrates the contemporary mania for brevity: Twitter forces us to squeeze great ideas and insights into 140 characters, spaces included. For instance: "Want a

refill on coffee. Server says it's \$2. Remember when refills were free? How'm I supposed to stay awake at work? - @javahound" (118 characters with spaces).

LinkedIn allows 200 characters for group posts and about 560 for individual status updates on your own page, though your profile may run to several screens. Facebook used to cut off posts at about 400 characters, but there doesn't seem to be any limit on "the new Facebook" recently released. This generosity should allay some of the hostility aroused by Facebook's latest invasions of privacy.

This obsession with communicating in as few words as necessary (and sometimes even fewer) is a serious challenge to us writers who literally live by words, and especially one like me, who was raised in the fine art of the classical British essayists. My models in English class were Bacon, Addison, Steele, Burke, Dr. Johnson, Thomas Babington Macaulay—and, in the somewhat degraded Modern Era, George Orwell and Bennett Cerf. I learned to thrill to, and strive to emulate, the elegant rhythms of the periodic sentence, swelling sonorously from clause to clause, balanced with harmonious parallelisms where syntactical structure echoed the flow of thought, until the sentence crested in a grand rhetorical climax that drove

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With Help from Skype, IWOCers Learn How to Snare Clients on the Web

BY JENNIFER OATFIELD

The well-attended October IWOC meeting gave IWOCers two approaches to expanding their client base in the digital age. Angela Atkinson, a freelance writer and editor from St. Louis, and Sam Bauch, a recruiter from Solvate.com, tag-teamed to give attendees a rounded approach to using the web to increase their receivables. Bauch and Atkinson's approaches, experience and, most importantly, successes were energizing in the face of the "double-dip recession" looming so ominously. Keeping IWOC *au courant* with established technology, Bauch attended the meeting via Skype, Atkinson in real-time.

Tired of nickel-and-dime project offers?

Sam Bauch's Solvate.com markets U.S.-based, independent, vetted freelancers in the global marketplace. Unlike bidding websites, where freelancers race each other to the lowest rate in order to land a project, Solvate's clients know the talent they hire will be highly professional, provide high quality, timely work, and, most importantly, they will expect to pay for that guarantee of quality.

Angie Atkinson came armed with an arsenal of tips for finding reasonable employment as a writer in the digital age. In this time of economic slow-down, Atkinson, who is a journalist, corporate communicator, and editor with a corporate healthcare background, is turning down projects. She works the virtual "social" world like a WWF pro. Both Bauch and Atkinson agreed that having an online presence is a requirement for those claiming to be professionals capable of delivering quality work for higher pay. A website or author bio page with samples is a must. Both Sam and Angie also agreed that blogs are one way to promote yourself (and to provide samples for those just starting out). Beyond blogs, Atkinson uses meaningful interactions on LinkedIn and Facebook as a way to promote her services. Even Twitter can be used to extend your name digitally. The caveat is you should be sure anything you post, especially on LinkedIn groups, is of interest to the recipients.

Want to increase the scope of your marketing?

Bauch, on the other hand, does not approve of Facebook as a marketing tool (which only goes to prove that finding a way to be successful online is an individual matter). Solvate wants to change the landscape of online employment by providing client subscribers with a pool of vetted talent. They accept only 20 percent of applicants into their talent pool. Solvate markets their talents' skills to the global marketplace, but they provide assistance in improving profiles and optimizing websites to those accepted into their pool. They also offer their approved talents meet-ups, educational webinars, partnership opportunities, and access to "full-time employee" benefits.



With offices in New York and Austin, Solvate is looking for established professionals and career freelancers. Currently Solvate provides about 10 percent of a talent's assignments but with projects that are both profitable and enjoyable. To get started with

Solvate, apply online at www.solvate.com. If accepted, you then build a profile to exhibit your services. After signing subcontractor and W9 forms, you'll be ready to supply your services from your home office to anywhere in the world. While 10 percent of the hourly rate goes to Solvate, the average rate for approved Solvate talent is \$60 per hour. Clients register with Solvate and this guarantees payment.

Still want to navigate online possibilities?

Both Atkinson and Bauch agreed that the online mass job boards are something to avoid. Companies on those boards generally neither provide adequate compensation nor interesting work, nor do they understand and respect the professional work product. Nonetheless, Atkinson's 10-page marketing tips handout provides information on how to work even those sources for projects. It also includes tips on how to find a pool of better assignments, free resources for freelance writing, on- and offline marketing actions and much, much more.

After a lively question and answer session, and before all the hands quit flailing around ("Pick me! Pick me! I have a question!") Bauch said good-bye via Skype and president David Epstein closed the meeting. Attendees left with actionable ways to improve their bottom lines and retired (some of them) for dinner at Exchequer Restaurant and Pub and further questions for Atkinson.



And old IWOC business? New president Dave Epstein presented a Frank Lloyd Wright glass plaque to retiring president Roger Rueff—his "watch" for four years staunch, creative service as IWOC's president. 🍷

Got Your QR Code? It Can Help Promote You

This is yet another review in an irregular series devoted to books and Internet sites that are popularly classified as reference source material.

BY RICHARD L. EASTLINE

You're seeing them all over — in magazine ads, newspapers, mailers, even sales letters. They're small B&W square boxes filled with splotchy dots or pixels. And they're not smudged stamps. What you've been viewing are hard-working successors to the ubiquitous bar codes, those familiar groupings of thick-and-thin vertical lines commonly called Universal Product Codes (UPCs) and found on almost any carton or clothing tag. That marketing device, created more than a quarter-century ago, may be sharing space now with the advent of the Quick Response (QR) code.

So what? Say you the writer, when this object of discussion contains nary a single word. Stretching the popular adage of a picture being worth a thousand words, a tiny QR code can do at least as well. This versatile symbol is custom-made for each and every application and provides,

via easy scanning, immediate access to just about anything from catalog page data to a website. Depending on the use of numeric or alphanumeric characters, even the most basic QR codes have capacities that range from 3,000 to 7,000 characters. Reproduction sizes vary but the images most frequently seen in publications tend to be 3/4" or 1" square.

Unlike the older, one-dimensional bar codes, a QR code is mainly directed to consumers — or in the case of writers, potential clients — not store managers. So, the objective on the part of today's businesses is to optimize the audience via use of a standardized application adaptable for cell phones. A great many of today's smart phones now have an app installed for reading these codes, or you can download any of several apps at little or no cost. Scanning is done via a cell phone's built-in camera (providing it has reasonably high pixel resolution).

As for value to users, especially small organizations, the QR code offers a con-



venient means for a potential customer to acquire essential information about a service or product quickly. It's especially valuable for reaching people on-the-go who are commuting or in waiting rooms or in a store. The scanned response could display a text message dealing with product pricing or a lunch menu, connect to a wireless network, or even take the viewer to a website by opening a URL in the phone's browser.

Creating a QR code is simple and sometimes free

of cost. Take, for example, accessing your website. (That's typically a freebie offered by many online QR producers.) You simply provide your URL and moments later a finished QR code is ready for a

PDF or GIF file download. Use that as your master in preparing JPG image copies to insert into a letterhead, brochure, business card, or just about anything else you consider to be a promotion piece. Websites where you can generate free QR codes include: generateqrcode.org, waspbarcode.com, and easyqrcodegenerator.com. So, give it a try. If nothing else, a prospect who spots a QR code on your card or a letter might well initiate a business dialog. After all, for a sales gimmick, it's cheaper than stapling a \$10 coupon.✿

IWOC
CORDIALLY
WELCOMES
NEW
MEMBER
DAVID RUSH

News of Former IWOCers

Longtime IWOC members will be saddened to learn of the death of Jerry Detra, who died in October. Jerry was a business writer and member of IWOC for many years. Our thoughts are with his wife, Kathleen, and the rest of his family.

On a more cheerful note, we've recently learned that former IWOCer and treasurer Nancy Parsigian, has moved to Ecuador with her son and his wife. Old friends can contact Nancy at nansdesk@nowif.net.



President's Column, Continued from page 2.

home the point. (There—that one's not bad).

Hemingway's sparse style of loose clauses linked by endless "ands" and vague verbs and adjectives ("He looked at the bull and it looked back. It was good"; "the fish was big and the waves went up and down") was, I realized, not his fault. It was simply due to his being educated in some log cabin in the backwoods of Michigan, or Illinois (or wherever the colonials went after we left them to their own devices).

However, apparently Hemingway has won after all. And—forget about classical prose—that's a huge practical challenge for us writers. One way or another, whether we charge by time or by project or by word, we get paid by the word. If the people who hire us want fewer and fewer words, how are we to eat? After all, whatever your hourly rate, how much can you reasonably charge for writing 140 characters, including spaces—which contribute nothing to the word count?

This led me to a quest to find writers who had made big money by writing very few words. That brought me back to Hemingway, who allegedly won a bar bet with this six-word short story: "For Sale: baby shoes. Never worn." Talk about capturing pathos in less than 300 words! Now, I don't know how big was the bar bet Hemingway won, but he certainly made a ton of money off writing the same plot over and over using short words and short sentences.

Then I recalled a one-word work of genius, from Forrest J Ackerman (1916–2008—and yes, no period after middle initial, like Harry S Truman), who invented the term sci-fi and who, in 1953, was officially voted "#1 Fan Personality" by the members of the World Science Fiction Society. "Forry" wrote just about the shortest story possible, far outworded by its four-word title, which is "Cosmic Report Card: Earth." The text is, simply—"F"—and that looks like the way we're heading, what with tsunamis, famines, environmental disasters, Greek debt crises, etc., etc.

According to the following source—forums.comicbookresources.com/archive/index.php/t-213832—Ackerman was paid \$100 for the initial sale, as well as for four more sales, so he was paid (he estimated) a nominal \$500 per word per sale, or \$2,500 per word for all five. Not bad for a night's work, especially in 1973.

But the grand prize goes to a license plate a friend told me about just last week. Seems her daughter was driving along a New England country road when she saw a woman tooling along in a bright red Ferrari with the license plate: "WAS HIS."

According to the website autos.msn.com/research/, the cheapest Ferrari I could find was a 1992 Mondial, starting at \$49,950. The Ferrari Overview page lists various models, some used, in a range from \$192,000 to \$326,730 to "Not released." So the person who created that two-word license plate earned \$25,000–\$164,000 per word. Of course, 30% of it went to her divorce lawyer.

Even so, at such rates, all of us can afford to tweet. In fact, this article contains over 6,800 words and spaces, so if I break it up into 50 tweets—and can get \$25,000 per word, or even Ackerman's \$2,500 rate—I'll be doing OK.

Moral for writers: Keep it short. Work smarter, not harder. 🐦

Calendar

November 8

IWOC Monthly Meeting. Speakers are food writers Michael Gebert and Lisa Bertagnoli. They will serve up a tasty dish of tips on how to find writing gigs in the food industry. Nonmembers welcome. For more information, call 800/804-4962 or visit www.iwoc.org.

December 13

IWOC Holiday Party. Save the date for the annual gala holiday party. Details coming soon. Check the website. Visitors welcome.

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.

November 22 (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.

November 3 & December 1 (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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WWW.IWOC.ORG