

NINK

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Six Tips for Beating the Winter Writing Blahs

Winter can be a challenging time to write. Our bodies seem to want to hibernate, the weather tends to be cold and wet and gray skies can be a challenge to our moods. Winter is also a time we're likely to find ourselves imagining all the problems we might encounter in our careers and to find it hard to focus when we sit down to write because we're so uncomfortable! Add unhappy kids who are inside wanting attention even more than they do in warmer weather and winter can be a recipe for disaster for us as writers—or at least significantly hamper our work. Fortunately, there are some simple steps we can take that will greatly improve our moods and productivity.

1) Make your workspace welcoming

Research shows that our brains work differently—and far less efficiently—when we're under stress. The warmer and more welcoming your workspace, the more time you will find yourself wanting to be there. Is it comfortable? If not, what can you do to make it better for yourself? Do you need an extra sweater to be warm enough? A better chair? More light? Do you have space for a cup of coffee or tea or hot cocoa?

Next, is it decorated with things that make you smile? The more you can relax and enter into a spirit of play as you write, the more creative you're likely to feel and the faster and better the words are likely to flow. It pays to surround your work area with things that make you smile and foster your sense of creativity.

What do you have that fosters creativity directly? Some writers find that index cards posted on a bulletin board work. Others like a white board on which they can write notes to themselves about their work in progress. Others find that pictures relating to their project jump start ideas.

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Do you have a system for keeping all notes regarding your project handy? You don't want to spend precious writing time searching for where you put them.

If you have to share your work space with someone else who might mess with your things (your kids, for example), invest in a plastic container in which you can put your things and move them out of the way so that it's easy to keep them safe and easy to put them back out when it's your turn to work there.

If all else fails can you go out to a tea or coffee shop to write? Even if you don't have a laptop to take with you, you may find that switching (briefly) to pen and paper helps.

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Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

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Address changes may be made on the website.

For members without Internet access, send changes to the Central Coordinator.

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Introducing...

The following authors have applied for membership in Ninc and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 15 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of Ninc. For further information or to recommend eligible writers, contact:

Membership Chair: JoAnn Grote
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New Applicants:

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Susanne Dunlap, Brooklyn, NY
Peggy Webb, Mooreville, MS
Clare O'Donohue, Westchester, IL
Janet Mullany, Cheverly MD
Cynthia Cooke, Apex, NC
Sheila Connolly, Middleboro, MA
Mary Reed McCall, Gloversville, NY

New Members:

Nicola Cornick, Swindon Wiltshire, UK
Nancy Gideon, Portage MI
Debra Bess, Apex, NC
Sara Littman, Cos Cob, CT
Lori Dandrea, Hilton Head, SC

Ninc has room to grow...

Recommend membership to *your* colleagues.
Prospective members may apply online at
<http://www.Ninc.com>.

Refer members at Ninc.com. Go to Members Only, "Member Services" and click "Refer a New Member to Ninc."
Take Ninc brochures to conferences.
Email Pari Taichert with your mailing address and requested number of booklets.
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Ninc Statement of Principle.

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

Can Knowing Too Much about Publishing Be a Problem?

This was a recent topic on the Ninlink. And since I've been told the President can write whatever she wants in her monthly column, I've decided to write about this. Because I have Very Decided Opinions.

One Very Decided Opinion I've held since, oh, around 1984, is that there's no such thing as too much information when it comes to the "business" of publishing. Now, my agent insists that publishing is not and never has been a business; it's an "activity." Which possibility explains a lot. But for the sake of argument, we'll call it a business.

I don't like business, broadly speaking. I was taking business courses in college – and hating every single one – when the writing bug truly bit and turned me onto a different path. A path I honestly believed I could follow without the need to know about the Business of Publishing. I mean, all I had to do was stay home, preferably in my PJs, and write stories. Oh, joy. No more public-contact jobs, like my college stint working at Hardees'. No more bosses looking over my shoulder, like that supervisor in the plastics plant where I also worked during the college years.

Just me, all alone with my comfortable chair and my cluttered desk and my imagination.

You can stop laughing now.

Yeah, I was naive. I hadn't worked with any editors yet, far less the Dread Copy-Editor. (Please tell me some of you remember the Dread Pirate Roberts!) I didn't know any other writers, and there was no Internet filled with forums and Google searches to answer any of my questions. And even later, when I knew a few more writers and got myself an agent, it only slowly dawned on me that I really needed to know about the Business of Publishing. Not because I didn't trust my agent. Not even because I didn't trust my publishers.

I needed to be educated on the Business of Publishing because I'm a control freak with Very Decided Opinions, and I had seen enough to believe that mistakes were made on a regular basis, mistakes that affected the careers of writers. Mistakes with titles, with cover design, with cover copy. Not deliberate mistakes; publishers want to make money, after all, and despite many urban legends to the contrary, I don't believe publishers routinely plan for a book to tank.

But they didn't always make wise choices, as far as I could see. And while nobody died and made me a publisher, those were my books going out into the marketplace, and I believed that if I educated myself on the Business of Publishing, I could perhaps influence that "package" beyond the story on the pages.

It wasn't much fun, I have to say. I kept having terrible college flashbacks of spread sheets and accounting ledgers. Especially around royalty time. <shudder> But I persevered. I asked questions. I read every flipping contract clause until I thought my eyes would bleed. I paid attention when other writers talked about The Business. And, gradually, I learned how publishing worked. More or less.

The 'more' part is that I learned enough to know what I wanted and needed to fight for. There was, after all, nothing I could do about corporate decisions, by either publishers or booksellers. Nothing I could do to control things once my book was out there on the shelves.

But I could have some say in how my book was packaged, surely. The title. The cover design. The cover copy. That seemed simple enough.

I was informed by various people in varying tones of humor or compassion (for my apparent idi- ▶

ocy) that there wasn't a chance in hell I'd get that kind of approval into any of my contracts. Not unless I was a big star. And I wasn't a big star. I wrote series romance, where standing out from the rest of the books in your line wasn't really the idea. The idea was that each line had a particular look, was easily recognized by the target audience, and delivered what they expected.

Well, I'm stubborn. So I didn't give up.

No cover approval in the contract? Fine. That didn't mean I couldn't make sensible suggestions as to design. It didn't mean I couldn't ask to "review" the cover copy at an early stage, just in case there were "mistakes" none of us would want on the book. And it sure as hell didn't mean I couldn't fight for my titles, especially since, for me, the title is the first step in creating the story.

The first little battles led to little victories. Most of the time. I lost a few, but I remained determined. And I was consistent and professional. I never asked for a change for the sake of a change; I could always argue my case. At length. If nothing else, I probably just wore down resistance over time. <G>

It probably helped that I remained at the same publisher for so many years, but I don't think it would have changed how I viewed the situation. Nobody knew my books better than I did. And while Marketing was never my thing, I was pretty sure I knew my audience at least well enough to have a good idea what would catch their eye in terms of how my books looked.

And gradually, without ever having it written into my contracts, I gained a great deal of control over how my books looked. And what the cover copy said. And my titles were my titles.

Now, as to the 'less' part about learning the Business of Publishing "more or less," well ... I think I'll save that for next month. See if you're paying attention. <G>

— Kay Hooper

Business Briefs

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

MYiLIBRARY

Ingram Digital is partnering with library automation and software developer, Ex Libris, to supply software tools that will help libraries search and access Ingram's MyiLibrary, a digital content aggregator that offers more than 175,000 digital titles from more than 18,000 publishers.

Farrell Leaves Harlequin

Executive editor of HQN and Luna, Tracey Farrell, has resigned after 25 years with Harlequin. Farrell has been working closely with Tara Parsons to help her transition into her expanded role as head of HQN and Luna.

<http://WhoMovedMyBuyButton.com>

As a result of the infighting between Macmillan and Amazon, Author's Guild has created whomovedmybuybutton.com—a free service that will alert authors to any changes in the status of their Amazon book page buy buttons.

Action Beyond the Book Trailer

Medallion Press has introduced "action interviews" an audio download in which authors will be accompanied by actors and sound effects to draw readers into select scenes from the book. The 10-12 minutes "interview" will be part of the monthly Medallion Press Radio podcast, or as an individual download.

VOWS Reality Romance

HCI Books has announced a new imprint, Vows, which will launch October 2010. Matching romance writers with real life couples to create a new subgenre of "reality-based romance," Vow authors will include Ninc's own Judith Arnold, Alison Kent and Julie Leto.

Six Tips for Beating the Winter Writing Blahs

Continued from page 1 ▶ Whatever you choose, ideally, your writing area is a place you want to be and one that fosters creativity and is as physically comfortable as possible.

2) Eat healthy.

In winter our bodies seem to crave carbohydrates but those aren't the ideal food if we want to write. Make sure you have nourishing meals and healthy snacks for in between—especially when you're writing.

The good news is that chocolate is actually good for us! Dark chocolate is best, according to experts, but one study showed that any chocolate was correlated with better health. Now mind you, I have a certain amount of skepticism about that study but it does mean that eating chocolate isn't something to automatically feel guilty about. Still, our bodies need a variety of healthy foods. The key is to eat foods you love that are healthy for you. One of my favorite treats is yogurt over fruit. It's healthy but also feels like I'm pampering myself.

When I have clients who are worried about their weight, I often recommend they make a list of foods they love. From that list, I suggest they create a second list containing foods from the first list that are healthy. If there are other foods they crave that are not, I suggest looking at what the key factors are that cause them to crave the food and figure out a healthy food with similar characteristics. Is it crunch? Sweetness? Saltiness? When you eat foods you love, you don't feel deprived and you're more likely to stick with healthy eating.

Another reason it's so important to eat healthy is that our immune systems need a boost in winter because our systems are stressed and certain germs such as flu droplets tend to stay viable longer and spread more easily. Heaven knows it's hard to write when you're sick, so take care of your body with nourishing, healthy food that you love.

3) Move around.

In winter, there's a tendency to want to huddle inside where it's warm. We're less likely to get exercise, but exercise not only boosts our immune system it also helps sharpen our focus as we write. The problem is that if we exercise by doing things we hate because we think we should, studies show we're not likely to keep at it and we're likely to feel we should reward ourselves with snacks and/or relaxing instead of writing. The key, as with food, is to figure out activities you love. You might dance, use a Wii Fit, go for a walk with your dog, play tennis, or any activity you like enough that you will keep doing it on a regular basis.

Since writing is essentially sedentary, try being active for five to ten minutes at a time several times a day rather than exercising for one long block of time. Studies show that several short blocks of movement actually lower blood pressure and rev up our metabolism better than a one hour block of exercise done once a day.

When I'm coaching, I often ask clients what the average block of time is that they can write before they become restless. I then suggest they write for 5 minutes LESS than that and plan on getting up and moving around for five minutes or so before sitting back down to write some more. The physical movement is not only good for the body, but also seems to do something with the brain that allows the writer to sit back down and focus again on the work.

4) Focus your imagination.

We're writers. We have great imaginations. We think of all sorts of things that can go wrong—with our personal lives, with our manuscripts, with reviews, contracts, sales, etc. Winter seems to magnify these issues, maybe in part because there is less sunlight and many of us are sensitive to that. It's crucial to pay attention, therefore, to your emotional health as well as your physical health and to do things that bolster our goals rather than impede them.

Every time you catch yourself imagining what could go wrong, stop and imagine what could go right. To help keep the focus on success, I often recommend to clients that they post great reviews or display awards where they can see them as they write. This is a reminder to both the conscious and subconscious mind that you can succeed. Similarly, I suggest keeping a folder of fan letters so that when you feel discouraged, you can read them and remember how much your writing means to readers.

I also recommend that writers pay attention to how they feel in the clothes they wear. Sweats may be ▶

comfortable, but for some, it's hard to feel really professional wearing them. If you're getting stuck, I suggest going to your closet and looking at your clothes. How do you feel if you imagine wearing this outfit or that? Wear what makes you most feel like a writer—and ideally most like a successful writer.

Remember, the key is to figure out what helps get the manuscript done. So, if pajamas make you so comfortable that the words flow; go for it and don't let anyone make you feel guilty for doing so!

5) Watch out for saboteurs.

Surround yourself with people who support your writing and avoid those who will feed your fears and self-doubts. We all have saboteurs in our lives. Sometimes they masquerade as friends or are family. You need to make sure that you have people in your life who support your dreams and believe in you—even when you have trouble believing in yourself—and protect yourself from people who don't.

That support can be “real world” or online. It makes all the difference in the world to be able to talk to someone who knows what we mean when we say our characters are arguing with us or that we're worried about the latest challenge in our careers. You want people who will imagine the best for you—and who will remind you to imagine it for yourself. And if real world obstacles pop up, you can ask your support network to help you brainstorm possibilities around them.

Don't be your own saboteur. Focus on what you love about your manuscript. If you don't love it, spend a little time figuring out what you could add that would let you love it. What could be just a little different about one or more of your characters so that you would want to spend time with them? What could be just a little different about their situation that you would love writing about? The more you focus on what you love about your work and what you want readers to get out of the story, the better.

Set clear goals for your writing time. Clear goals are a signal to our conscious and subconscious minds—and to those around us—that we are serious about what we are doing and that it's important to us. There is tremendous power in setting goals—especially if they are a little more ambitious than we've thought we could achieve. Imagine how you might surprise yourself if you set your goals higher than you have before.

6) Reward yourself.

Heaven knows writing isn't the easiest of careers. It isn't one that often brings us instant rewards. It can be difficult to keep going if we've hit any kind of snag in our careers or our personal lives. That's why it's so important that we celebrate what we do and any token of success.

It's also important to celebrate the act of writing itself. At the end of each writing day—or block of writing time if you write full time—celebrate. It can be as small as rewarding yourself with a cup of your favorite tea or hot cocoa. It can be spending time with loved ones laughing and having fun. It can be a soak in a hot tub. The key is that whatever it is you choose to do, it makes you smile and feel happy.

We live in a culture that says we shouldn't play or reward ourselves until all our work is done, all challenges resolved. The problem is, for most of us that would mean we never—or very rarely—get to have fun. And lack of fun kills creativity. We need laughter and joy in our lives. Fun, laughter and joy all nurture our resilience and our immune systems so that we have the strength and resources to do the work we need to do and triumph over the challenges in our lives. So...reward yourself for writing—every day.

With these six steps, you're likely to find yourself writing more and having more fun doing so and maybe, just maybe sidestepping those winter writing blues.

April Kihlstrom is an award winning author of over 30 published books. She teaches the highly acclaimed Book in a Week workshop both in person and as one of her online classes. She also provides coaching for writers and has helped even some New York Times bestselling authors streamline their writing process and juggle the demands of life and a writing career and have more fun with both. April can be reached through her website www.aprilkihlstrom.com or Facebook.



Talk It Up....

I'm writing this in January, and you guys get to see it March first. Which means we don't have a whole lot solidly nailed down as yet, speaker-wise, for October's *Brainstorming On The Beach*.

Any responses we do receive between the day I send in this column and the day you're reading this will immediately be posted on Ninlink, and made a part of the website Conference Center. Okay, I'll also be shouting, so you'll probably be able to hear me all the way from Pennsylvania.

What we do have as of the end of January is a beginning, and a solid plan.

Thursday, October 7: We're setting aside this entire first day for an in-depth program we're calling *Brainstorming: The Future of Publishing*. We're going to hit this general topic from several different angles and perspectives, and we're going to hit it hard.

Here, let me quote from the invitation we've sent to a remarkably diverse group:

Ours goals are both specific and general: The roles of publisher and author in the rapidly changing landscape of book publishing. Delivery systems — those now existing, and those still on the drawing board. Melding publisher publicity and promotion with author self-promotion, for the benefit of both parties. Copyrights. Are e-books just another delivery system to be handled by traditional publishers, or is e-book publishing real competition to the continued success of traditional book publishing? How will slicing up the monetary pie of what may be a new dawn in publishing impact career writers? And much more.

I can announce two of the participants now, with many more to come as the invitation and acceptance process moves forward.

First, we have the pleasure of welcoming **Christopher Kenneally**. At the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), Christopher is responsible for organizing and hosting programs that address the business needs of authors and publishers. He is also host and moderator for an ongoing series of writing conferences, "Beyond the Book" (<http://www.beyondthebook.com>). His articles on blogging, search engines, and the impact of technology on writers have appeared in the *Boston Business Journal*, *Washington Business Journal*, *BookTech Magazine*, and others.

Ninc's own **Lou Aronica** has also agreed to join us, wearing his publisher hat, lending his decades of expertise (and he will once again head up our End of Conference free-for-all, no-topics-barred closing session on Sunday. Never, never-never-never, make transportation arrangements that will force you to miss this most honest and important session!). ▶



Back to *Brainstorming: The Future of Publishing*. We'll have six or more experts at the front of the room for every session, we'll have Ninc members and non-Ninc professional writers (for a fee), editors, agents, the media, as well as any other publishing types who want to listen and contribute, sitting in the rest of the chairs -- and between them will be our experienced, crackerjack facilitator, **Peter Novins**, who will keep things moving and on topic.

Peter is a Senior Partner at VShift Consulting. His practice centers on finding new strategic opportunities and operational improvements for international clients across diverse industries. Prior to VShift, Mr. Novins was the Global Chief Operating Officer at Proudfoot Consulting, where he managed work by more than 300 professionals in 20 countries.

As a Senior Partner at Ernst & Young, he ran several major practices and was an international authority on knowledge management. He holds a BA in Philosophy from Northwestern University and an MBA from the Harvard Business School.

This is cool. Don't mess with a Harvard grad, folks!

Peter has agreed to stick around for the remainder of the conference, and head up a morning workshop on the art of negotiating. (Something we all need to master, right?) He will draw from his vast career experience, present the basic tenets of successful negotiating ("Don't make it just about money or you lose, know your bottom line before you start, find what's cheap to you but dear to them, and yeah it's going to be emotional, so manage it"), and then show us *how* we do all these things.

But, much as we're all going to Florida to hear about the future of publishing (and our place in that future) — *we're going to Florida!*

The sun. The sand. The Gulf. We're not fools. We're not going to have all of that waiting for us outside the windows while we're sitting in workshops all day, every day. No, no, no!

Instead, after the first intense, business-of-the-business day, we're going to shift into low and take it easy. We're going to hear from the creative experts in the morning, and then take advantage of our get out of school pass and hit the beach to practice what we've learned.

Promising to not ingest tomato soup in a questionable restaurant just before the conference this year (and end up in the hospital instead of Saint Louis), **Dr. D. P. Lyle** will be joining us in Florida with three fantastic workshops geared to getting those old creative juices flowing.

We'll kick off with his *Psychology of Character Motivation* workshop, the one I was waxing poetic about last year. Prepare to take copious notes during this "Ah, *now* I understand!" hour. In another interactive workshop, we will all be *Plotting the Perfect Murder* together, and then deconstructing it, finding the flaws, so that we'll leave the workshop with new insights on plotting *all* of our ideas. Lastly, during *The Autopsy of a Thriller*, we will examine possibly the best thriller ever contrived, and discover why we aren't just excited by the plot, but also deeply involved with the hopes and growth of the characters that ride that thriller rollercoaster.

There will also be expert-led sessions designed to teach both Ninc members and industry personnel ways to de-stress, explore their limitless imaginations, and learn techniques that aid and inspire more fluent and fulfilling work production. Not "woo-woo," not "touchy-feely." Real, workable tools, designed to help us. But definitely with the "wow factor."

This relaxed programming encourages authors and their editors, their agents, allied publishing personnel, to spend some quality time together, get to know each other better in beautiful resort surroundings, and will hopefully grow the professional relationship in ways often impossible in today's email and texting world.

We will have our meeting room open all day during the main conference, with set-ups for collaging in one area, chairs and tables for conversation in another, snacks and drinks available. We can divide into groups, listen to what another member may be working on at the moment, bat book ideas and concepts around, talk about the markets — whatever floats your boat. This is *your* time!

Our evenings will offer our always popular members-only Night Owls, and Melinda Haynes is working hard on producing a varied lineup of sessions.

Creative brainstorming. Kick-starting the imagination. De-stressing. Networking. The perfect locale and atmosphere, designed for conversation, for meeting with agents and editors who will also be digging bare toes in the warm sand and not worrying about catching the express subway home at five o'clock.

Beginning to end, this conference is part career information, part creative retreat. But it is also (once again) *Florida*, and there was never a better time to think about bringing along a spouse, a sibling, a pal, and even extending your stay, still at the low conference hotel rate.

Brainstorming On The Beach is something new, something that hasn't been done before (so, naturally, Ninc is doing it first). We've all got questions in this sometimes scary time of rapid change in the publishing industry, concerns for the future of publishing and our place in it. Writers worry. Publishers and editors and agents and booksellers worry.

But every problem brings with it opportunities. Now is not the time for panic, or for adversarial stances, because at the end of the day we're all in this together.

So that's it. Sun. Sand. Balmy breezes and beautiful Gulf views. Ninc supplies the venue, the Facilitator-led industry discussions, the opportunities for informal, one-on-one conversations between those who provide the product and those who produce and market the work. And everything happens in an atmosphere conducive to the free-flow of ideas as we all look to the future of publishing and find ways to get there, together.

Talk about *Brainstorming On The Beach* and *Brainstorming: The Future Of Publishing* with your editor, your agent, any editor or agent you hope will want to join us. Copy and send them this column if you wish; post it on other loops. Everyone is invited to participate. There is *no charge* for them to be a part of the conference, and they are all eligible for our low conference rate for the *Tradewinds Island Grand*.

Then send us their contact information and we'll be sure to get formal invitations out to each and every one of them for you: Karen Tintori Katz (KTinti@aol.com or to me at kcmi@aol.com

Again, for a fee, *Brainstorming: The Future of Publishing* will also be open to non-Ninc published authors. But only Ninc members may register for the remainder of the conference.

The best bargain, of course, is for those writers to join Ninc and take advantage of all that awaits us in Florida (http://ninc.com/join_ninc/apply.asp).

Here are the particulars again:

Brainstorming On The Beach

October 7 –10, 2010

Tradewinds Island Grand, St. Pete Beach, Florida

Room Rate: \$129 plus tax <http://www.tradewindsresort.com/properties/island-grand.aspx> (You have to check out this website!)

Conference fee (includes *Brainstorming: The Future of Publishing*): \$255. EZ payment plan: three payments of \$85 between now and July 31. Ninc keeps its conference fees low because we know writers need a quality conference *and* reasonable costs.

Sign up today on the website today (<http://www.ninc.com>), keep checking the website for additions to the list of invited speakers and participants in *Brainstorming: The Future of Publishing*. Come to Florida in October, and be a part of this groundbreaking conference. Bring your questions, your imagination, and your suntan oil!

Kasey Michaels
Conference Chair

Ask the Agent...

JoAnna Stampfel-Volpe



How important is it for a published author to have a web presence?

Web Presence. Blog Tours. Viral Marketing. <<shudder>> Twitter. These are the buzz words on everyone's lips today, but what do they really mean? Do authors really need to partake? And how much is enough? For those of you cringing from promoting your books (and yourself) on the internet, I have some advice: Suck it up and join the rest of us on the web! And I can say this, because I used to be one of you.

People (your reading audience included) are busier today than they've ever been before. In just 30 years households have gone from 32% with two working parents to over 60%. And don't even get me started on how many extra-curricular activities the average kid is involved in today. So when it comes to extra-extracurricular activities, like hobbies or entertainment, you have to make it easy for them to find and gather information on you. And nothing is easier than the click of a mouse.

Before the viral age really hit its stride, authors didn't have many inexpensive options for promoting their books or connecting with fans. Author tours, hard-copy newsletters, school visits, conventions—all of these take a lot of time and a lot of money, with no guarantee of pay-off. At these events an author might reach a very limited number of readers, all the while crossing his or her fingers that word-of-mouth would take off. I'm not saying this doesn't work, but the odds are certainly stacked up against you.

By marketing on the internet, there is no end to the number of people you can connect with, and this goes for any genre. There are online groups, e-zines, chat rooms, blogs, Facebook and MySpace pages, websites dedicated to just about every and any topic. And with sites like Amazon, IndieBound, and even B&N.com, people are buying more and more online, which means that they're turning to the internet for their research as well.

But of course, your "web presence" doesn't begin after the book is published. It starts before pub date, and even before sale. Today, one of the first questions out of an editor's mouth after they've read and fallen in love with a manuscript is "Does the author have any type of web presence?" This is especially the case with previously published authors because they want to see what you've done to promote your books.

Before you start to worry—don't. It's not the determining factor of whether or not they'll buy your book. But it is something they take into consideration and it gives the editor more "ammo" when pitching it to their sales and marketing departments. Because when it comes to publicity, for the average author, 90% of it is up to the author, and sales and marketing do consider this.

As for submitting to agents, it's not as important when you're a debut author, but if you're previously published and have little or no web presence it will certainly give agents pause. This won't necessarily bring on a rejection immediately, but it will make me think "Why aren't they keeping active in the industry or at least with their fans?" or worse yet "Why didn't they promote their last book?" As previously published authors, you should have some idea of how important self-promotion is (remember--90%...yeesh!), and agents like to see that you have realistic goals and expectations.

With this in mind, every writer should partake in online promotion, whether for your book, or simply building a web presence. But that doesn't mean you have to do it all-- blog, tweet, build a Facebook page. Find your audience, explore your options, and establish a web presence that suits your needs and comfort level.

Joanna Stampfel-Volpe is an agent with Nancy Coffey Literary & Media Representation. She represents children's to adult books, and when she's not reading (which is almost never), she enjoys cooking, watching movies, and hanging with her husband and her chihuahua, PeeWee.

*Labor stats provided by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Research Redux

BY MARIANNA JAMESON



NASA



The National Aeronautics and Space Administration came into being in 1958 as a response to the “Sputnik crisis of confidence” and one of its first priorities was human spaceflight, which led to rapid and continual innovations in every branch of aeronautics, space science, and earth science. So it’s no surprise that NASA’s website, <http://www.nasa.gov/>, is pretty close to geek heaven. But before you breeze past this article as being not what you’re interested in, I need to point out that the site isn’t just for the science fiction and fantasy writers among us. Don’t let that ‘aeronautics and space’ stuff in the title fool you: the NASA website is a goldmine of information for the rest of us, too.

NASA’s website is massive and contains something for everyone. Sure you can learn about the spacecraft settling into life on Mars (http://www.nasa.gov/home/hqnews/2010/jan/HQ_10-024_Spirit.html), what the latest solar orbiters are seeing (http://stereo-ssc.nascom.nasa.gov/beacon/beacon_secchi.shtml), why NASA is firing a green laser beam at the Moon (http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/LRO/news/LRO_lr.html), and what the Hubble is photographing now (http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/hubble/main/). But as I said, there’s more to NASA than just outer space. Many of NASA’s scientists and researchers are working on projects that are closer to home and perhaps closer to our hearts.

The first thing that I find wonderful about this site is that you don’t need a Ph.D. to get your information. The Home Page (<http://www.nasa.gov/>) has buttons that take you to portals set up for educators (<http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/index.html>) and students (<http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/index.html>), either of which is a great place to start if you want you information in plain, old, understandable terms. Those areas of the site are further segmented by the age of the audience (kindergarten through college), which is great if you’re not exactly sure what you need or want to know, and prefer to start your research with baby steps before moving on to more sophisticated information. And the best part is that every article or news release closes with links to additional information and, usually, information regarding who to contact if you want more information. It’s like a gift from the universe.

So, once you’re on the Home Page, and you don’t want to go the educator/student route because you know what you want and just want to get there, you can just click on the large icons on the right side of the home page, which will take you directly to the broad topic you’re interested in: Earth, the Universe, our Solar System, the Moon, etc. Since the point of this article is showing you the things you might be surprised to find on the site, let’s start with information most of us could use in our books: stuff about Earth.

NASA’s many earth-orbiting satellites collect atmospheric data regarding both global climate and regional weather, as well as more focused terrestrial issues. For instance, a single project currently underway is focusing on Central America and will enable researchers to study the structure of tropical rainforests, monitor volcanic processes and activity, create three-dimensional maps of earthquake faults, and examine Mayan archeology sites. (<http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/haiti20100126.html>)

The Hurricane Information page (http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/hurricanes/main/index.html) provides what you think it does, like images of hurricanes taken by Shuttle astronauts, and a whole lot more. There are some great pictures and videos of storms to get you in the mood to write that disaster scene, as well as information about how such storms form and why they move the way they do.

If your character is a pilot or maybe just a frequent flyer, you might be interested to know why NASA is studying how much solar radiation people are exposed to during commercial airline flights. ▶

(<http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/airline-radiation.html>). It's in part because airplane cockpit and cabin crews are considered by the federal government to be "radiation workers", just like X-ray technicians and workers at nuclear power plants. However, until now, no one has been able to quantify how much radiation exposure they receive during flights, only that they are indeed exposed. Going to be crashing a plane in your pages soon? You might want to know the dangers of, as well as the whys and hows of, ice forming on airplane wings (<http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/icing-forecast.html>). Or maybe you need some down-and-dirty info on the destructive forces that occur during a helicopter crash. NASA recently looked into that *by dropping a small chopper from a height of thirty-five feet*. And then filmed it. (<http://www.nasa.gov/topics/aeronautics/features/helo-droptest.html>)

If your story's going up in smoke, you need to check out the Fire and Smoke page (http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/fires/main/index.html). It's the place to go if you want to find out what the global pollution and carbon monoxide distributions were from last autumn's Southern California forest fires, or just see some amazing photographs of them. If you want to see visible light, infrared, and thermal images of those fires, go to http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/fires/main/usa/wsfm/wsfm_mission_update.html. The Fire and Smoke page also contains links to satellite images of recent wildfires elsewhere in the U.S., as well as in Africa, Australia and Asia, and articles about their environmental and atmospheric impact.

The Climate page (<http://climate.nasa.gov/>) is the place to learn about everything from the history of the ozone hole to recent changes in Arctic Ocean sea ice coverage. Specific information regarding all sorts of terrestrial and atmospheric issues is available on an interactive page that allows you to click on a number of different earth-orbiting satellites to find out what they do, to track their orbits and find out where they are in real time...and when one of them might be coming to your neighborhood. (<http://climate.nasa.gov/Eyes/index.html>) (For what it's worth, many earth-orbiting satellites, including the International Space Station, are visible with the naked eye if you know where and when to look for them.)

Then there are the more quirky and/or more basic things you can learn from the site. Want to know what you have to do and wear before being allowed access to a clean room? There's a YouTube video just for you. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7iwkKFAKzs>) Maybe you have a burning desire to know how microgravity affects the microscopic hairs of the human inner ear (<http://www.nasa.gov/centers/ames/news/releases/2010/10-10AR.html>) and why NASA is studying it. Or what the latest developments are in robotics, and how things are going for Robonaut, the first "humanoid robot designed for space travel", which came into being ten years ago, or its sexy younger sibling, Robonaut2, the "next generation dextrous robot." (<http://www.nasa.gov/topics/technology/index.html>, click on the Robonaut2 video) For a techno-beast, it's sexy-hot. And, um, its penmanship is way better than mine.

If you want to know about budgets, how far in advance NASA programs are planned, the hoops a program has to go through to get off the ground (so to speak), or how issues are handled, you want to head to the page set up for policymakers (<http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forpolicymakers/index.html>). You'll find links to everything from budget discussions and congressional testimony to the latest reports on near-earth objects and the hazard mitigation plans in place regarding them, to treatises on space trash, and reports on the Space Shuttle *Columbia* disaster.

Setting a story in a town that houses one of NASA's sixteen space centers and facilities? Download a fact sheet about the center and the projects going on there. (<http://www.nasa.gov/news/media/factsheets/index.html>) The News Release Archive (<http://www.nasa.gov/news/releases/archives/index.html>) goes back to 1990 if you want to find out what might have been going on at a certain time in the last twenty years, and the Media Alert archive (http://www.nasa.gov/news/releases/alerts/alerts-small_archive_1.html) is another place to find some interesting tidbits. (Glow-in-the-dark plants, anyone?) Press kits are available going back to 1997 (<http://www.nasa.gov/news/media/presskits/index.html>) and audio clip files are available (http://www.nasa.gov/news/media/audiofile/clips_archive_1.html). They go back to 2005 and cover everything from Chesley Sullenberger, the Hero of the Hudson, chatting with Shuttle astronauts, to interviews with scientists creating computer models that recreate the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. And let's not forget NASA TV (<http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/nasatv/index.html>), which offers channels for the public, the media, and for educational purposes, as well as streaming video from the International Space Station and streaming mission audio, as available.

It's no surprise that the website really shines when it comes to things beyond our atmosphere and I will leave that to you to discover on your own time. Again, though, the site is divided into easily navigable segments via buttons on

the Home Page: the Space Shuttle and International Space Station, the Moon and Mars, the Sun and its Solar System, and the Universe. There is a veritable galaxy of information available, ranging from discussions of the intricacies of a Shuttle astronaut's spacewalking suit, including a clickable spacesuit for getting at that specific information. (http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/spacesuits/home/clickable_suit.html), to ponderings about baby black holes (http://www.nasa.gov/topics/universe/features/newborn_black_holes.html), to full-color sky maps of our solar system (<http://www.nasa.gov/topics/solarsystem/sunearthsystem/main/index.html>), to seeing evidence of water on the moon (http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/LCROSS/main/prelim_water_results.html).

No matter which section of this excellent website you go to, you'll find vast amounts of detailed information that will intrigue and amaze; beautiful graphics, photographs, and videos that are available for download; and, best of all, links that work. Happy researching!

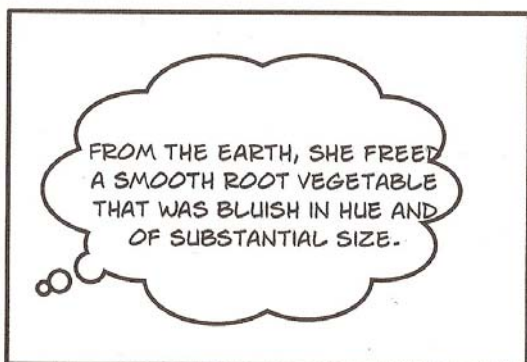
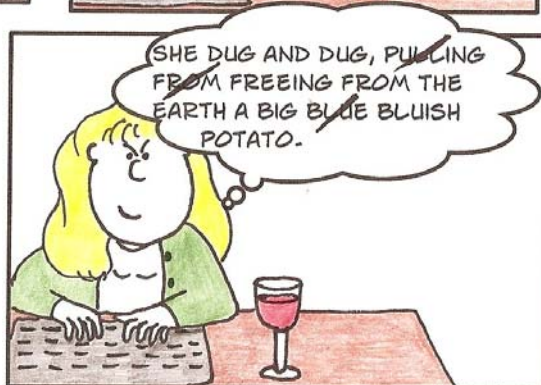
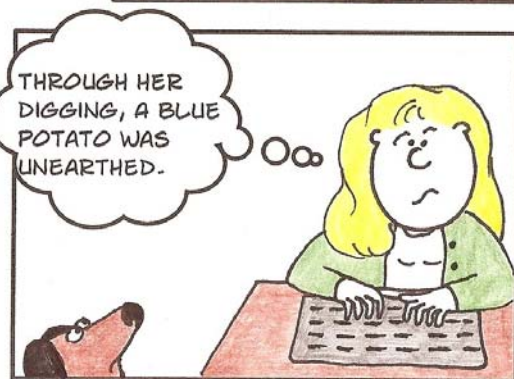
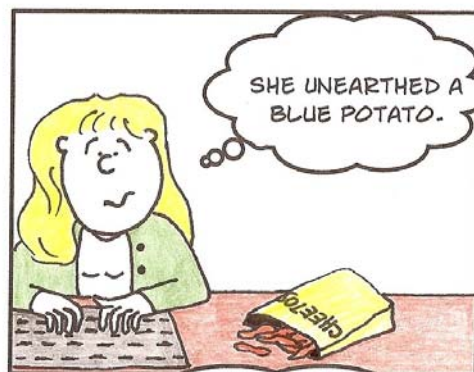
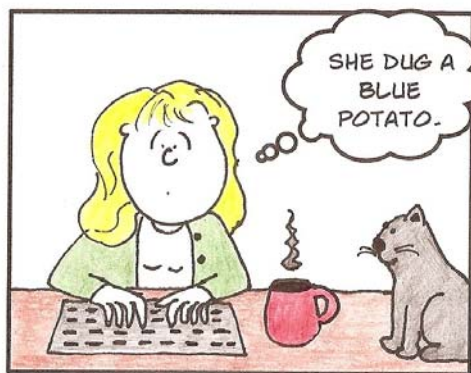
When she's not indulging her inner research geek, Marianna Jameson is a New York Times bestselling author of eco-thrillers. Her current release is *Frozen Fire*. Her next, *Dry Ice*, will be published in Spring of 2011.

Editor's Note: Got a topic you're eager to learn more about but haven't the expertise to dig into as deeply as Marianna? Send your requests to: Marianna@MariannaJameson.com



THE AUTHOR

REVISION DAY



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Editor's note: There's been a lot of discussion on the loops about why, in this increasingly tough publishing market, writers continue to write. In this new feature, JoAnn Grote tackles not the why, but the how, exploring techniques to keep the writing flowing.

Not Your Usual Writing Advice

BY JOANN GROTE

"Your imagination is your preview of life's coming attractions." — Albert Einstein

As novelists, we draw on our imaginations to develop stories. But some authors have taken it a step further, drawing on their imaginations to jump start their careers, and improve the daily act of writing.

Sue Grafton, author of the best-selling Kinsey Millhone alphabet mystery series relies on visualization. In 1986 Grafton wrote, "I have one final suggestion, a practice that's boosted my productivity by 50%. Start each day with a brief meditation...five minutes of mental quiet in which you visualize yourself actually sitting at your desk, accomplishing the writing you've assigned yourself."

At the time, only three Kinsey Millhone books had been published. Last December, her twenty-first book was released. Grafton's practice impressed me, because she was using it not just to achieve the goal of a published book, or money in the bank—although are certainly desirable, too—but to enhance the process of writing. I wasn't published when I first read Grafton's quote. But I decided to follow her advice; I posted a note beside my computer: 5 minutes. Thirty-eight books later that note is still beside my computer.

How do you want to experience your writing time? I visualize writing with focus, joy, enthusiasm and high energy, with the current work-in-process emerging easily in story content and in tangible form.

In *Wake Up and Live!* Dorothea Brande discusses a similar process she used to change her writing life.

"...you are mentally going to an appointment...with your successful self....How can you arrange your frame of mind to make that appointment fruitful?...What you want to recapture is the state of mind in which you once succeeded...The steady, confident feeling that was yours when you knew the fact that was demanded of you...was well within your powers."

In his book, *Maximum Achievement*, motivational speaker Brian Tracy lists four elements of visualization: frequency, vividness (clarity), intensity (emotion), and duration. The more of these elements you make part of your visualization process, the faster you can achieve the desired results.

Tracy says, "Increasing the amount of emotion with which you accompany your visualizations is like stepping on the accelerator of your own potential." Did you notice that Brande's definition of the "state of mind" also includes emotions - "the steady, confident feeling...?" Indeed, Brande considers emotion so important that she recommends, "Until you can reach that steady, confident feeling of a previous success, refuse to begin; but insist to yourself on reaching it as soon as possible."

I've found that one way to increase emotional attachment to a pleasant, productive writing process is to visualize the desired long-term result. I got the idea from a speech Debbie Macomber gave at RWA workshop on visualization. Debbie said that before each writing stint, she visualizes the cover of the unsold book in the format of the line she's targeted.

I not only adopted her practice, I expanded on it, taping my name and the title of my manuscript on the cover of a romance book, then framing the cover and setting it beside my computer. At the time I started writing, there were no inspirational romance lines, so I used a traditional sweet romance. I later sold the book to an inspirational line that wound up using a strikingly similar cover format.

Use your past successes as a basis for your visualizations: see yourself happily and easily writing, receiving and signing a contract and/or a royalty check, or holding your published book in your hand for the first time. Try to recapture the feelings that went along with those experiences as you visualize them.

To hold the images of your desired results for a longer period of time ("duration" in Tracy's list) post pictures of them, as I did with the cover mock up. Make a poster for your office that includes such things as pictures of you typing away on your keyboard, or holding one of your books or a writing trophy you've received, with an editor at a conference, or beside a smiling fan at an autographing. Add positive comments you've received on your writing: a great review, an editor's compliment, or a fan's gushing praise. I once created a border around the top of my office with my





WRITING is TAXING

By Diane O'Brien Kelly

1099 Tax Reporting for Royalties

A Novelists, Inc. member recently noted that some agents send 1099s, while others do not. Some deduct their commissions from the amount they received from the publisher and report only the net royalties passed to the author. Some report the full amount paid by the publisher without reduction for the agent's commission. The author asked: Is there a right way, a wrong way? Or, if both work, is one more advantageous, tax-wise, for the author?

Right Way, Wrong Way

Fortunately, the IRS has issued definitive guidance on the 1099 reporting issue in Revenue Ruling 2004-46. (Internal Revenue Bulletin 2004-20, p. 915). This ruling requires literary agents who receive royalties on behalf of their author clients to report the gross amount of the royalties earned by their clients in Box 2 of a Form 1099-Misc if the aggregate royalties are \$10 or more in a given tax year. The "gross" amount means the total paid by the publisher before the agent's commission and any other fees are deducted.

You can read this ruling at http://www.irs.gov/irb/2004-20_IRB/ar08.html and the instructions for literary agents on page 4 of the Form 1099-Misc Instructions at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1099msc.pdf>.

If the publisher splits payments between the agent and author by issuing separate checks to each, the agent does not have to report to the author.

If an author has incorporated his or her writing business, a 1099 is not generally required to be issued. But keep an eye on this corporate reporting issue. I've noticed some recent developments in reporting for corporations and would not be surprised if the IRS requires reporting for payments to corporations in the future. Looks like there's been some underreporting of corporate income going on and the IRS is catching on.

Just because the IRS requires literary agents to report the gross amount of royalties to the author doesn't mean all agents are following the rules, however. Some may not understand their reporting requirements.

Which leads us to the writer's second question: If both work, is one more advantageous, tax-wise, for the author? Sorry, folks. No tax advantage here.

We've established that there is only one correct way for a literary agent to report an author's royalties – by reporting the gross amount on a 1099. But we've also established that an agent may or may not be actually reporting correctly. It is a common myth that the amounts reported to you on a 1099 dictate the amounts you should report on your return. That's not necessarily so. A 1099 provides data to the IRS to track income. However, taxpayers are required to accurately report their income whether those making payments to the taxpayer report correctly, incorrectly, or not at all.

Thus, regardless of whether your agent correctly reports gross royalties on your 1099, or incorrectly reports the net amount paid to you after deduction of commissions, fees, and expenses, you should report the gross amount of your royalties on Line 1 "Gross Receipts or sales" on your Schedule C. You would then deduct any commissions and other fees and expenses collected by your agent on Line 10 "Commissions and fees."

By reporting this correct way, you have made complete, detailed disclosure to the IRS of your revenues and expenses rather than "hiding" data by combining income and expenses into net figures. Your bottom line number on your Schedule C will then accurately report your net income from your writing activities.

Note that the amount reported on the 1099, if correctly reported, will not match the actual amount of payments you receive from your agent. For instance, if your publisher pays \$10,000 in royalties to your agent, your agent will likely deduct the standard 15% commission and send you a check for \$8,500. The 1099 issued by your agent at year-end should show the full \$10,000 as "Royalties" in Box 2 even though the check your agent sent you was only for

\$8,500. To view the 1099-Misc form, see <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f1099misc.pdf>.

As noted above, if an agent incorrectly reports the net amount on the 1099, the author must still report the full gross amount on the Schedule C. Here's why. If the author reported only the net amount from the 1099, the author would be double-dipping if he or she then claimed a deduction for the agent's commissions, fees, and expenses. Reporting in this manner would result in an understatement of both net income and tax due. The author might later receive a tax bill with penalties and interest tacked on. Yuck.

Oops. I Filed Incorrectly in Previous Years. What Do I Do?

If you realize now that you filed incorrectly in the past due to misreporting by your agent, you can file an amended tax return for each incorrect year on Form 1040X, available at <http://www.IRS.gov>. You will owe additional tax and interest for each of those years, but may be able to get any penalties waived. Penalties may be waived if there is "reasonable cause" for an understatement rather than "willful neglect." If you point out to the IRS that the 1099 issued to you was incorrect, and that you relied on that information to prepare your return, the IRS may forego the penalties.

Be aware, too, that the applicable statute of limitations generally allows the IRS to go back only three tax years to assess additional taxes when there have been errors on a return. If your misstatements in tax years further back than three years were minor, the IRS may lack authority to force you to pay those taxes. That said, however, the IRS can go back six years if the amount of income was understated by 25% or more. Moreover, the IRS can go back to any year if no return was filed, or a fraudulent return was filed. What you consider an honest mistake the IRS may consider fraud. Thus, if you understated income on a return that's more than three years in the past, it may be worth the peace of mind to go ahead and come clean if your understatement was significant.

Got a tax question for Diane? Email her at Diane@dianeobrienkelly.com. Your question might be addressed in an upcoming issue.

For further tax tips, check out the "Tax Tidbits" page on Diane's website, <http://www.dianeobrienkelly.com>.



Forensic Files

Continued from page 15 ▶

huge subject but a few things he might do would be:

Orientation means does the person know who he and others are, the date, his location, and what situation he is in. The MD might ask: What's your name? How old are you? Point to the victim's sister, friend, etc. and ask Who is this? What is today's date? Who is the president? What type of building are we in?

Memory would be tested by asking: What do you last remember? He might then tell her the name of everyone in the room and ask her to repeat them. Or say a sequence of numbers and get her to repeat them back.

Cognitive function means the ability to understand concepts and connections. He might ask her to subtract 7 from 100 and 7 from that number and so on. Answer: 100, 93, 86, 79, etc. He might ask her what does the phrase cry over spilt milk mean? Or a penny saved is a penny earned. Such questions test her ability to reason and use abstract thinking.

It's more complex than this but this should help.

Your victim might not require anything and could go home a week after awakening—depending upon what other injuries she sustained of course. More likely she would need psychiatric counseling and physical therapy (PT). Again, you have great leeway here.

D. P. Lyle, MD

Website: <http://www.dplylemd.com/>

BLOG: <http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com/>

The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



Experience

“Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes.”

— Oscar Wilde

Every so often, I sort through my computer files and delete old folders and documents that I don't need anymore: letters to the bank, the landlord, or the IRS about matters long-since resolved; travel plans, restaurant recommendations, and conference schedules for trips that are over; and professional documents and correspondence that I have no reason to keep any longer.

On the most recent occasion of this ritual, I came across a file of material that I hadn't looked at in a few years, and which holds such bad memories for me that just seeing it darkened my mood. Getting rid of something *that* negative from my past seemed like a good idea. However, remembering what had inspired me to compile this file, I decided I'd better take a good look at it before getting rid of it. Just in case.

It's a file that I maintained to protect myself while working with the most stressful editor of my career. Ultimately, I insisted on requesting editorial reassignment despite the vehement objections of my then-agent, who warned me that the publisher would disapprove of my doing this and might well refuse my request. In fact, the agent had already rejected multiple desperate requests from me on previous occasions to arrange this reassignment.

But I was so miserable that I refused to take "no" for an answer this time. I crossed the Rubicon, telling my agent that I would either receive word from the agency by Friday afternoon that my request to be reassigned had been placed before the publisher, or I would phone the publisher myself on the following Monday morning to set the wheels in motion.

I didn't care if this ended my association with the agent (and, indeed, I left the agency soon thereafter, though there were many reasons for my departure). I didn't care if it ended my relationship with the publishing house. I didn't even care if it ended my fiction career. I was *that* unhappy—and, by now, *that* determined to put an end to this unbearable situation.

For the first time in my life, I was suffering from stress illnesses. I had by now developed increasingly frequent migraines; chronic insomnia; unprecedented heartburn, indigestion, and intestinal trouble; mysterious skin rashes; muscle spasms; a facial tick; and a weird psychosomatic pain that began in my neck and gradually spread through my left arm until finally—hello!—*I could no longer type.*

What's most telling about my wretched physical condition is that within 2-3 days of finally receiving the news from my then-agent that my request had been made and accepted, and I was being assigned to another editor... *all of my symptoms completely vanished*, as if they had never existed. And they have never returned.

When I look back, I remember clearly just how *bad* things were and just how *much* I wanted to get out of that destructive editorial relationship. I still remember the sleepless nights, the burning stomach, the abdominal cramps, the skull-splitting headaches, the alien muscle spasms, the freakish facial ticks, and the debilitating pain in my left arm. Above all, I remember the stress which inflicted these symptoms on me, as well as the resultant frustration and depression that I wrestled with.

But what I realized I'd forgotten, when I recently looked through this old file on my hard drive, was *how* I reached that point.

I mean—good God, man! A psychosomatic pain that made it impossible for me to *type*? That's just crazy! It's also a point I really want to avoid ever getting to a *second* time.

Among the documents in the file is a record I kept of the problematic incidents with this editor. Our association was so troubled that, on one occasion, I thought I'd have to hire a litigator. Although that incident was resolved without my needing a lawyer, it made me realize that I could conceivably wind up in a lawsuit with the publisher because of the editor; so I decided I'd better keep a record of everything that happened, to protect myself.

Reading this document now, I see *exactly* how I arrived at the point where I was ready to throw away my entire career rather than remain in that situation. I also see how I arrived at the insane point of believing that my career *could* be destroyed by refusing to work with one sole editor.

Reviewing this log of incident after incident after incident—some of them bizarre beyond belief, others predictably repetitious, and a few of them positively sickening—I am amazed now that I didn't reach the point of bridge-burning desperation much sooner than I did. Even remembering the considerable pressure that I was under from my then-agent to stick with this editor... when I read that log of incidents now, I am stunned by the time I get to the third page that I was *still* hanging in there and going along with this clearly destructive situation—and the document is *eleven* pages long!

Getting to the point where I finally made the right decision for myself, despite obstacles and objections, was a long, rough, rocky road of experience that cost me a heavy toll. My sensation of being trapped for so long, with no way out, made me feel like a fool when I discovered that, in fact, *I lost nothing of value by enacting my decision; because there is nothing of value in a situation that makes me that miserable*. But I didn't realize that until after I was free.

I learned a lot from the experience, and this document is a record of how long it took me to learn my lessons and of how hard my education was. They are lessons I don't want to forget, because I never again want to get to such an extreme place. (*I couldn't type*. I had facial ticks! And skin rashes!)

Experience really is the greatest teacher. The time has passed when I thought I might need this log for legal reasons, but I'm keeping it on my hard drive as a reminder to eliminate destructive problems from my professional life by page three, and not wait until page *eleven* to do so.

Laura Resnick is living rash-free these days. Her latest book is Doppelgangster, and her next one is Unsympathetic Magic.

Business Briefs

Black Quill Awards

Dark Scribe magazine has announced the winners of the Third Annual Black Quill Awards, celebrating the best work in dark horror, suspense, and thrillers. The editors' choice for Dark Genre Novel of the Year award went to *Dark Places* by Gillian Flynn. The readers' choice went to *Drood* by Dan Simmons.

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COMPILED BY JACKIE KRAMER

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Amazon-Macmillan: An Outsider's Guide to the Fight

Editor's note: As this newsletter is going to print, the Amazon Macmillan story is still evolving. While I'm aware aspects of this article may be outdated by the time you read it, I couldn't resist running this coherent explanation of the issues at stake. Thanks to Charles Stross for allowing us to reprint from his blog:

Last Friday, Amazon.com unilaterally pulled most or all of Macmillan's books, including all paper editions, not just electronic, from their online store. (You can still find them via affiliates or second-hand stores, but Amazon themselves won't sell them to you. Note that this only affects me via my Merchant Princes books — published by Tor, a Macmillan subsidiary — in the US Amazon store. My Ace titles are safe ... for now.)

This whole mess is basically about duelling supply chain models.

Publishing is made out of pipes. Traditionally the supply chain ran: author -> publisher -> wholesaler -> bookstore -> consumer.

Then the internet came along, a communications medium the main effect of which is to disintermediate indirect relationships, for example by collapsing supply chains with lots of middle-men.

From the point of view of the public, to whom they sell, Amazon is a bookstore.

From the point of view of the publishers, from whom they buy, Amazon is a wholesaler.

From the point of view of Jeff Bezos' bank account, Amazon is the entire supply chain and should take that share of the cake that formerly went to both wholesalers and booksellers. They do this by buying wholesale and selling retail, taking up to a 70% discount from the publishers and selling for whatever they can get. Their stalking horse for this is the Kindle publishing platform; they're trying to in-source the publisher by asserting contractual terms that mean the publisher isn't merely selling them books wholesale, but is sublicensing the works to be republished via the Kindle publishing platform. Publishers sublicensing rights is SOP in the industry, but not normally handled this way -- and it allows Amazon to grab another chunk of the supply chain if they get away with it, turning the traditional publishers into vestigial editing/marketing appendages.

The agency model Apple proposed -- and that publishers like Macmillan enthusiastically endorse -- collapses the supply chain in a different direction, so it looks like: author -> publisher -> fixed-price distributor -> reader. In this model Amazon is shoved back into the box labelled 'fixed-price distributor' and get to take the retail cut only. Meanwhile: fewer supply chain links mean lower overheads and, ultimately, cheaper books without cutting into the authors or publishers profits.

Amazon are going to fight this one ruthlessly because if the publishers win, it destroys the profitability of their business and pushes prices down.

(Note that Amazon have been trying to grab a larger share of the cake by dipping into the publishers -- and the authors -- share of what meagre profits there are (book publishing is notoriously, uniquely unprofitable, within the media world), even though they've already got the wholesale and retail supply chains stitched up. Their buy wholesale/sell retail model screws publishers' ability to manage their cash flow and tends to induce price wars on the supply side, which is okay if we're talking widgets with a range of competing suppliers, but books are individually unique products and the industry already runs on alarmingly narrow



margins: this isn't the music or movie biz.)

Now, as to pricing and DRM -- those issues are entirely irrelevant -- at least at this stage of affairs. They're different battles. For what it's worth, the ePub format Apple, Sony, Baen, and everybody except Amazon are going with doesn't mandate DRM (although it provides an optional vendor-specified DRM layer). The DRM push comes from the board level of the corporations who own both the book publishers and the music vendors, and individual editors and publishers know it's crap. This is a battle that'll be lost or won within the publishers.

Pricing ... we sell books by reverse auction, most expensive editions first, then cheaper editions, then mass market, until we get to the remainder shelves. What any sane publisher would like to do is to get away from the current crude fixed-price points -- a system they can't do anything about right now because it's locked in via the wholesale/retail distribution model -- and get round to flexible pricing on books: start selling high, then drop the price incrementally with much higher granularity than is currently possible. Such a system would allow them to get a lock on the price elasticity of demand, and thus work out the price point at which they can maximize book sales. A fixed-percentage agency model (distributor takes a flat 30 or 35%, whatever the price, while the price is set by the publisher) lets them do that.

It's interesting to note that unlike the music industry who had to be pushed, the big publishers seem to be willing to grab a passing lifeline.

Final note: to customers, Amazon would like to be a monopoly (i.e. the only store in town). To suppliers, Amazon would like to be a monopsony (i.e. the only customer in town). Their goal is to profit via arbitrage, and if they can achieve those twin goals they will own everybody's nuts -- the authors, the customers, everyone. They are, in fact, exactly the kind of middle-man operation that the internet tends to squish, gooily. And if you think things would be different if I, Charlie Stross, went into self-publishing and sold my wares directly without any icky publisher to 'help' me ... do you really think I'd get better terms out of Amazon than a huge publishing conglomerate?

Whether this means Macmillan is any better placed to adapt to the post-internet order is an entirely separate issue which I can't begin to address here.

But Amazon, in declaring war on Macmillan in this underhand way, have screwed me, and I tend to take that personally, because they didn't need to do that.

Author's note: Just before Apple announced the iPad and the agency deal for ebooks, Amazon pre-empted by announcing an option for publishing ebooks in which they would graciously reduce their cut from 70% to 30%, "same as Apple". From a distance this looks competitive, but the devil is in the small print; to get the 30% rate, you have to agree that Amazon is a publisher, license your rights to Amazon to publish through the Kindle platform, guarantee that you will not allow other ebook editions to sell for less than the Kindle price, and let Amazon set that price, with a ceiling of \$9.99. In other words, Amazon choose how much to pay you, while using your books to undercut any possible rivals (including the paper editions you still sell). It shouldn't surprise anyone that the major publishers don't think very highly of this offer ...

Charles Stross is a science fiction novelist published by Tor, a Macmillan group company. His next novel, The Trade of Queens, is due out from Tor on March 18th. For more information see his website, <http://www.accelerando.org/>



New BISG Survey Tracks Book Consumers' Behavior Toward and Preferences for E-Books

First installment of three-part consumer survey addresses how print book buyers access, purchase and use e-books and e-readers

New York, NY (January 15, 2010) – In a benchmark survey—the first of three to be released this year—the Book Industry Study Group, Inc. (BISG) has just revealed concrete consumer data collected directly from book readers that addresses how print book buyers access, purchase and use e-books and e-readers.

“For example,” Bole continues, “the survey found that 30% of print book buyers would wait up to three months to purchase the e-book edition of a book by their favorite author. This kind of information can inform decisions publishers need to make today about when and how to publish e-book editions.”

Percentage of consumers willing to wait three months to buy e-book rather than immediately buy print book

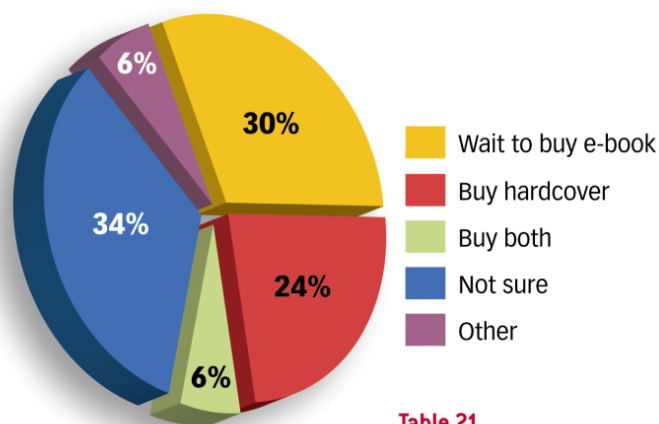


Table 21

Additional findings include:

- ▶ Roughly 1/5 of survey respondents said they've stopped purchasing print books within the past 12 months in favor of acquiring the e-book editions.
- ▶ Most survey respondents said they prefer to share e-books across devices. Only 28% said they would “definitely” purchase an e-book with Digital Rights Management (DRM); men were more likely than women to say they would not buy an e-book with DRM.
- ▶ Survey respondents indicated a clear preference for e-reader devices used as of November 2009, with computers coming in first (47%), followed by the Kindle (32%), and other e-reader devices at roughly 10% apiece.
- ▶ Although certainly growing, 81% of survey respondents say they currently purchase an e-book only “rarely” or “occasionally.”

The January 2010 release of Consumer Attitudes Toward E-Book Reading is the first installment of a three-part study that breaks new ground by providing data from hundreds of print book buyers who also identify as e-book readers. Over the course of nine months (November 2009 to July 2010), respondents were and



will be surveyed to find out when, why, how and where they purchase and use both e-books and e-readers. The findings will be available for sale both as a summary report and as a complete data compendium accessible online.

“This past holiday season, major e-book retailers reported unprecedented sales growth,” said BISG Executive Director, Scott Lubeck. “The data available in Consumer Attitudes Toward E-Book Reading starts making sense of it all.”

Data for Consumer Attitudes Toward E-Book Reading was derived from a nationally representative panel of print book consumers (men, women and teens) who complete surveys about their book purchasing behavior each month as part of PubTrack™ Consumer, a service of RR Bowker. Out of 36,000 possible panelists, 868 qualified for the BISG e-book survey by indicating they had either purchased a “digital or e-book” in the last 12 months or owned a dedicated e-reader device (such as Amazon Kindle or Sony Reader). 556 survey responses were received, yielding a response rate of 64% at a confidence level of 95%.

Top characteristics why consumers purchase an e-book rather than print book



For more information, or to order a copy of Consumer Attitudes Toward E-Book Reading, visit <http://www.bisg.org/publications/product.php?p=19&c=437>.

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About the Book Industry Study Group, Inc.

The Book Industry Study Group, Inc. (BISG) is the U.S. book industry’s leading trade association for policy, standards and research. The mission of BISG is to create a more informed, empowered and efficient book industry supply chain for both physical and digital products. Membership consists of publishers, manufacturers, suppliers, wholesalers, retailers, librarians and others engaged in the business of print and electronic media. For over 30 years, BISG has provided a forum for all industry professionals to come together and efficiently address issues and concerns to advance the book community.

Learn more about BISG at <http://www.bisg.org>.

