

# Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

## NOVEMBER MEETING

### *Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Hie Thee to Ye Olde Roundtable*

BY JAMES J. HODL

It's that time of the year again! Time for the annual IWOC Roundtable Session during which IWOC members and other interested freelance writers gather in a single great hall (or room as it may be) to share information and perhaps learn a few new things that will make us better and perhaps more prosperous writers.

Scheduled for Tuesday, November 14, the IWOC Roundtable offers some of the same features of the more famous roundtables in history. Like the roundtable in ancient Camelot, we will strategize. And like the roundtable staged through the 1930s at New York's Algonquin Hotel, the bon mots will fly. But unlike the others, part of the agenda of this IWOC Roundtable will be set by attendees.

As always, the Roundtable will present some interesting problems for attendees to solve. Devised by longtime IWOC member and Adams Press co-owner Jim Kepler, these puzzles will present real situations that freelance writers can encounter. Working in small groups, attendees will devise their own solu-

tions and share them with attendees in other groups.

But halfway through the Roundtable, attendees are invited to share real problems they have encountered, and invite other attendees who may have faced these same situations to share information on the strategies they used to resolve the problem to their advantage. These can range from common queries such as how to get more paying assignments or collect past-due bills for work performed, to the truly different.

So bring yourselves, your questions and your knowledge from experience to the 2006 Roundtable Session at the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, November 14 at the Chicago Athletic Club's 7th Floor Lakeshore Room, 12 S. Michigan Ave. Come at 5 p.m. to network with other professional freelance writers over gourmet cookies and coffee. The program begins at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC professional members and \$15 to non-members.

After the meeting, attendees are invited to go to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to continue networking. ♦♦



## WINTER HOLIDAY PARTY

### *Fiesta en Diciembre*

Ward off winter's chill and celebrate the holidays as IWOCers and friends migrate to sunny Spain — or a facsimile thereof — at Cafe Iberico Tapas bar.

This year's holiday party will feature scrumptious hot and cold tapas, along with the libations of your choice.

Hot dishes will include spicy potatoes in a creamy tomato sauce, baked goat cheese with tomato basil sauce and garlic bread, chicken and ham puffs with ali-oli sauce, grilled large prawns, grilled octopus with potatoes and olive oil, and paella.

The cold offerings include smoked salmon with dill cream sauce, mixed seafood salad, broiled red potatoes with garlic mayonnaise, and Spanish-style cured ham with manchego cheese and tomato bread.

This year's frolic begins at 7 p.m. to spare you rush hour traffic. Cafe Iberico is at 739 N. LaSalle. Go to the website for a flyer and a link to a map.

The cost is \$35 per person, which includes all the delicious food and two drinks (beer, wine, soda, or coffee). There will also be a cash bar and a visit from Santa

Please RSVP with your checks by December 5 to Jim Leman, 100 S. Atkinson Rd., Suite 116-210, Grayslake, IL 60030. Feliz Navidad! ♦♦

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN BY HARRY J. KARABEL

# Abundance

**M**y first recorded obsession was with toy soldiers. From the time I was 3, and until I was 11, I could sit for hours and hours and set up my soldiers, build houses, towns and forts for them, and then shoot them all down until only my few favorites were left. These were strictly "NO PRISONERS" types of battles. Everybody except the best guys died.

I had Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest, with the Sheriff of Nottingham's castle, knights and, of course, the Men of Sherwood. I had Fort Apache, with soldiers, cowboys, and Native Americans, whom we still called Indians. (This would make Sherman Alexie, one of my favorite writers and a Native American, happy.) I had the Battle of Gettysburg, the Union against the Confederacy, with cannons and wagons. I had Custer's Last Stand with the Colonel himself and Sitting Bull on horseback. I had The Alamo, Davy Crockett against the entire Mexican Army. No indigenous people anywhere were left unslaughtered. I had Ben-Hur, complete with chariots to race, gladiators dressed for battle, and in one of the more bizarre inclusions ever in a children's playset of little plastic creatures, a slave auction. I just let the slaves watch the gladiators. I had the Battle of D-Day, with G.I.s and Germans, landing craft, tanks, and jeeps, barbed wire and howitzers, bunkers and machine guns.

I had countless bags of other soldiers from local dime stores: more Civil War infantry, more G.I.s, more cowboys and Indians, astronauts and space aliens, Eskimos and Arctic explorers, more knights jousting and fighting on foot, and an entire display case of hand-painted Warriors of the World by Marx.

I even had a farm, which I appropriated from my little brother, for staging battles, with fences, livestock, and a barn with a loft, which was ideal for ambushes. Not since Leviticus were so many animals slain.

In my creative play, I was never hindered by the trifling details of history or geography. I had battles involving every single one of my soldiers and if Colonel Custer was fighting alongside a G.I. in green camo firing a Tommy gun, I had a good reason for it. I wasn't just setting them up to knock them down. I had reasons for everything. I was making up stories, and then acting them out on a small scale all over the house, the basement and the backyard. Endlessly.

Now, there are lots of explanations for this behavior. I had a lot of reasons (a lot more than you want to listen to, trust me) for acting out my aggressive tendencies in this way. My mother would say that I had "an abundance of imagination." She liked to use elevated language, whenever possible, to let people know how smart she was. But she also liked to use that language on me.

See, the time came when I still wanted more soldiers. At age 11, I was supposed to be moving on to other things. There was a new set in the Sears Wish Book of King Arthur and His Knights of the Roundtable, complete with said Table, a castle, a jousting field, a willowy Guinevere, and marauding Visigoths. When I pointed to the full color display on the catalog page, my mother said, "You already have an abundance of soldiers." That was the Christmas I got a real fiberglass bow with steel-tipped arrows and a red and white manual typewriter. The stories I told moved to erasable bond and the soldiers sadly disappeared from my life. What's left of them are somewhere in my brother's basement. They still inhabit my favorite pages in the Wish Book.

I don't think mom was trying to tell me abundance is not always a blessing, although that would have been just like her, a Depression-era child and all. I was just dragging my heels heading into my teenage years, and she was not about to let my peers leave me behind. Regardless of her motives, I am a writer because she encouraged me to be one by moving my stories off the living room rug and onto a white page. Then she read them and liked them. So did my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Schaefer. Between that life-changing series of events and the Dick Van Dyke show, I picked a career goal and stuck to it.

From my perspective, the only possible downside to abundance is when you have it and you don't share it. Joey Stuparitz and I used to share our soldiers and have even bigger battles strewn across even more history and geography. And so, I am never less than amazed at the ways in which IWOC members share their abundance.



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# If You Build It Right, They Will Come

## TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING TRAFFIC TO YOUR WEBSITE

BY ELLEN KRUPP



Some websites languish in cyberspace, never creating so much as a ripple of interest. Others have visitors who risk being stampeded by all the traffic. Most fall somewhere between these two extremes. Creating an interesting and compelling website is no guarantee anyone will visit it and then shovel tons of business-and dollars-your way. That's where SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and SEM (Search Engine Marketing) come in. At the October meeting, IWOC members heard from two experts about these different methods of maximizing website traffic.

### SEO: GETTING YOUR SITE TO APPEAR AT THE TOP OF THE SEARCH RESULTS PAGE

Jim Grosspietsch, a veteran marketer and creator of high-traffic websites based on Search Engine Optimization, explained the "free" ways to construct a site so it appears at or near the top of search engine results, therefore generating a lot of traffic. Think of SEO as building a better mousetrap, er, website. Grosspietsch described the essential elements of successful SEO, including:

**Make sound decisions about design and copy.** Within the body copy, make sure you include keywords and phrases that describe the kinds of work you do and the services you provide. It's also important to use keywords in the titles you put on web pages, and to be descriptive. For example, "Welcome to Cat Writer" as a web page title won't help optimize a search for your website as much as "Cat Writer: Words for and about Felines." Use the keywords or phrases that describe your business not only in the copy, but also in filenames or names of PDFs. Remember, search engines are looking far and wide and you don't want them to miss your website!

You should also give careful consideration to your domain name. Choosing a name that begins with a letter closer to the beginning of the alphabet can contribute to search engine optimization, as can incorporating what your business is and does as part of the domain name. For example, [www.smithwriting.com](http://www.smithwriting.com) (starts with an "S") wouldn't be as strong a choice as [www.catwriter.com](http://www.catwriter.com). (writer who writes about cats).

In terms of design, we all love bells and whistles. However, if your goal is search engine optimization you probably ought to resist the urge to get too fancy. Flash animation may look cool and appeal to your inner geek but it doesn't contribute to effective SEO. That's because when Google and other search engines are web crawling (looking for websites related to a keyword search), they can't read or index flash-based animation very well. In addition, flash pages and those with a larger file size take longer to load—a characteristic that will push those sites farther down the search results list.

**Develop an inbound link strategy.** Even after your website has been created, you can improve SEO by getting other sites on the Internet to have a link back to your site. Search engines "notice" when other sites are linked to yours, so investigate directories or sites related to yours that incorporate a link to your website. Dmoz.org is a directory that thousands of sites (including Google) reference and use when web crawling. To get a link here, first you have to submit your site to dmoz.org, answer questions about it and then wait perhaps months to get listed. You can also get listed on Google and Yahoo, as well as on independent industry-relevant directories—especially those that provide a link back to your site.

**Pay attention to performance.** Finally, you need to monitor and evaluate your website to make sure your SEO strategies are working, or whether you should rethink and redo them. Investigate how people are finding you (the search words they're using) and also where your site ranks when you use different search terms.

### SEM: MOVING YOUR AD TO THE TOP OF THE SEARCH PAGE ADS

In addition to free SEO strategies that earn your site a higher rank on search result pages, you may want to augment these techniques with SEM, or Search Engine Marketing. Jim Leman, past president of IWOC, shared his experience and insight into ways to increase traffic to your website using SEM. Many people were surprised, and understandably envious, when Leman shared his return on what's been a very modest investment. He's averaged three leads per month since he started using SEM in 2003 and generated more than \$65,000 in local and national business! And his costs? For site maintenance and SEM, he's paid less than \$1,000 per year. That's a small price to pay for driving traffic and increasing business.

Leman told us that he created his site following basic SEO techniques (using a Yahoo template), including a liberal use of the keywords and phrases that describe his business on each page of his website.

Then, to improve traffic to his site and generate leads he signed on with Google for a pay-per-click ad, which is one of the ads you see on the right side of the search results page. Whenever an Internet searcher clicks on Leman's ad, they're redirected to his website. If you're going to try this SEM technique, keep in mind that these ads should be written in a pretty straightforward, nuts-and-bolts manner. Skip the hyperbole because Google won't accept ad copy that's over the top.

If you've spent any time searching the Internet, you've noticed that there are a lot of these ads appearing on search results

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## Networking: Start with a Master Plan



YOU CAN MAKE NETWORKING PAY OFF BY USING THESE FOUR SIMPLE STEPS. TRY IT!

**N**etworking should be a powerful way for all of us in IWOC to grow our businesses. But if you're like me, don't you want to revert into yourself at such social occasions and hug the wall, plate of weenie wraps in hand?

But recently I tried a different approach at two different business networking affairs. As a result I walked away with two opportunities to do business from one of these events and one opportunity from the other, all of which I'm now developing.

I have the business cards of others I met at those events to follow up with later. And you can bet I will.

Here's what I did that worked for me:

**1 I had a plan:** I made the decision to take full advantage of as many networking events as I could find, and I would use them to grow my business. At them, I would not stand idly by but break from my comfort zone and approach these strangers.

**2 I set goals:** I was not going to leave these opportunities without having talked to enough individuals to qualify a certain number who might be potential clients; my goal

then was to have brief but quality conversations with X number of people and exchange cards and get commitments from them to follow up.

**3 I went into role:** Jim Leman wasn't there, but Jim Salesman was; I had my mini-commercial ready and delivered it in 5-10 seconds to people I met. Then I asked if their company had all the good press coverage it wanted. That got their interest. Then I flipped the remainder of the conversation so they talked and I listened for their communications pains.

**4 I followed up:** Immediately back in the office I sent e-mail thank-you notes to everyone I met and tweaked those that went to individuals with whom I'd agreed to meet or speak later to set specifics.

At your next networking opportunity, set goals before you go, drop into your salesperson role, and then take the initiative to move from your comfort zone to deliver your mini-commercial (more on how to create your mini-commercial next month).

In any given situation, someone else there either needs, or knows someone else who needs, your magic dust. Your job is to find them. ♦

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## Driving Traffic to your Website

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pages. Clearly it's in your best interests to have your ad appear at or near the top of the page so you have the best chance of generating interest and clicks through to your website. The way you improve your ad's placement is to bid on the keywords or phrases an Internet surfer might use to find a site with your services. Think "executive speeches", "marketing writer", "medical editing," or whatever words you're using to describe yourself and your work. You decide what words are most likely to draw someone to your website and bid anywhere from a few cents to a few dollars for those words. If your bid is among the top bids, your ad's position on the search results page will be higher.

You can also set a limit on how much you'll pay per month, and when you've reached your limit you won't pay any more and your ad won't receive priority placement until the next month.

For Leman, the investment has clearly been worth it. He knows that, not only because of the leads and business he's generated, but also because he regularly checks on how his strategy is working. Google provides reports on the position an ad earns based on the keyword bid, how many clicks it received, the average cost per click, and the total cost. So Leman can evaluate which keywords may need to be changed, which bids may need to be raised or lowered and whether he wants to change the dollar limits he's placed on his pay-per-click ad. Google even has a tool to let him estimate how these changes would affect his results.

And speaking of return on investment, IWOC members who took the time to attend the meeting certainly achieved a high ROI. The Grosspietsch-Leman team provided tools we can all use to transform our websites from cyberspace duds to the high-traffic, income-generating websites of our dreams. ♦

## SEO Works for Us!

**S**hortly after the terrific October meeting, the webmaster received an excited e-mail from Jane Ware Davenport, who had just gotten a job from a complete stranger in New York who had found her via search engine through the website. Jane wanted to compliment us on our SEO. But it gets even better: A brand new member – and I mean brand new; she had joined two days before – got a job covering a TV show for a well-known national newspaper, who also found IWOC via search engine.) It was a rush job, but the member got the interviews, and by midafternoon she had a great big byline on the web!

### Member News

IWOC is saddened to report the death of former PR chair Noreen Kelly's mother and also the death of former IWOC member Joan Harpham's mother. Our thoughts are with Noreen and Joan.

