

Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

NOVEMBER MEETING

Fishing for More Clients? Learn How SEO Can Lure Them to Your Website

BY BECKY MAGINN

Many of us have Web sites, and many more have considered building one or hiring someone to do that for us. If you don't fall into one of these categories, and you want to increase your chances of attracting new clients—quite significantly—you might want to rethink your thinking!

But it's not just about having a website (although that is a very cool thing). It's about having a site that rises to the top in a generalized search, such as a Google search in which someone who has never heard of you starts by entering something as vague as "freelance writer." These days, when asked a question to which they don't know the answer, who doesn't say, "I'll google it!" (I think it's interesting that that usage has become so commonplace that several dictionaries indicate that "google" as a verb is often lowercased.) If the link to your site comes up on the first or second page of that Google search for a writer, your exposure to potential new clients can increase dramatically—and that is with a capital "D." I can't imagine many of us who wouldn't love to have that happen, especially in this

financial climate that is causing us to lose longtime clients through no fault of our own.

Anyway, that's where our November meeting comes in. The topic is search engine optimization, or SEO. SEO, quite simply, as the name implies, increases the ranking of your Web site in a search, enabling it to pull in many more visitors, from across the city or around the world, 24/7, to be enticed by the services you advertise there.

The only thing is, implementing SEO is not quite as simple as one might think. To explain many of the ins and outs, we enthusiastically welcome back Jim Grosspietsch, who, along with past president Jim Leman, gave a presentation on SEO to our group about three years ago. Jim will tell us why improving your website with SEO requires fine-tuning your thinking when it comes to writing the site content. Through the use of key terms, you can boost your site's ranking not just

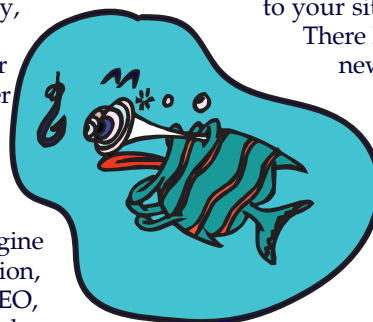
through direct links from search engines, but also by getting other pages such as directories and blogs to link to your site.

There have been some new developments in SEO over the past few years. This is one reason we have asked Jim Grosspietsch back—in addition to the positive response he received last time

he spoke to us. One new consideration is that, today, many more people are relying on referrals from the social media, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and using searches less. Jim will address how this impacts SEO.

Jim also plans to spend just a little time talking about the first steps to take if you think you might be interested in looking into SEO as a possible addition to the list of services you offer as a writer. (Yet another exciting possibility!)

Jim is a marketing executive, entrepreneur, and online search consultant. A frequent speaker on marketing-related topics for small to mid-sized businesses,

Continued on page 4.


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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

Word Play . . .

Sometimes, I just feel like playing with words. (One might say I like letting them play with me.) My job involves working with words, after all, in much the same way a musician works with notes. Even concert pianists improvise, sometimes.

There's an old saw that starts, "All work and no play..." I believe it. Many a sharp boy and blade has been rendered dull by overworking. Exhaust your tools, and your work becomes heavy and hard. So to keep things light and sharp, you know what I do?

I play.

John Cleese, of *Monty Python* fame, once said, "If you want creative workers, give them enough time to play." Unlike those who ply their writing trade in the corporate world, we freelancers are our own bosses. Strictly speaking, therefore, the burden falls squarely on us to give our workers (ourselves) a break from time to time and encourage them to go out and play. To do otherwise is to invite an unproductive fatigue among the staff.

For me, the best word play is often founded on whimsy. Expressions of playful joy crafted from the tools one uses every day can reinvigorate the desire to use those very tools. Especially these days, when it's tempting to think only in terms of billable hours, the occasional creation of a piece with no greater purpose than fun does wonders for the soul.

"Let the words play," is my advice to the writer who feels mired and weary of the craft—or merely suffers keyboard fatigue. "Life will reward you for doing so."

I don't claim to have invented this outlook, of course. Knowing what I know about the writing life—what I've learned through my own experiences, as well as those of other writers whose brains I've picked over the years—I think I'm safely speaking for the majority of my past and present peers. English (like every other language, I assume) contains at its core the potential for marvelous fun.

Play, in some sense, can be thought of as a language

of its own. Language, in the same respect, can be a form of play. (At least that's one way to look at it. You determine what anything is, I suppose, by choosing how you approach it.)

I guess what it comes down to is that I like to have fun when I'm writing. Not all the time, of course. Good sense cracks the whip if I play too long when I should be working. When (and if) I reach retirement, though, I hope to spend a lot of time playing with words. In the meantime, I satisfy myself with the occasional diversion.

This article, for example, which might seem on the surface innocuous—perhaps even trite—is something else entirely at its core. How so, you ask? Why, because of the little acrostic I've woven throughout.

Or did you not see it the first time through?

Read it again, then, and take note of the first letter in every sentence. Does a pattern emerge when you do that?

Sometimes, well... I think you get the point.☺



. . . Word Play Gone Terribly Wrong



Hey Buddy, Can You Spare a Paradigm?

WHY READERS, WRITERS AND EDUCATION ARE VITAL IN THE CYBERSPACE ERA

BY DAVE EPSTEIN

Speaking to a large turnout of IWOC members and guests, Dr. Edward Gordon, researcher and consultant in global workforce trends, summarized the technology race of the past three decades. We left the Age of Mass Production, which he called the "Era of the Wrench," zoomed through the Computer Age (was this perhaps the "Era of the Byte"?), then teleported swiftly into a new paradigm—the wireless "Era of Cyberspace." Cars, phones, houses, and even clothing contain more and more high tech. Fashion won't just look "smart," but will be "smart" enough to sense the wearer's changing environment and activities and adjust accordingly. The pace of change is speeding up continually. Gordon forecast that more new products and services will be introduced in the next decade than during the past 50 years.

CYBERSPACE SHIFTS

While the Cyberspace Era paradigm offers plentiful opportunities for those who can navigate its shifting landscape, it has also disrupted basic social and economic patterns, revolutionized communications, destabilized the global job market, and created new demands for technical training and literacy that are not being met by American (or other) educational systems today.

With the shift from print to cybermedia, 20,000 journalists have lost jobs in

the last two years. Equally serious to Gordon are the declining audience for responsible journalism, the shift from news to "infotainment," and decreasing levels of literacy. A recent survey by the *Chicago Sun-Times* and *Tribune* revealed that 50 percent of adults in Illinois cannot read. Other studies indicate that 10-15 percent of American college graduates are functionally illiterate. He (and other thinkers) consider that "our Republic is at great risk from the loss of the printed word," because without an informed citizenry, democracy can turn to demagoguery.

OUTLOOK FOR WRITERS

In spite of—in part because of—these trends, Gordon sees writers with their strong communication skills becoming more valuable in the global marketplace, as companies seek to do business across the globe. Answering a question about how writers can infiltrate these wider markets, he suggested looking for writing opportunities with the many foreign companies, such as Korean, Japanese or Swiss, which need business communicators skilled in English and familiar with American culture to help them reach North American partners and customers.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

He also sees an important role for writers as educated citizens and communicators in contributing to local projects in which new community-based organizations

(CBOs) are working with local government and educators to close the widening gap between the technical skills employers want and the low technical skills and literacy among many public school—and even college—graduates. High-school graduation rates are only 69 percent nationwide, and about 50 percent in big cities. One result is that jobs that could be done in the U.S. are sometimes going overseas because companies cannot find enough workers with the requisite skills here. The chip manufacturer AMD could not find enough technically proficient workers in any town in Texas to staff a chip factory, so 4,000 well-paid jobs that could have been filled by Americans were lost to Dresden, Germany.

EDUCATIONAL MODEL

One remedy for this problem is being developed in Santa Ana, California, which started losing 5,000 jobs a year in the mid-1990s, as technical workers moved away, to be replaced by low-skilled Mexican immigrants. The Chamber of Commerce founded a CBO, which, working with the local school board, now operates a liberal arts high school career academy. Together, they



have also opened 60 sites for adult basic education (ABE) and retraining in needed job skills.

This model is spreading. A Chicago example is a project of the Manufacturing Association, in which Gordon is personally involved, to develop new high schools as part of the Chicago Renaissance 2010 initiative. Four schools are being opened or developed, including the Austin Polytechnical Institute, the Advanced Technology School, an IT school, and a healthcare school. Other education-oriented CBOs are springing up throughout the nation, many in smaller cities like Wausau, Wisconsin. Their goal is to prepare American workers for the burgeoning job opportunities in fields like nanotechnology, biotechnology, and healthcare.

THE SYSTEM IS BROKEN

Gordon says the nation's education-to-employment system is broken. Despite today's high unemployment, the U.S. already faces a shortage of 3 million technically skilled workers, which

Continued on page 5.

October Recap

is predicted to grow to more than 24 million by 2020. This will include a shortage of 3 million nurses and 250,000 doctors, as well as other healthcare professionals.

PEOPLE PARADOX

In what Gordon calls the People Paradox, skilled technicians who are Baby Boomers are retiring. Companies that expected to replace them with engineers and technical workers from India and China are discovering that, although those countries graduate roughly a million "engineers" per year, their standards of training are inadequate. Also, as wages rise in China and India, 500,000 foreign technical workers are expected to return to their home countries.

Gordon believes that Americans will not allow our country to become the

Continued from page 3.

victim of ignorance, but he compares our current low-skilled workforce to trying to play a Betamax videotape in a Blu-Ray disc player. As professional communicators, he believes writers can play important roles in the sustained effort required to correct this situation. Along the way, we can find new clients and assignments in a world that needs quality communication more than ever.

In the Q&A session, audience members asked about possible ways writers could tap into these opportunities, but there was no opportunity to explore this topic in any depth. However, based on the considerable interest shown, there will be an effort to return to the area of the potential global marketplace for writers, next time with a more specific how-to emphasis. ♡

November Program

he is often quoted in the media as an expert—most recently, on ABCNews.com, Entrepreneur.com, and WSJ.com. Although he does a little bit of everything when it comes to marketing, Jim currently spends the majority of his time on website design, SEO, social media marketing, and PR.

So be sure to join us on Tuesday, November 10, if you hope to catch some new fish in the vast World Wide sea. The saying is true: there

Continued from page 1.

are plenty of them out there!

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

Calendar

November 10

IWOC Monthly Meeting. In these tough economic times, we need all the help we can get to improve business. SEO expert Jim Grosspietsch will tell us how to tweak our websites to make Google love us. The meeting will be held at National-Louis University, Room 5008, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Program 6 p.m. Networking 5 p.m. Nonmembers, \$15; IWOC members free. Buy-your-own dinner follows. Nonmembers welcome. For more information, call 847/855-6670 or visit www.iwoc.org.

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

November-December Holiday Lunch

IWOOP Monthly Lunch. Join near-west suburbanites for a noon lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. Check before you come. This lunch is monthly only if there are enough people who can attend. This month there will be a combined November-December lunch. Barb will e-mail those on the list with the date. If you're not on the list, call Barb.

November 5 (1st Thursday)

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

It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line

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See What's Doing in IWOC Events

WWW.IWOC.ORG