



# Stet

## Independent Writers of Chicago

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NOVEMBER MEETING: TOTE A TABLET & LEARN TO CREATE A WEBSITE /BLOG

## WordPress Makes It Easy

IWOC is back to regular programming in November after a successful mixer with members of Alliance of Creative Professionals in October. On Tuesday, Nov. 13, bring your laptop or iPad and wear Army fatigues and boots, (no weapons please), as IWOC brings you WordPress Setup Camp. Our drill sergeant is Nicole Crimaldi, founder of MCG Media Inc., a Chicago digital content-creation service.

Consider this program as basic training in WordPress, a free web-based software program that anyone can use. Originally intended as an easy way to get into blogging, today's WordPress is really a content management system (CMS) that can be used to build business websites as well as blogs.. For freelancers struggling with static websites that are hard for them to update, WordPress Setup Camp promises to be a life-changing experience that will allow you to take charge of your web destiny.

Crimaldi's goal is to have IWOC members and guests leave the class feeling comfortable about creating a website, blog, and brand using the tools



available through WordPress. She promises to tailor the class for freelance writers and editors and offer advanced help to those who already are familiar with WordPress. Time permitting she'll go into more detail on search engine optimization (SEO) and attracting readers to your blog.

Crimaldi is an accomplished teacher, presenter, and blogger ([www.msca-reergirl.com](http://www.msca-reergirl.com)) who left the comforts

## October Mixer Scores

In October, IWocers, guests, and members of the Alliance of Creative Professionals (ACP) gathered at the North Avenue Marcello's for a get-to-know-you evening that turned out to be heaps of fun.

The setting was ideal: plenty of room to stroll about and mingle, wonderful tidbits to snack on — a lot of praise for the chicken fingers and the artichoke dip — and, of course, a handy bar for the libations of one's choice.

Though the get-together was billed as a simple meet-and-greet, at least one IWOCer got a tip on a job. Mostly, though, we met a lot of fascinating and truly creative people — photographers, web designers, and other thinkers outside the box.

Another treat was reconnecting with IWOCers we hadn't seen in a while. The turnout was gratifying, and everyone left with a smile. If you weren't in attendance, you shudda been there. ■

— Joen Kinnan

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# Can democracy afford our "free press"?



Fifty years ago President Eisenhower in his farewell address warned that we "must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.... We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes." Even though the birth of campaign media over-hype might be traced to the Kennedy-Nixon TV debates of 1960, Ike could not foresee that half a century later what might be called the media-political complex might be an equal threat to American democracy.

Just how "free" is the American press? Actually, very costly. The two Presidential candidates are on track to spend as much as \$2.5 billion between them, and at least a third of that is going to TV, radio, and other media. By late September, according to Doug Mataconis in [outsidethebeltway.com](http://outsidethebeltway.com), presidential campaign ad spending alone had reached \$700 billion. Now it is climbing past \$900 billion.



That doesn't count the additional multi-millions of "free" promotion that TV, radio, and newspapers give away daily by presenting campaign ads and claims as "news." That's truly

"freedom" of the press. Partisan "news show hosts," star columnists, and political consultants slide back and forth between media "journalism," political candidacy, campaign management, and punditry. Will Sarah Palin star on Fox TV or run for office again? Just when did Al Sharpton morph from a civil rights leader into a news anchor? Does this faintly resemble the military-industrial merry-go-round, where the same folks migrate smoothly from academia to defense companies (Ike used the franker term "armaments") to politics to lobbying and back again?

In those diminutive islands east of the Atlantic, whose tyrant King George III inspired our Founders to strike out for Liberty or Death, they later learned to hold elections—from us. They held one in 2010. The entire campaign took four weeks. The campaign began on April 12, polling day was May 6, and on May 11 the new Prime Minister, David Cameron, took office, even though he had first to negotiate a (bipartisan) coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

The cost? From official British electoral figures, all parties combined—Labour, Tories, Liberal Democrats, plus minor parties—spent £31 million (\$49 million) to elect 650 Members of Parliament. That's more candidates than our 2-for-1 President-plus-VP, 535 Senators and Representatives, and 30-odd governors (some of them really quite odd).

Ah, you say, but our Great Republic is so much grander than "Great" Britain, so we must spend vastly more. Besides, the Supreme Court ruled that campaign spending is protected Free Speech (there's that brave word "free" again, which hath so many dollars in it).

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# Can democracy afford our “free press”?

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**OUR CAMPAIGN SPENDING IS 118 TIMES MORE THAN THE UK SPENT ON ITS 2012 ELECTION. FACTORING IN THE POPULATION DIFFERENCE, THAT'S 23 TIMES MORE PER VOTER.**

The Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan research group, calculates that party and candidate spending in 2012 for Presidency, Senate, and House (excluding spending by PACs, etc.) will total \$5.8 billion, maybe more. Our campaign spending is 118 times more than the UK spent on its 2010 election, but our population of 311 million-plus is only 5 times larger than the UK's 63 million. Proportionately, according to the BBC News Magazine of August 1, 2012, we spend 23 times more per voter. That's true Dollar Democracy.

To achieve Britain's miracle of electoral frugality—and to keep the democratic playing field as level as possible—British law strictly limits how much parties and individual candidates can spend and advertise. In 2010 the two main parties were allowed four or five party political broadcasts each in England, and six split between Scotland and Wales. In just the first three weeks of October, as reported in the Chicago Tribune on October 28, US voters were deluged with 112,730 pro-Obama commercials vs. 97,407 pro-Romney ads, although Romney and allies spent about \$87 million, almost \$10 million more than Obama and his PACs.

The British electoral rules would never fly in the US. But just for fun, let's apply their rules to our 2012 elections, only multiplying everything by 25 to adjust for our 5-times-larger population and our vast landmass, plus distances to Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Multiplying by 25, Republicans and Democrats would each have been allowed 100-125 political broadcasts for the mainland 48 states, plus 150 to cover Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam—and any states, like Texas, threatening

to secede. The campaign would have lasted 100 weeks (4 x 25), so it would be no shorter, but the parties might have had only one or two Presidential debates, and citizens would have been spared the endless Republican primary debates and probably the grin-and-grimace bout between Biden and Ryan. This approach would drastically curtail the demand for the services of America's news media owners, star anchors, columnists, journalists, advertising and PR experts, not to mention many others whose livings depend on the advertorial industry.

Many, including media pundits, blame our costly, exhausting, increasingly nasty and polarizing campaigns (though elections were even dirtier 100-200 years ago) on politicians, campaign managers, lobbyists, corporations, unions, SuperPACs, sinister creatures (e.g., Karl Rove, the Koch brothers), and the Supreme Court's decision sanctioning limitless anonymous campaign spending as “free speech.” But few—certainly not the media stars—mention the role of our “free” press in nurturing Dollar Democracy.

Listen to the frantic, super-fast speech of TV anchors and reporters. Look for the editorializing injected into so many news stories where past editors would once have sternly red-penciled opinion or bias. Hear the rising crescendo of exaggerations designed to increase drama—and boost ratings: “fiscal cliff,” “world changed forever,” “end of an era” (death of a world leader—or a drugged-out pop star), “historic flood,”

“catastrophic drought,” “hundred-year (or even thousand-year) storm.” Mayor Bloomberg just said we're getting a hundred-year flood or storm about every two years now.

The media's addiction to crises that pump up ratings leads them to inflict on us a sense of perpetual anxiety. News media obsessively cover one story for days on end and show visible disappointment when the current disaster begins to fade or turns out to be less disastrous than expected. Some news anchors have said, “What will be our big story tomorrow?” Luckily for them, something always turns up—or down. Just last week, there was a very promising “tsunami heading for Hawaii.” There was a visible letdown when the waves came in barely three feet high. Fortunately, Hurricane Sandy churned in very slowly, giving them days to agonize about impending disaster and mull over possible effects on the election. How thrilling: they got to blend an all-too-real and painful human catastrophe with a “cliff-hanger” election.

Could all this media hype be “incentivized” (love that word!) by the prospect of \$1 billion in political advertising and untold billions more from supercharged ratings? Traditional journalists at least tried to cover “all sides” of a story in what was considered fair and balanced reporting. Today's “news show hosts” (the new incarnation of “news anchors”) seem to consider “balance” to be inciting partisans from each side to yell and yammer at each other in verbal gladiatorial combat. Besides the \$1 billion in political ad revenue, may-

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# Did you know...



Occasionally, we like to delve into the origins of unusual phrases. Below are a few more for your amusement and edification.

**Kick the bucket** (to die): Though evidence is sparse, the phrase may arise from a suicidal penchant for standing on a bucket, putting a noose around one's neck, and then kicking the bucket away in order to hang oneself.

**Beat around the bush** (to avoid the obvious topic): This comes from a hunted boar's practice of hiding in a bush. Beaters were hired to beat the bush to chase the boar out, but not being fools, beaters wanted to avoid the boar's fearsome tusks and generally beat *around* the bush instead.

**Bury the hatchet** (to make peace): North American Indians sealed a peace treaty by burying their weapons, which not only showed good faith but also made it impossible to keep on fighting.

**Always a bridesmaid, never a bride** (to be perpetually excluded from one's goal): Oddly, this one comes from a Listerine mouthwash ad from the 1920s, in which "poor Edna" never walked down the aisle because she had bad breath, and nobody told her. (How's that for enduring ad copy!)

**Flash in the pan** (short-lived success): In the 1700s, the *pan* was the part of the musket that held the gunpowder. When the gunpowder was lit, the flame was supposed to propel the bullet out of the gun. When that failed to happen, there was just a "flash in the pan."

— Joen Kinnan

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## WordPress: An Easy Route to a Website or Blog

of the commercial banking world a few years ago to pursue her interests in writing and digital marketing. She readily admits that blogging itself and blogging through WordPress changed her life. "WordPress allowed me to learn technology, learn social media and have a side-hustle," she said. The side-hustle soon became her new career when she left banking to work in community marketing for a daily-deal start-up.

Don't miss this opportunity to advance your freelance writing career. The IWOC meeting is Tuesday, November 13, at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Ave., Room 5033, in Chicago — across the street from the Art Institute. Admission is free for

IWOC members, \$15 for nonmembers who pay at the door and \$10 for nonmembers who register at the IWOC website, [www.iwoc.org](http://www.iwoc.org), where you will see the upcoming events box.

Social hour with snacks and beverages begins at 5 p.m. The program will start promptly at 6 p.m. and runs approximately an hour. After the meeting, attendees are invited to reconvene at a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to continue the conversation and relax. By the way, we were just kidding about wearing Army fatigues, and no one will make you drop down and do push-ups. Just come to learn, network, and have a good time. ■

— Stewart Truelsen

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## Crowdsourcing: What Is It & Is It a Writer's Job Source or a Threat to Livelihood?

### CLIENTS BENEFIT GREATLY FROM A POOL; WRITERS NOT SO MUCH

The term *crowdsourcing* was coined by journalist Jeff Howe in a 2006 article for *Wired* magazine. Briefly, the word is a combination of "crowd" plus "outsourcing," and it is the practice of businesses making an open call to a broad community (usually on the Internet) to solve a problem, either through competition or collaboration.

The concept isn't new. Think barn-raising in colonial times, when families banded together to help a farmer erect a barn on newly acquired land. Today's superconnections through the Internet and social media, however, have made crowdsourcing a hot marketplace for established businesses and entrepreneurs alike.

Forerunners in the crowdsourcing game have been program developers who use "open source" coding, i.e., the coding isn't copyrighted by companies like Microsoft and Apple, so anyone can develop programs and add-ons using it. Big names are the Mozilla Firefox browser and the Apache HTTP server.

Now, however, all sorts of uses for crowdsourcing are springing up. *Wikipedia*, for example, is not your father's encyclopedia, which was written and edited by teams of *paid* experts in their fields. *Wikipedia* contributors are volunteers who don't get a dime for their postings, nor do those who edit them.

Since anyone can post a topic on *Wicki-*

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# British Political Parties — A Selective List

## 2010 UK general election — Campaign expenditures

You think we have political confusion in the US? Try Great Britain. It's widely known that they have three major parties: Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Conservatives—or "Tories," whom we Yanks think we got rid of in 1783.

Many people outside the UK are also aware that there is a Scottish National Party, which wants an independent Scotland, and which is staunchly supported by Sean Connery, the *only genuine and authentic* James Bond. That's why he refuses to be knighted by the Sassenach Queen and become Sir James.

The *Plaid Cymru* or Party of Wales, which wants an independent Wales and would presumably fire Prince Charlie as Prince of Wales, is also quite well known.

That makes five parties.

Heck, buddy, that don't even scratch the surface. At the last general election in 2010, the Electoral Commission of Great Britain listed **128** duly registered and legitimate parties. One of them is the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which spent £732,780, or nearly \$1,200,000, which ain't chump change. Oh, there's also an English Independence Party, which apparently spent £0. Do they want to be independent from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland—or, more likely, from the European Union?

Anyway, for your enlightenment, delectation, and consolation—i.e., the Brits suffer from even more political chaos than we do—here is a small selection of some of the more intriguing of the 128, along with their total campaign expenditures (the final total expenditure is more than spent by the parties shown because many are omitted):

Party Name	Total Spending (£)
Animals Count	0.00
Apolitical Democrats	0.00
Best of a Bad Bunch	0.00
Church of the Militant Elvis	0.00
Citizens for Undead Rights and Equality	0.00
Common Sense Party (Do we need one in the US?)	0.00
Conservative Party	16,682,874.00
English Independence Party	0.00
Fancy Dress Party	0.00
Get Snouts Out of The Trough Party	0.00
Green Party	325,425.00
Labour Party [The]	8,009,483.41
Landless Peasant Party	0.00
Liberal Democrats	4,787,595.00
Libertarian Party (See, they have these too)	0.00
Magna Carta Party ("Hooray for the Magna Carta!")	0.00
Matriarchal Party United Kingdom Great Britain	0.00
Mebyon Kernow - The Party for Cornwall	50.00
Movement for Active Democracy (M.A.D.)	0.00
Official Monster Raving Loony Party [The]	368.00
Pirate Party UK	0.00
Plaid Cymru - Party of Wales [The]	144,933.00
Revolutionary Communist Party Britain (Marxist-Leninist)	0.00
Save King George's Hospital	0.00
Scotland Against Crooked Lawyers	0.00
Scottish Jacobite Party	No response
Scottish National Party	315,776.00
True English (Poetry) Party, The	0.00
UK Independence Party (UKIP)	732,780.00
Virtue Currency Cognitive Appraisal Party	0.00
Workers Revolutionary Party	0.00
Your Right to Democracy Party Ltd.	0.00
<b>Total: £31,154,792.68</b>	

It makes perfect sense that the Scottish Jacobite Party did not file their electoral expense return. After all, they do not recognize the government of the Hanoverian usurper who now sits on the English throne. It would be equally logical for Her Majesty's government to fine them heavily for not reporting—or even behead them—since they are clearly self-confessed traitors to the Crown.

Each of you is encouraged to vote for your favo(u)rite party from the list above. We will then endeavo(u)r to found an American branch of the party that gets the most votes. ■

— Dave Epstein

**Editor's note:** Surely nothing rivals the Get Snouts Out of the Trough Party for sheer beauty and eloquence.





# Crowdsourcing: What Is It, and Is It a Good Job Source for Writers or a Threat to Livelihood?

*pedia*, how does one know the information is accurate? The site relies on

million works have been paid between \$1 and \$2 billion for crowdsourcing projects.



its mass audience (crowd) to contain experts who will spot errors and correct them.

That there will be experts among the crowd who reply to any solicitation contributes to the use of the method. So, according to at least one commentator on crowdsourcing, a whole bunch of people are neither smarter, more innovative, or more creative than a single individual, **but one or two people who respond might be**. In other words, it's more like separating the wheat from the chaff than Group-think, though some projects actually are collaborative.

What sorts of tasks are crowdsourced? Well, Amazon invites readers to review its books, iStockPhoto solicits photos, and DuPont even uses crowdsourcing in its R&D. One might even say that "Like Me" on Facebook is a form of crowdsourcing. In that case, it would be known as *fansourcing*, which is also popular among touring rock groups.

Enough about the free stuff. Now that we're clear on the concept, what we all want to know is: Can anyone make money by being a crowdsourcee? Overall, estimates are that roughly one

Payment comes in a couple of flavors: Some crowdsourcers offer prizes for the winning ideas or problem solutions. Others are looking to hire freelancers or contractors for particular projects. Still others are brokers for particular skills, including writing, editing,

and proofreading, and some pay for simple projects that computers can't do, such as identifying items in a photograph or skimming real estate listings for unquantifiable data.

Risk takers can even join the group attempting to purchase Pabst Blue Ribbon Brewing Company. People can pledge money toward the \$300M asking price and receive a percentage ownership of the company. Here, obviously one has to pay for potential future gain, but it is a novel way to raise cash.

There are many websites with whom a freelance writer, editor, or proofreader can sign up and then have an opportunity to browse available jobs. These sites typically offer fantastic deals — for the client. In the 30-odd sites I perused, I found that nearly all touted how inexpensively one could find a top-notch professional freelance writer.

In those that had fixed payment rates for writers, the rate ranged from about seven-and-a-half cents a word for bloggers to \$10 to \$20 an hour for even technical writing. On the page for writer-sign-up, one site boasted that a writer could make up to \$18/hour, which the site hosts apparently

thought was a munificent sum.

Other sites require writers to bid on jobs, thereby virtually guaranteeing that the job will go to the lowest bidder. In some cases, the price that hirers are willing to pay is listed along with the job requirements. Not surprisingly, hirers here included college students who were frantically seeking "a detailed treatise on the works of Samuel Johnson, and I need it by Wednesday." (Actually, I made that one up, but there were similar, equally hysterical requests from kids unwilling or unable to do their own work.)

Lamentably, overall, I found almost no sites that paid enough to keep a canary in birdseed, let alone make a dent in anyone's actual bills. To take a site with which most of us are familiar, by name at least: Elance is about as good as it gets.

The wonder is that we do as well as we do, given the increasing prevalence of these sites, but maybe we should take a page from the labor union playbook and make a preemptive strike. Perhaps as legitimately professional writers, we ought to be blogging, tweeting, and otherwise getting out the word that clients won't find people who provide the quality of work they want on most crowdsourcing sites.

My research did turn up one site you might want to check out: crowd-SPRING is a site that specializes in naming, logo design, tag-line creation, and fun things like that. Pay could be up to \$1000 for a name or a tag line. It's not great pay for things like that, but it's brain work, not work-work, and you can think creatively while doing dishes or walking the dog. If you win — yes, it's a competition — you've made a nice piece of change.■

— Joen Kinnan

# Can democracy afford our “free press”?

*Continued from page 3.*

be the siren call of glamo(u)r, wealth, fame, and the thrill of influencing the nation's future tempts star media personalities and journalist-authors. They get to ride on the candidates' planes—maybe even Air Force One—and the producers, cameramen, and gophers enjoy well-paid jobs and get to fly on the press planes.

Whether we think American democracy can afford—or survive—this kind of press freedom depends on how much we believe the media-political

frenzy contributes to increasing political polarization and gridlock. How much does media craving for scandal, rumor, and innuendo help to increase the already grave erosion of trust and respect for our institutions?

Let's not pretend that our elections in some golden past had the purity of Athenian democracy (which was actually not so pure), but politicians, media people, and pollsters are increasingly shifting our elections away from issues and policy debates to

polls, “likability” contests, and athletic metaphors like “horse races” and “ground games.”

The original slogan of The Daily Show was, “When news breaks, we fix it!” Fixing the media-political complex would mean getting the media-political complex to kill the goose that lays their golden eggs. I don't know how to do that, but I can tell you that my opponent is at the root of the problem. ■



## In the next issue. . .



- **December 11 Holiday Party:** Always a terrific event and a great way to end the year. Details to come.
- **President's column:** You always learn something interesting in this often surprising column.
- **Preview of January 8 Meeting:** Learn about how to get a copyright and when you need one.
- **Tips and tricks** you can use to work smarter and better.

IWOC Welcomes  
New Members  
Terri Yablonski Stat  
and Erin Wright