

# Stet

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

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## JUNE MEETING

### *How to Find Smooth Sailing in Today's Rough Economic Waters*

BY STEWART TRUELSEN

**M**ost freelance writers have accumulated a sizeable library of books on the art of writing well, but check your book shelves for help in marketing your work. You probably won't find much help there. That's why you need to attend the June 8 IWOC meeting.

Gary Glenn, a seasoned



marketing consultant, will tell us how he has prospered in this uncertain economic climate. His presentation, "How I Grew My Business in a Down Economy" will give us tips we can use. If you thought the economy is getting better, and you won't need this help much longer, you haven't been keeping up with the falling euro, Greek contagion, and other late-

breaking economic worries. Break out of the grip of fear and come to the IWOC meeting.

Glenn will share with us from his 25 years' experience in strategic market planning, media relations, and market research. In 2006, he left corporate consulting to start an apparel decoration and branding business, which he is now growing. In a few short years, StitchMine has become the premier provider of quality logo-wear and corporate apparel in the Chicago area.

Glenn enjoys sailing, so be prepared for some of his advice to sound nautical. He believes in scanning the horizon for problems and impending challenges. He wants to maintain his objectives but be ready to adjust plans, or as he puts it, "Sometimes you have to change the tack of your sails when the wind changes if you want to stay on course."

His presentation will be



especially helpful in understanding clients and reviewing our client lists. He also will talk about those days on the sea of writing

when there is no wind in our sails, ergo, no work. What should we do? Do we need to slash our prices? Glenn has an answer for that.

If you want your business to be one where quality and service excel, and the buzz about your work has everyone humming the same tune, you'll want to hear Glenn.

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 business meeting and 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 afterward, where we'll continue our networking over dinner. ☛

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

# The Delight

Sometimes, I'm just frankly delighted that I can write. And I mean that in several ways, the various interpretations of which hang on the meaning of "can"—specifically, whether one reads it to mean "am allowed to" or "have the ability to." Let's take them in order and in brief.

First, I'm glad that I live in an era when writing is a fundamental part of public and private communication. It was not always so. Part of the reason that the churches of medieval Europe came to be filled with paintings and sculpture, some of them stunning in their executions, is that the parishioners were, for the most part, illiterate. Literacy was the privilege of the clergy; therefore, the Church had to rely on other means to spread its messages to the masses—specifically, by way of illustration (artwork) and oration.

And although it is true that illustration can be more efficient than writing for getting a particular message across (the exchange rate still hovers around a thousand words per picture), communication involves far more than simply the getting across of messages. It sometimes involves developing arguments, leading the receiver down paths

of logic, opening the mind to new concepts, or touching deep-seated feelings that possess no correlative images in the visual world. Oration can accomplish those feats but is fleeting, archived only in the often-unreliable memories of its receivers. Writing, on the other hand, can be passed around and tucked away for later retrieval.



Imagery has its place as a communication tool and

asserts its everlasting ubiquity from time to time in subtle ways—for example, the development and quick adoption of emoticons for email and text messages—but the world today communicates mostly via words. So in this first case, I'm glad that I woke up in history when I did... at least from a writing standpoint.

Second, I'm happy to be living in a land and era where, for the most part, I am free to write what I like without fear of censure, imprisonment, or violent retribution. Again, it has



not always been so and, in some locales, is still not so. Come to think of it, even here in Chicagoland, where the "Star Spangled Banner" is preceded with "God Bless America" for Sunday baseball games at Wrigley Field, it is not completely so, because these days messages carrying unintended offenses can spread across the globe at the speed of light, and insecure people who use such offenses as excuses for violent behavior are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to impose their own versions of justice on the perpetrators of the perceived offenses (see Rushdie, Salman or Westergaard, Kurt).

I might get a little political from time to time in my *Stet* columns, but I haven't had to hire bodyguards or build a panic room in my condominium... yet.

Finally, I'm pleased to be making a living doing something I enjoy and am good at... pleased to traffic in the world of written communication and to have regular opportunities to exercise my craft. For one thing, my work as a freelance writer has not only paid my bills, it has allowed me to travel with purpose and opened the door to friendships I would not have otherwise made. For another, it has permitted me to express ideas, concepts, and feelings adeptly, whether on behalf of myself or someone who is paying

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# Writely Speaking: Panel of Pros Share Tips on the Craft and Business of Freelance Writing

BY NOREEN KELLY

The IWOC May meeting was an excellent opportunity to hear from a panel of seasoned writing pros on the art, craft, business, and challenges of professional freelance writing. The audience benefited by hearing many tips on setting your price, getting paid, cold calling, and more. The illustrious panel of experts included:

**Jeff Steele** (moderator)—A journalist and a generalist, Jeff has been freelancing for over 20 years, logging more than 2,000 articles to his writing credit. Jeff has experience in writing for major newspapers across the country, as well as trade publications, company newsletters, advertising copy, employee bios, and corporate histories.

**Michelle Beuscher**—A freelancer for 10 years and in the field of marketing communications for 20 years, Michelle specializes in message planning, writing and editing for business, consumer, and internal client audiences. She has significant freelance writing experience in the fields of management and information technology consulting, though she also enjoys opportunities to work in a variety of different fields.

**Diana Schneidman**—A freelance writer since 1991, Diana is owner of “Stand Up 8 Times” coaching, helping people who want to start making money quickly as a freelancer or consultant. She recently published her first ebook: <http://www.StartFreelancingAndConsulting.com>: How to take control of your life and make great money quickly as a solopro.

**Stewart Truelsen**—A freelance video writer/producer and voice-over talent with a background in news and association public relations, Stewart is also an experienced writer of op-eds and commentaries and author of a recently published book, *Forward Farm Bureau*. Stewart shared with the audience that he had the opportunity to work with Paul Harvey!

Jeff posed questions to the panel around three areas (and offered his own input as well): “Setting prices and getting paid,” “cold calling,” and “What’s one mistake you made in your writing career and what advice can you give on doing things differently?”

## Setting Prices/Getting Paid

**Stew:** Set your price on a per-word basis. Review the Writers’ Market. Determine your worth, based on your knowledge and abilities. Don’t ask for too high a rate.

**Michelle:** Charge less than an agency’s rate. Google “average freelancer rates.” Consider a two-tier rate structure: one for writing and editing and another for administrative work/status reports, etc. If the scope of the project changes, include in your terms that you will have to revisit the fee.

**Diana:** Legend has it that some freelancers have won assignments paying respectable rates on Elance, Guru, Craigslist, and other online posting sites. While it may be possible, the danger is that in spending hours scrolling through their listings, we may become so discouraged that we compete for projects paying less than even the minimum wage.

**Jeff:** If you can, never give a price to a client. You run the risk of low-balling, which could result in your being perceived as unprofessional. Instead, ask the potential client, “What’s in your budget?”

**Jim Kepler** (audience): Arrange a monthly retainer with clients.

## Handling Slow Payers

**Diana:** Get part of your money upfront, e.g., half of the total amount. And submit a bill two weeks after the final draft. (With marketing communications, you don’t know when the project is over).

**Michelle:** Place your efforts with clients who *will* pay. (She’s never had to initiate legal proceedings with a client.)

**Stew:** Consider the quality of your work. Look at your rate structure and review why you’re charging your rate. You don’t want clients second-guessing your work, based on what you’re charging.

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## May Recap: Panel of Pros Share Tips (Continued from page 3.)

### Letters of Agreement (LOA)

**Michelle:** Develop a letter of agreement that is fair to both parties (though she does not do a letter of agreement for small



projects). (Others commented they never do a project without an LOA.)

**Diana:** I tell the client I'm not responsible for the final publication.

**Catherine Rategan** (audience): I state in the LOA that I will provide first drafts up to two revisions (not to exceed 30% of the original work). I also send the client a reminder re: payment after 30 days and charge 2% interest after 60 days.

### What Would You Do Differently?

**Jeff:** Deliver whatever the client wants.

**Stew:** Don't get too comfortable with the current market. Always be on the lookout for something new/the next hot thing. For example, in my industry, YouTube has dramatically changed video production services.

**Diana:** Make cold calls (recommends 50 cold calls/day).

Jeff applauded and seconded Diana's recommendation to cold call and emphasized that e-mailing is not the same as picking up the phone and talking to a potential client. In touting cold calling as a way to gain new clients, Jeff relayed the following accounts of how he landed steady writing gigs at the *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*:

"The first was in 1998, when I determined I would call one out-of-state editor each week to see if they ever hired freelancers out of their areas. I made one cold call every week, and even if I just got voicemail, that still satisfied my pact with myself. It got to be August, and I finally tried the *LA Times* special sections editor Sally Sterling. She wasn't in, but I had

made my cold call for that week. The next week I tried again, and this time, she answered. So I said (GULP!), 'Hi my name is Jeff Steele, I'm a Chicago-based writer who's written for the *Chicago Tribune* for years, and do you ever use freelance writers out of your area?' There was a brief pause, and the next words I heard were:

'When can ya get this done?'

I responded 'you tell me,' wound up filing the story in one day less than the ridiculously short period she gave me, and went on to contribute articles to the *LA Times* for more than a decade—and counting."

The other story was of trying to reach a *Chicago Tribune* editor I'd never written for. I got her name out of a Tribune-owned publication I saw while waiting for a Metra train. I called her and could tell she was saying to herself, with elaborate annoyance, "Oh God, here comes another one . . ." She had nothing in the way of assignments to offer, so I asked when I should call again. "Maybe three months," she said.

I called in three months, and she told me she had nothing to offer, but to try back in six weeks. I tried back in five weeks and she said, "You are in luck. I just happen to have a story I need to assign." I produced her assigned story, quickly got handed some more assignments, and am today one of her handful of favored writers.

The lesson: *Cold calling may be the single best way to be in the right place at the right time to snatch an opportunity!*

### Tips/Resources

**Michelle:** Media Bistro is a great resource on how-to's for the freelance writer. For the newbie: Write for community papers on a volunteer basis to get clips. Also, pitch to magazines that tie in with your background. And don't forget IWOC's Rate Survey as a good resource on setting your price.

**Jim Kepler:** Consult IWOC's "Working with Writers" section in the IWOC Directory and online (and send it along with your letter of agreement).

**Roger Rueff** (audience): If you hire freelance writers, pay your freelancers right away.

At the conclusion of the Q&A portion of the meeting, Karen Schwartz commented, "This was one of the best/most helpful meetings we've had!"

Roger Rueff, IWOC President, offered this final remark about the freelancer's life: "You've given up the illusion of security for the illusion of freedom." How true.

Let's continue the conversation on IWOC's LinkedIn page ... What's *your* biggest question about writing? 🐾

President's Column Continued from Page 2.

me to do so. And with adeptness in any endeavor comes the satisfaction of accomplishment—the knowing that one has done a job well.

The best chefs find satisfaction in preparing and plating their dishes, the best gardeners in the explosions of color that burst from their plantings in summer, the best waiters in their facility to serve their diners efficiently and make them feel comfortable and at ease. Dry cleaners, plumbers, musicians, electricians, architects, nurses, farmers... the satisfaction that comes from a well-executed performance is not the exclusive domain of those whose work is broadcast live on television. It lies at the heart of every endeavor... at the wonderful confluence of talent and appreciation.

For us, as writers, it hides in the folds of a well-written sentence, the nicely composed paragraph, the understandable instruction, the moving passage. And no, that satisfaction won't pay the rent on its own. But our pursuit of it is part of what renders our skills marketable, sets us apart from mere typists, and gifts us with something money cannot buy...

The delight. 🍷

## You're Talking About What?

If you haven't met already, let me introduce you to the **I**nterrobang, the nifty piece of punctuation that ends the head above. Part exclamation point, part question mark, it solves the thorny problem of how to end a forceful rhetorical question. (You've worried about that a lot, I'm sure.) When adman—what else?—Martin Speckter introduced the interrobang in 1962, he toyed with calling it the "rhet," "exclamative," or "exclamaquest" but settled on "interrobang," an unholy wedding of "interrogation point" and "bang," the slang expression for an exclamation point. Some pig-headed diehards still insist that it's a "quesclamation mark," though. Who am I to quibble? I'm mad for it and plan to use it whenever possible. Who wouldn't? And to think it's been lying low in my Palatino linotype font all this time, and I didn't know.

Even more exciting: one can use it in Spanish where an upside down question mark/exclamation point would begin a sentence. The upside-down version is called a "gnaborretni," which your steel-trap mind has instantly recognized as interrobang spelled backwards. What a wondrous thing is a brain whose synapses can fire off a thing like that? My Spanish is a bit rusty, but I'm feverishly applying to *La Raza* in hopes of landing some interrobanging and gnaborretni-ing work before the sun sets. And I'm also thinking of writing my congressman to suggest that, in honor of our large Hispanic population, we amend American English to mandate that we also use the upside-down marks to begin questions, exclamations, and gnaborretnies. Who knows? With a gnaborretni or two thrown in, maybe our clients would actually read our e-mails. One can hope, can't one? 🍷

— The Editor

## Calendar

### JUNE 8

**IWOC Monthly Meeting.** Join IWOCers and guests to hear marketing pro Gary Glenn discuss "How I Grew my Business in a Down Economy." He'll have tips that will help writers weather these stormy times too. 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](http://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](mailto:webmaster@iwoc.org).*

### JUNE 22 (4th Tuesday)

**IWOOP Monthly Lunch.** Join near-west suburbanites for a noon lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. Check before you come. This lunch is monthly only if there are enough people who can attend. Note: The lunch is now on the 4th Tuesday, not the 4th Thursday as it had been in the past.

### JULY 1 (1st Thursday)

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

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