
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 910 writers, each of them creating a
Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

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- 1) Welcome to the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine!

If you're sharp-eyed, you may have noticed that this e-zine has grown remarkably in the last month. We're adding about 100 new subscribers per week, and that's mostly thanks to you! Many of you have been telling your friends, and they've been telling their friends. I've added a way for new subscribers to tell me who referred them, and I've decided to use that information to reward those of you who make referrals.

First, though, I ought to tackle the question of "does size matter?" Well, yes, it does for e-zines. The bigger this e-zine grows, the bigger the names of the folks I'll be able to arm-twist into doing interviews. If I had a million subscribers, I should be able to interview just about anybody on the planet, right? Well, maybe. That'll benefit you, and it'll certainly put me on the path to Total World Domination, which is my ultimate goal.

So I'm going to hold a drawing. For every new subscriber, I'll put the name of their referrer into a hat. When this list reaches 2000 subscribers, I'll

pull out a name, and the winner gets a brand spanking new iPod Shuffle from Apple--the 512 MB model that holds 120 songs in less than an ounce.

So tell a friend! The more you tell, the more chances you have of nabbing that iPod.

2) "Mommy, Where Do Baby Ideas Come From?"

I used to think I wasn't very creative. I used to even say it out loud. I have since learned that saying things like that qualifies as a Crime Against Humanity. There's probably a Geneva Convention against it.

The reason is that this is the quintessential self-fulfilling prophecy. Do you want to be uncreative, dull, and boring? Then tell everyone you're uncreative, dull, and boring. (Or tell everyone you're creative, entertaining, and fascinating. You get the same great reaction either way.)

Frankly, if you have a pulse, you've got some level of creativity. And if you're a novelist (or imagine you're a novelist) then you probably have a lot of creativity.

Bottom line: Stop worrying about whether you ARE creative. Start focusing on how to beef up what you've got.

I recently gave a talk on "Exercising Your Creativity" at a writer's conference. I based the talk on one of my favorite books on the subject, A Whack On The Side Of The Head, by Roger von Oech. Here are three of the things I learned about being creative from this book:

A) Sometimes there is more than one right answer.

I tried to convince my calculus teacher of this once, and didn't get very far. But real life doesn't have much to do with calculus. In real life, there may very well be six or two hundred or a zillion right answers.

Example: What is the "right" way to write this article?

There are plenty of right ways, and my way isn't necessarily the rightest. It's just my way. So when you come up with a clever idea to solve a problem, don't stop! Ask yourself if you can come up with ten clever ways. Or ten stupid ways. But oops! I'm infringing on the second principle I learned . . .

B) Sometimes being "stupid" is smart.

People are so afraid of doing something stupid, they'll go along with the crowd. Even if that means getting

caught up in Groupthink and doing something . . .
stupid.

Guess what? The crowd isn't always right, and sometimes what seems smart to everyone isn't smart at all. There are any number of garage inventors who've built things that the experts said couldn't be done. Am I right or am I right?

Kings used to have "court fools" whose job was to mock the group, including the king. The purpose was to always have at least one voice that wasn't going with the crowd. Do you have a devil's advocate who will argue with you about your ideas? Maybe you should! Even if they're not very bright. There's nothing like trying to explain physics to a barmaid to force you to use clear thinking. And sometimes, the barmaid is right.

C) What rule can you break?

Rules are good--usually. But sometimes you can do something cool by breaking the rules. Ogden Nash used to do this with his poems by violating the rules of spelling to get something to rhyme. As an example, look at the last two lines of his poem "The Panther":

Better yet, if called by a panther . . .
Don't anther!

It's a little silly, but that's the point. As another example, look at this limerick that violates the "rules of limericks":

There was a young poet named Dan
Whose poetry never would scan.
He said, "I try hard,
But I guess I'm no bard,
Because I always have to cram as many words into the
last line as I possibly can."

Whoever wrote this limerick succeeded by breaking the rules in a beautiful self-referential way.

There's more, but I'd hate to steal all the thunder from Roger von Oechs. I'll close by giving you a link to his book on Amazon. It's a classic, and every time I read the thing, I somehow have a ton of creative ideas in the weeks that follow:
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0446674559/rsingeshomepage>

3) An Interview With Brandilyn Collins

I recently did an interview with Brandilyn Collins.

Brandilyn is the bestselling author of a number of women's fiction novels and suspense novels, including her Hidden Faces series, featuring a forensic artist. Her latest novel is Dead of Night. She is the author of the widely-read book on character development, Getting Into Character (John Wiley and Sons). Her website is at:
<http://www.brandilyncollins.com>.

I met Brandilyn years ago in the bookstore at a writer's conference, where she was telling everyone how great my latest novel was. That's right, she was hand-selling MY book. Kind of easy to be friends with someone like that!

RI: Hi Brandilyn! Thanks for agreeing to this interview today. I know you just finished revisions on your latest book, so you must be exhausted.

BC: [Moans loudly.]

RI: Let's get started. What are the biggest mistakes beginning writers make in constructing characters, and what can they do to fix them?

BC: I'd say three main things:

A. Throwing on the outside stuff without knowing what makes them tick on the inside. Authors tend to choose hair and eye color, toss on a few personality traits (he's arrogant, she's shy, etc.), and off they go. For a well-rounded character, authors should work from the inside out. Discover the deepest driving forces of that character, then see what personality traits those forces--combined with the character's unique life experience--naturally lead to. Then you'll have a three-dimensional, rather than a shallow, character.

B. Lack of character motivation. Characters enter a scene with no obvious "action objective," or goal, in mind--nothing concrete to pursue. So the scene wanders, is weak. Very dangerous. Weak = boring. Boring = put the book down. For good.

C. Shallow emotions. Human passions are multi-layered, intertwined. Under varying circumstances, any given passion will encompass other emotions. Grief, for example, is not all tears and tissue-clutching. Sometimes grief presents itself through despondency, hopelessness, blame, guilt, a sense of being overwhelmed, shock, loneliness, even anger. Novelists need to become "armchair psychologists," watching and studying the interplay of human emotion.

RI: I love the chapter on "Personalizing" in your book, where you get into that in more detail. It really

highlights the importance of getting to the core of a character. But suppose I hate the villain of my novel? How can I write a scene in his point of view, when I really can't identify with him at all?

BC: You've correctly identified the precursor to hate--a lack of understanding. When understanding grows, hatred diminishes.

As Stanislavsky taught in his Method acting, every person has experienced every human emotion--to some degree. Therefore there is no character with whom we cannot connect, if we take the time to work at it. All the feelings that we have experienced are captured in our minds as "emotion memory." Novelists need to learn how to open their own emotion memory files, extract the passion needed, then ramp it up as is appropriate for the story. For example, I often write in the POV of big, bad killers. I've never murdered anyone, but I've been so angry and annoyed by a fly in my home that I've dropped everything to stalk him--to the death. That self-centered, murderous intent is all I need to build understanding of a character who is angry and annoyed enough to kill another human being. I have never been haunted by the desperate guilt of having caused a tragic accident. But I have felt deep remorse over hurting another person unintentionally. And so it goes, with each human passion.

RI: I remember reading the example of the fly in your book and thinking you must have used exactly that example when you got inside the brain of the murderer in your novel, *Eyes of Elisha*. Let's talk about creativity a bit. What are the key elements of creating characters that a novelist must master in order to get published?

BC: One element only--but it's a huge, multi-faceted one. Characters need to represent human nature. And human nature runs like a sometimes unpredictable river. It has its surface, yes, but underneath are cross-currents, areas of colder or warmer water. Places of faster flow, sometimes over rocks, sometimes slow and placid. Readers identify with characters who are fully formed, whose emotions and motivations are complex and sometimes even contrary to each other. Such is the human condition.

Problem is, it's downright hard work to create such characters, and then portray their feelings through effective description and action. It's way easier to throw in a few "she felt sad" lines and go on with the plot. But let's not forget the fundamental rule of fiction: characters come first. The most creative plot in the world won't pull readers through a book if they don't care about the characters.

RI: Do you have any tips on writing back cover copy

that would get readers interested in the characters?

BC: In back cover copy, every word counts. There's not much room for actual characterization. This copy is more about plot. It must present (A) a compelling central conflict and (B) a character with a lot to lose if he/she doesn't prevail. Remember that the purpose of cover copy is to sell the book. Once the book is bought, and the reader opens the pages, then we must capture his attention so he'll keep reading. That's when the real characterization begins.

That said, in my "Bradleyville" contemporary series, I did pull a quote from each main character and place it in italics as a lead-in for the back cover copy. These books were written in first person, so the quote gave the timbre of the protagonist's voice, and in that way presented a bit of characterization.

RI: What do you think is the relationship between character and plot?

BC: Character drives plot, even in so-called "plot-driven" fiction. I write suspense novels that are known for tight plotting and storyline twists. Which means I gotta spend a lot of time on plot! But if my characters' motivations don't make sense to drive them through that plot, the book will fall apart. Character motivation is paramount--especially when a certain event must happen to move the plot forward. Don't rely on the creative event itself to make the story work! If my character must make a decision that leads to a certain crucial occurrence, I will start building in motivation for that decision from the beginning of the book. The result I'm aiming for is a plot that unfolds with clarity and logic--even as it surprises the reader.

Sheesh. That sounds hard to do. No wonder I kick a lot of cabinets.

RI: I prefer to kick the cat. Thanks for your time, Brandilyn. Now go get some rest and please stay away from my--no, NO, NOOOOO!

BC: [Moans loudly and removes foot from my brand new kitchen cabinet.]

Randy sez: OK, that last part didn't happen. Special thanks to Brandilyn for getting this interview wedged in despite her killer deadline. I'll say it again: Brandilyn's book, *Getting Into Character*, is one of my favorite books on writing, and it's definitely my favorite on character development.

If you're interested in reading the reviews on *Getting Into Character*, check out the Amazon page at:

4) Tiger Marketing

Did you read the book I recommended last month, *Unleashing The Ideavirus*? Seth Godin wrote this book a few years ago and made it available for free on the web. The book's copyright notice allows anyone to distribute it for free. Subscribers to my e-zine can now download it for free on my web site at:
<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/pdf/ry704avK2/Ideavirus.pdf>

The key idea I took away from reading Seth's book was that you must figure out what you give away for free and what you sell.

You may decide to give away everything and sell nothing (in which case you make no money, but you may well become famous and you'll definitely earn the undying love of your fans). This is a nice model, and it often has unexpected rewards, but it may not be your barrel of tea.

You may decide to give away nothing and sell everything (in which case you are a Dreadfully Conventional Thinker, and I'm wondering how you sneaked in here. You're no Tiger! Scat! Scat!)

Your first goal in Tiger Marketing is to figure out what to give away and what to sell.

The stuff you sell is called your "product." (This is one of the three claws of the Tiger, for those of you who've read your Special Report on Tiger Marketing.)

The stuff you give away is what you put on your web site and in your email newsletter. (These are the other two claws of the Tiger.)

Here is where many writers get obscenely stingy. I've seen way too many web sites that are "all about me." Let me be blunt. Nobody cares about you. They really don't, and I don't blame them. Nobody cares about your book, either. The sooner you get over this, the better.

The secret to Tiger Marketing is to give away as much valuable stuff as you can bear. Then give a little more. Give away your gold! Yes, gold! Don't give out pennies. And don't give out eighteen-dollar bills. Give out your gold.

I'm not saying to give away ALL your gold, but whatever you give away should be some of your best stuff.

I learned this by accident. Some of my best gold is my

famous Snowflake method. I posted that on my web site about two years ago. For free. Why? Because I thought it would be useful to people. (And also I was sure it would help me achieve Total World Domination. So I was off a little. Nobody's perfect.)

Well over fifty thousand people have downloaded my Snowflake page. That baby has made me famous all around the world. Many, many writers are using it to organize their thoughts into novels. I'm pickled tink.

Lots of friends have told me I should have sold the Snowflake. Yeah, right. Now you tell me! But the thing is, the Snowflake never would have got big if I'd sold it. I gave it away, and it moved. I've recently been hatching some plans to take advantage of that. This is what Seth Godin calls "extracting revenue from your ideavirus."

I prefer to think of it as "do something nice for people and amazingly wonderful things will happen to you without you doing anything." But of course I could be wrong and I might get kicked in the fangs. Such is the life of a Tiger.

OK, enough about me. Let's talk about you. What have you got? I hope you're a novelist. If you're not, you are seriously misaligned with the planets, buddy, because this is a fiction writing e-zine doodad.

So you've got a novel, or you're working on one. And you probably already know that nobody gives a rip about you or your book. But hey, there's hope.

Because your book is about SOMETHING. I have no idea what. Quilting, maybe. Or Parkinson's Disease. Or UFOs. Or man-badger love. Whatever.

No matter what your book is about, there are people massively interested in that topic. They just aren't interested in you, mainly because they have no idea that you care about the same marvelous topic they care about.

For any book, there is some "natural market" of folks who would be dying to read it, IF ONLY they knew it existed.

Tiger Marketing is about finding those people and nudging them to the conclusion that you are one of the planet's supremely interesting people, because . . . you and they are interested in exactly the same thing!

You will do this by giving away free gold that is valuable, entertaining, and interesting. Eventually, some fraction of these dear folks will decide that they want your whole pot of gold, and, ooh la la, you just made a sale! Or not. There are no guarantees. But it's a whole lot easier to sell your badger romance novel to fans of your web site BadgerLove.com than to

the average Joe on the street, am I right? (You sick mind, you!)

That's the theory, anyway. Getting it done is not so easy. We'll return next month to talk about some ways to make it happen. This is a big, BIG subject, and I'd hate to dump the whole load of hay on you right now.

See ya next month with more, Tiger! In the meantime, think hard about what you can give away and what you prefer to sell. It's your choice. It's your gold. Make of it what you will.

5) Who Needs A List Provider???

This article is contributed by Staci Stallings, a novelist who knows an incredible amount about running an e-zine to support her fiction marketing. Her web site has a trove of info on web-based marketing. Visit Staci's web site at:
<http://www.StaciStallings.com>

Who Needs A List Provider?
by Staci Stallings

Many authors today turn to online newsletters to keep their audience apprised of what's going on with their books. Newsletters and ezines mailed directly to subscribers can be a great way to stay in front of an audience. They can also be a nightmare that soaks up precious resources like time and energy, not to mention patience and excitement. If not handled well, they can be a major drain instead of a major benefit. And if you're really unlucky the law can come after you!

Since I started my newsletter in August of 2001, the newsletter game has gotten a lot more difficult. The CAN-SPAM laws made it easier for email receivers to fight back against unwanted emails, but it made the work of legitimate online emailers that much harder. Plus, everyone seems to have a newsletter today, so it can be difficult to get your newsletter subscribed to, read, and even opened.

However, from my experience, newsletters can be the lynchpin in truly making the web work for you. Without a newsletter, a website is a hit-or-miss venture in which you have one shot at selling to a customer who happens to surf through one time. That's rough even for master marketers who will tell you that it takes 7 impressions of even a great ad to get a customer to buy your product.

With a quality newsletter, you buy yourself those 7 chances and more than that at a very reasonable price

if you know a few tricks. Authors are busy people. They have one career. They don't have the time nor the energy--nor maybe even the desire to learn something that has technical and legal pitfalls like newsletters. However, in all honesty, it's not that hard. It's more than worth it, and if you have a website and no newsletter, you're really letting opportunity pass you by.

Why You MUST Have a List Provider

When you start, you are going to be tempted to maintain your list manually. There will seem to be no reason to find a list provider. Even the cheap ones don't always seem cheap, there is a learning curve to every one of them, and it just seems easier to do it by hand . . .

DON'T!

I'm not saying, "It's better if you don't." or "It's easier if you don't." I'm saying:

DON'T! PLEASE DON'T!

There are now legal issues that make it nearly imperative to get a list provider. Beyond the legal reasons, there are some very good practical reasons to find a list provider as well.

Trying to maintain a list manually (by taking subscriptions through email for instance) is a great way to make yourself crazy and land yourself in legal trouble. Admittedly, at first doing it by hand doesn't seem like that big of a deal. If you're only getting 10 subscribers a month, it's not hard. But if you are serious about growing your list (as you should be otherwise what's the point?), then there will come a point when doing it manually will simply not be possible. Plus, you need to be spending your time growing the list, not maintaining it.

For example, at the end of my "doing it manually" phase, I had 300 people subscribe in ONE DAY when a promotion I had done hit a big vein of interested people. The next day, I got another 150 subscribers. I was going crazy trying to get them all put in by hand. Then, when I sent out my first mailing afterward, like 40 hard bounced. So I had to go through, find those, and remove them. It was a mess!

So save yourself the heartache and set up your list on a list provider now. With all the subscribers you will be getting when you employ the marketing techniques I'll be outlining in the coming weeks, you will need it.

List Providers

A list provider is a company that will maintain your

list (add and delete subscribers), give you a way to send out your mailings, and takes care of the legal aspects of sending a list. In the realm of list providers, your options are all-but boundless. As you begin to choose someone to host your list, here are some considerations to take into account:

Things you most need in a list provider:

- 1) They do 24/7 maintenance for inputting and removing (most do this—unless it is just a program that lets you send out the newsletter through your ISP, which is NOT a list provider)
- 2) Gives a Double opt-in option
- 3) HTML capable, Text capable, and the ability to send both at the same time and it decides what will go to the person at the inbox stage
- 4) Import list option for your existing list (you don't want to have to get all of your current subscribers to have to opt-in again)
- 5) Multiple lists option—the ability to run multiple lists from a single account
- 6) Tracking for # sent, # bounces, # blocked, # delivered
- 7) Tracking for HTML and text clicks
- 8) Form input for your site
- 9) Email address to subscribe directly
- 10) Campaign records and tracking
- 11) The ability to schedule campaigns in advance
- 12) Spf and all other records in place and correct
- 13) Maintenance of a Do Not Contact List into infinity or pretty close

In researching many list providers, I have found that the costs for a provider can go from free for the first 400 or so, to free (with advertising) into the \$100 per mailing range. None are perfect, but there is probably one that will fit your circumstances. It's a matter of what is most important to you.

List Provider Options

There is a group that formed in response to the CAN-SPAM laws called the Email Service Providers Coalition <http://www.espcalition.org/> Members of this organization are on the cutting edge of technology and the law. The coalition maintains that their members are in full compliance with all laws related to CAN-SPAM. I

do not have any reason to doubt this. However, after researching many of their members, expense becomes a real issue.

"Cheap ones" through the ESPC run about 5 cents per email, per time you send. With a list of 1,000, that's \$50 per time you send anything out. It is not inconceivable (trust me on this) that you send out a message only to realize there was a MAJOR error that must be corrected immediately. So you send out a second message. That's \$100 without blinking.

Prior to learning about this organization, I had signed with a list provider that is not a member. However, in my opinion, this provider meets the criteria to keep a list compliant, while providing the elements to really grow and build a list at a very reasonable rate of \$15.50 per month with unlimited lists.

In fact, if you are just starting out, this provider is free up to 499 emails in a month with no advertising requirement attached. There is a limited version of 500-1,999 emails for \$7.75. And at \$15.50, you can send up to 15,499 emails in a month. There are also packages that go from 15,500 emails all the way up to 2,000,000 (wouldn't that be nice to need!).

All of the features are available even in the free version—including HTML/Text mailings, tracking, full maintenance, Do Not Contact list maintenance, prior scheduling, etc. This is not to say this service is perfect, but for someone just starting out or someone looking to utilize a list provider, it should definitely be on the option list.

This service is called Ezine Director. You can see their entire website at:

http://ezinedirector.com?affiliate_id=251566

If you are interested in this service but unsure that you can swing getting it set up and running on your own, I am offering to help you get going and learn the program. So if you decide to go with Ezine Director but aren't sure you have the technical knowledge to get your list set up correctly, please visit:

<http://www.stacistallings.com/EzD.htm>

I have three packages of help based on where your list is right now—you have no list at all and are starting from scratch; you have a list that you know the subscribers have been fully opted-in but you want a list provider; or you have a list you're not sure is opted in and you want to get it legal and working with the system.

Each package takes you step-by-step through what you will need to do to use EzD as your list provider.

Another service that is worth looking into is Bravenet (www.bravenet.com) which allows you to send to a limited list for free if you let their ads be on the page as well. However, please note that their service does NOT have the capability to grow unlimited and you must make your current subscribers opt back in which could be a problem and make you lose some subscribers (just so you know).

Whether you go with one of these or someone else, the main point is do not try to run your newsletter manually. You will live to regret it.

~*~*~*~ Staci Stallings, the author, invites you to her Members Only Section--access the newsletter, a free novel and Virtual Booksignings. Send a blank email to: subscribe-956608488@ezinedirector.net

Randy sez: Wow, great article! I have looked at Staci's list provider, E-zine Director, and it is excellent. The one I use is KickStartCart, which I've mentioned before on this e-zine:
<http://www.kickstartcart.com/app/default.asp?PR=31&ID=61527>

Check them both out and figure out which one is right for you.

6) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

Last month, I asked you to drop by my infant web site at AdvancedFictionWriting.com and give me your comments. Boy, did you ever! I heard from a ton of you, and it's clear that I was dead right when I said I am design-challenged. Thanks to all of you for your suggestions!

I would especially like to thank Triche Osborne for tipping me off to the merits of XHTML/CSS. I didn't even know what that was until she told me. Triche is a professional web designer and she very generously made some helpful suggestions, and then whipped up a sample design for my site, which you can view at:

<http://www.triche-osborne.com/testing/andy/andy.html>

A little better than my design, no?

I have spent a fair bit of March studying up on CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) and I am sold on the idea. It will take me a bit of time to redo my site using this, but it's clearly a very cool way to build a web site, and it's the wave of the future. Between studying CSS and going to a major writer's conference, I haven't done a lot to upgrade my web site, but I'll be moving ahead on that in April.

Now, here's a free ad for Triche. She didn't ask me to do this, and she'll probably faint, but here's a link to her web site. If you need a talented (and very gracious) web designer, Triche just might be your ticket. Check her out:

<http://www.triche-osborne.com>

7) Coming Soon . . .

It's all fine to TELL you about Tiger Marketing, but in the next month or two, I'd like to SHOW you some Tiger Marketing. I can't say more now, but I have three projects brewing that could explode at any minute. I'll be using these as live experiments in Tiger Marketing, and I'll invite you to observe. I have no idea how they'll turn out, but a key characteristic of the Tiger Marketer is the willingness to try wild and crazy things. Bring your goggles and your asbestos suit and come watch the fireworks!

In next month's issue of this e-zine, I'll have another article on the craft of writing fiction (there are so many fun topics, I haven't picked one out yet). I'll also tell you more about Tiger Marketing. And I'll interview Sue Brower, Marketing Director at Zondervan Publishers, one of the major divisions of HarperCollins.

See ya then!

8) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth ten times what you paid for it. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2005.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to email this E-zine to any writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you email the whole thing, not bits and pieces. That way, they'll know where to go to get their own free subscription, if they want one.

At the moment, there are two such places to subscribe:
My personal web site: <http://www.Ingermanson.com>
My new web site: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

That's all for this issue! See ya next month!

Randy

