

Publisher: Randy Ingermanson ("the Snowflake guy")
Motto: "A Vision for Excellence"
Date: August 2, 2011
Issue: Volume 7, Number 8
Home Pages: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>
<http://www.Ingermanson.com>
Circulation: 26980 writers, each of them creating a
Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

"Fiction Writing = Organizing + Creating + Marketing"

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

Those of you who have joined in the past month (more than 600 of you signed up in July), welcome to my e-zine!

You should be on this list only if you signed up for it on my web site. If you no longer wish to hear from me, don't be shy -- there's a link at the bottom of this e-mail that will put you out of your misery.

If you need to change your e-mail address, there's a different link at the bottom to help you do that.

If you missed a back issue, remember that all previous issues are archived on my web site at:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>

What's in this issue:

The successful novelist needs good organization, good craft, and good marketing. In this issue, we'll talk about each of these in turn.

* Time should be your friend, not your enemy. If you're having trouble managing your time, then something is wrong. Half a year ago, I switched my time-management tool to Fractal Planner. Find out why I'm doing better than ever in my organizational column, "Why I Switched to Fractal Planner."

* All novelists want the magic key to make their writing instantly better. I don't know any such magic key, but the next best thing to magic is the mighty "Motivation-Reaction Unit" invented many years ago by Dwight Swain. Nothing can improve your writing faster than learning to write those pesky "MRU"s correctly. Learn how it's done in my craft column, "Unlocking the Mighty MRU."

* Last month, I began a series of marketing columns on the secrets of John Locke, the high-riding, iconoclastic self-published novelist who sold more than a million e-books in only five months. This month, I analyze what Locke's doing different from everybody else ... and what he's doing the same. Read all about it in my marketing column, "More Secrets of John Locke's Success."

Are you reading my blog? Check out the massively popular "Ask A Question For My Blog" feature on my web site. In each blog post, I answer one question in detail from my loyal blog readers. Are you missing out? Join the fun here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

2) Organizing: Why I Switched to Fractal Planner

It's a law of physics that you get exactly as much time in your day as everyone else does.

It's not a law of physics, yet it seems to be true, that no matter how much you get done, at the end of the day, you're going to leave some things undone.

The difference between being fulfilled in life and being unfulfilled largely boils down to the decisions you make about what things to do and what things to leave undone.

Choosing what to leave undone is what most people mean by the term "time management."

For several years, I've been using the free Simpleology tools to manage my day, and they worked well for me.

Back in early February of this year, I switched to a tool called "Fractal Planner," the brainchild of Dr. Jim Stone. I've been using the tool now for six months and I've persuaded Jim to make some enhancements that made it more effective for me.

My verdict is in. I like Fractal Planner better than any time-management tool I've used so far. Fractal Planner is a subscription web site that you can log into from anywhere. You use it to manage your To Do List.

For most people, their To Do List quickly grows to a monstrous and unmanageable size. At which point it becomes useless for figuring out what to do today.

In Fractal Planner, you can break things down into smaller and smaller tasks and keep everything organized.

Each task can be either a simple action item or a list of other tasks. It takes no work to convert any task from an action item to a list. You just start adding subtasks and it's instantly a list.

Effectively, you have many lists. They spring up, grow for awhile, shrink as you get things done, and eventually go away. All very naturally.

Using Fractal Planner is a lot like using my Snowflake method of writing a novel. You start simple and keep adding details until you fully understand what you need to do. Then you do it in any order you feel like.

You can hide or show any of your lists at any time. The brilliant feature that I love most is that you can quickly scan through all your lists, click on the action items that you want to do today, and then display them all in one small list just for today.

This gives you the best of both worlds. Your "Master Plan" list contains all the lists and sublists that you plan to do in the indefinite future, in all their gory detail. Your "To Do List" contains the urgent or important things you're going to focus on today.

If there's one thing successful people do, it's focus.

I've asked Jim Stone for an interview, and he's made time in his busy life to answer my questions.

Here's a quick blurb about Jim:

Jim Stone never did decide what he wanted to be when he grew up. As a result he simply followed his interests and now has professional expertise in Philosophy, Software Development and Entrepreneurship. He also has a decent background in Mathematics, and is a very strong amateur in the field of Positive Psychology.

Jim knows what makes creative people tick, partly because he is one. And he knows the problems they face -- both practical and psychological. His passion is to help creative individuals overcome their challenges so they can be more productive and add more creative expression to the world.

Jim has developed several software tools over the last 6 years that have helped entrepreneurs and other creative individuals be more productive. Most recently he has been helping people from all walks of life finish more of their projects, with less stress, through the practice of "fractal planning" and with his Fractal Planner planning tool.

Randy sez: Jim sounds a lot like me, doesn't he? His Ph.D. is in philosophy and mine is in physics. Both of us love building tools to manage creativity. On to the interview:

RI: Why did you develop Fractal Planner? What problem are you trying to solve?

JS: In early 2010 I was completely overwhelmed. I had several projects halfway done, an email inbox that would fill up with complex requests every day, several existing products and services that needed attention, and about 50 or 60 things I thought I should be working on that I hadn't found the time for yet.

In spite of this overload (or maybe because of it) I also found myself procrastinating -- just trying to distract myself and let all the thoughts marinate. I guess I thought that, if I just had time to think, it would all sort itself out or something.

My mind was overwhelmed partly because I wasn't using an effective procedure for clearing it, and partly because I didn't have a good enough tool to help me keep track of everything.

I had tried several productivity tools and systems over the years, and most of them helped to some degree. But ultimately it seemed they either didn't have enough structure, and I couldn't manage everything I needed to, or they had too much structure, and I couldn't get myself to actually work the system consistently.

At some point in here I re-read Brian Arthur's book, The Nature of Technology, and I started to realize that there was a mismatch between the fundamental nature of

the things we create, and the tools we use to plan them out.

The things we create (software programs, birthday parties, businesses, books, stories, the process we use to get published, etc.) all have a fractal structure. They are made of parts that are made of parts that are made of parts, and so on. But most people are not using planning tools with a fractal structure. Writers who are using your Snowflake software are an exception. They actually have a tool that allows them to plan in a way that makes sense.

But people need a way to plan the rest of their lives that's as effective as the way Snowflake users plan their stories. We are most clear and productive when our plans can naturally grow to have the same structure that our finished product will have.

I started to see that the ideal planning tool would allow you to plan as many levels deep as you need to -- and allow you to let it grow naturally -- without having to know how deep it goes at the beginning.

I tried spreadsheets, and was able to get fairly well organized that way. But it was a clunky solution. It was difficult to show and hide parts of my plan, to zoom and pan easily, to mark things done, to pull things off into a separate "to do" list or a separate "maybe later" list, to add several items at the same time, and such.

Being a software developer, at some point I just decided I would create the tool I wanted for myself.

So I did.

And, you know what? It completely solved my problem of being overwhelmed. It solved my problem of being unfocused. It solved my problem of not knowing why I was doing what I was doing when I was doing it.

And it also allowed me to simplify all the productivity advice I had ever tried to follow in the past.

And since then (about August of 2010), I've been getting easily twice as much done with half the stress. It's completely transformed the way I work, and my mood while I'm working.

RI: I've been using Fractal Planner only half as long as you have, but it's made a big difference in my own life. I feel like I'm back in control again, especially in my personal life where I have a LOT going on and never enough time to do it all.

You and I are both fans of David Allen and his terrific book GETTING THINGS DONE. How is Fractal Planner

related to David Allen's methodology, and what makes Fractal Planner different from the many other tools that are based on Allen's ideas?

JS: To me David Allen's greatest contribution has been to help people de-clutter their lives. He helps people organize all the physical stuff they own, and he also helps them clear their minds. And over the last 20 years or so he has helped millions of people get a clear mind in the midst of chaos.

It's mostly due to Allen's influence that there's a "Clear Mind Wizard" in the fractal planner, which walks you through a simplified version of Allen's clear mind procedure.

The Fractal Planner also simplifies some parts of David Allen's system. For instance, I think it allows you to do away with the several "next action" lists he advises people to use. That part of his system was always the most confusing part for me.

I understand why he advised people to use several next action lists. His theory is that having a "next action" for each project helps you keep a clear mind. When you're working on one project and another project comes to mind, that can be distracting and keep you from focusing on the task at hand. Allen's solution is to specify the next action for that other project on the theory that this will satisfy your mind and keep you from thinking about it again until it's time to work on that project.

But there's a downside to the "next action list" system. You need to coordinate your next action list with your project plans. You have to decide how to get a next next action after you've completed the last next action. And so on. And, even though I think he explained most of his system very well, I don't think he really explained the practical management of the next action lists very well in Getting Things Done.

The truth is, when it comes to keeping a clear mind, sometimes "next actions" simply aren't necessary. And sometimes they're not sufficient either.

Sometimes, when you're just starting a project, your mind will be best satisfied by having a broad overview plan. You don't need to get it to the level of a "next action". And you might not even know enough to do that right now. (Unless your next action is just "plan this out further at some point").

And sometimes you need to plan more than a single next action to get a project off your mind.

The main goal isn't really to get to a next action anyway. The main thing is to advance your project plan as far as you need to to get the project off your mind

so you can keep working on your current project.

And with the Fractal Planner, you have the flexibility to plan exactly as much as you need to to get thoughts of other projects off your mind as they arise, so you can get back to work on your current project.

You'll also find that by the time you get to working on a project that's been sitting for a while, it's already almost all planned out, because you were just adding little parts to your plan as they came to mind while you were working on other projects.

RI: Fractal Planner has a feature called "Stock Plans." When I first saw this, I thought it had to do with the stock market. Tell us what a stock plan is and give me some examples of how I might use this feature in planning my life.

JS: Stock plans are procedures or plans that you do more than once, perhaps on a regular or semi-regular schedule, or perhaps just from time to time, and you do them roughly the same way every time. Having a stock plan allows you to 1) make sure you do it the same way every time, not worried that you're leaving steps out, 2) optimize the procedure over time.

Here are some of my stock plans:

- * Pack for a 2 day trip (this lists all the things I typically take with me)
- * Turn a lead into a client
- * Set up a split test on a landing page
- * Daily Habits
- * etc.

Whenever I need to do one of these things, I just select the stock plan, and insert it into my master plan right where I need it. Then I tweak it if there are some details that are unique to the current case, and I get to work on the project -- confident that I'm not leaving anything out. If I realize my stock plan can be improved, I improve it for next time.

How many times have you packed for a trip, and racked your brain to make sure you didn't forget anything? This solves that problem completely.

RI: I'll just add that the Stock Plans feature of Fractal Planner probably cuts my daily planning time in half. Most weekdays have pretty much the same set of tasks to do, so I have a Stock Plan named "Daily Tasks" with 10 items on it. I can add this instantly to my daily To Do List -- no need to type them all in every day.

Likewise, I've got a Stock Plan named "Weekly Admin" that has all the gruesome administrative tasks that I tackle every Saturday morning.

I've got another Stock Plan named "Monthly Admin" that has a long list of things to do the first Saturday of every month. Gack! Accounting! I don't love accounting, but knowing that I've got all the steps laid out gets me rolling and gives me incentive to get it done and move on to something fun.

I've even got a Stock Plan named "AFW E-zine" that I use to make sure I remember all the steps in getting out this e-zine every month.

Fractal Planner has a "Clear Mind Wizard." What is a clear mind, and why do I need one?

JS: A clear mind is the opposite of an overwhelmed mind. Have you ever tried to work on something only to have a dozen different thoughts come to mind distracting you from the project you're trying to work on? And they don't just distract you. Sometimes they cause you to doubt that you should even be working on what you're working on. Being overwhelmed is a very terrible way to try to work.

Many people think that that's just the way things are in today's complicated world. But the thing David Allen showed us is that it doesn't have to be that way. We can clear our minds any time we want, and that leaves us free to focus completely on the task at hand.

There's a difference between having a single thought about another project come to mind while you're working on another project, and being overwhelmed with several diverse thoughts.

In the case of thoughts related to a single project coming to mind, you wouldn't use the Clear Mind Wizard, you would just switch quickly to the other project develop that plan for 10-15 seconds, and then get back to work, confident that you've got the new ideas exactly where they need to be.

The Clear Mind Wizard is for when you have several unrelated thoughts buzzing around. Basically, you just capture all your thoughts, process them (you put them in one of three places -- you delete it, you put it on a maybe later list, or you put it in your master plan). Even if you have a lot on your mind this typically takes only 5 minutes or so, and you come out the other end completely clear.

When I first created the Fractal Planner, and the Clear Mind Wizard, I was so overwhelmed I had to clear my mind 2-3 times a day! I probably use it less than once a week now. And that's a good thing. I think it's a natural progression people go through as they learn how

to keep their minds clear. It's a sign that this clear mind procedure works, and not just momentarily. Over time it trains you to run with a clear mind all the time.

RI: There's just nothing like having a clear mind. I think it actually helps me sleep better at night, knowing that I'm not going to forget anything. It's all on a list somewhere. If I want the details, I can drill down quickly in Fractal Planner and see what needs doing. Or I can hide it so I can focus on my current task.

Many experts recommend breaking up your day into chunks of a certain number of minutes, followed by a break. For example, the "Pomodoro method" uses 25 minute chunks of time, followed by 5 minute breaks. Does Fractal Planner include any tools to use these methods?

JS: Yes, there's a "rhythm timer". It includes the Pomodoro rhythm. It's got the 5x(10+2) rhythm that Merlin Mann uses over at 43 folders (You break an hour into 5 chunks of 12 minutes. You work for 10, rest for 2, work for 10, rest for 2. . .). And it's got 3 different versions of Eben Pagan's 50-90/10 rhythm (that he basically got from Loehr and Schwartz).

Personally I've been using the 5x(10+2) rhythm when I write -- and honestly I often work right through the breaks, because I've got a flow going. But the breaks are there when I need a breather.

RI: You've written a free e-book, CLEAR MIND, EFFECTIVE ACTION. What's that all about and how does it relate to Fractal Planner?

JS: CLEAR MIND, EFFECTIVE ACTION is an e-book that shows people how to work with a clear mind, and get a lot more done as a result.

It discusses the importance of using a fractal plan to manage your whole life, and it shows how fractal planning simplifies personal productivity.

It also discusses the emotional states that will interrupt our sense of flow as we work (things like overwhelm, uncertainty, lack of clarity about how to do things, lack of clarity about why we're doing them, haunting suspicions that we should be working on something else, the frustration that comes with unexpected complications, and so on), and how to deal with each situation so we can get back to work.

So, how does CLEAR MIND, EFFECTIVE ACTION relate to the

Fractal Planner?

The funny thing is, I think most productivity systems start with a method, and then someone creates a software program that helps them follow the method. In some ways I did things exactly backwards. It was only after I had created and used the first version of the Fractal Planner that I started to discover which planning habits taught by other people fit best with fractal planning and which could be left out. And that's mostly what wound up in the part of the e-book where I describe the "simplest productivity system in the world".

So, yes, there is a very tight connection between CLEAR MIND, EFFECTIVE ACTION and the Fractal Planner. The software helps you work the system in the e-book. But the advice in the e-book got there because of how easy it was to run my life while using the software.

Randy sez: I'd like to thank Jim Stone for taking time to do this interview with me, and for making some key changes to the tool at my suggestion months ago. Fractal Planner has the right mix of simplicity and power for me.

One reason I've hesitated to mention Fractal Planner before now is that this tool is not free. It costs \$9.95 per month, and I wanted to be sure that it was worth it to me over the long haul. It is.

So let me tell you a bit about how I use Fractal Planner:

I work half time as director of software engineering at Vala Sciences in San Diego. So I have one list named "Vala" that includes all pending tasks for that. This is actually the easiest part of my life to keep organized. Writing software is easy.

I also have two other web-based businesses that I run, and each of them has its own list in Fractal Planner. Within each one, I have a task list for each of the main projects going on. These are very detailed, and they've really helped me keep from going crazy when I see that there just plain isn't enough time to do everything I want to do.

I also have a list named "Personal" that contains all the things going on in my family life. This is where Fractal Planner has helped me most. My life is chaos, and one of the most chaotic areas is the maintenance on our yard (we own about 2.5 acres of land, and it can get overwhelming during the summer).

In the last few months, we've made incredible progress out there in the yard, and Fractal Planner is keeping

it all straight for me. For the first time in a long time, it feels like my personal life is under control.

I've also got top-level lists for "Endorsements and Critiques" and for my weekly goals, monthly goals, and annual goals. I'm pretty sure I won't hit all these goals, but at least I have them all written down and can drill down to anything pretty easily.

Having used Fractal Planner now for six months, I've decided to become an affiliate. This means that when I make a recommendation and somebody subscribes to Fractal Planner, I earn an affiliate commission. I do this only when I really like a product and when I'd recommend it anyway, whether there was an affiliate program or not.

If you'd like to learn more about Fractal Planner, I recommend reading Jim Stone's free e-book CLEAR MIND, EFFECTIVE ACTION first. You can get it here:
<http://bit.ly/qXK1Qg>

If you'd like to go direct to the Fractal Planner page and check out the features, you can do that here:
<http://bit.ly/oCeMQz>

3) Creating: Unlocking the Mighty MRU

One of the most popular classes I teach at writing conferences is a mentoring workshop. Typically, I have 5 to 10 students that I work with intensively for several hours over the course of the conference.

I've taught this enough times that I schedule time to teach little 5-minute lectures on various topics that I know in advance most of my students are going to have trouble with.

Right at the top of the list of topics is the "Motivation-Reaction Unit," often abbreviated to "MRU." (This term seems to be due to the legendary writing teacher Dwight Swain.)

Between 80 and 90 percent of my mentoring students need help on their MRUs. In reading published novels, I'd guess that about 75 percent of all authors also need some polishing on their MRUs.

As always, let me apologize for the terminology. "Motivations" and "Reactions" aren't quite what you think they ought to be, and that's confusing.

But there should be nothing confusing about MRUs. Let me define a few terms.

In each scene, you choose one "Point of View Character" whose brain you can look inside. You know this character's thoughts and emotions. You don't directly know the thoughts and emotions of any other characters in this scene, although you can make one of them the POV character in some other scene.

The "Motivation" is composed of anything that happens in your scene external to your POV character. The Motivation typically includes descriptions of the scene or actions and dialogue of the other characters.

The "Reaction" is composed of anything that your POV character does. The Reaction typically includes the actions and dialogue of your POV character, along with any thoughts or emotions you want to reveal to your reader.

Clearly, Dwight Swain had a reactive model in mind when thinking about POV characters. In Swain's way of thinking, things happen that "motivate" his POV character. Then the POV character "reacts" by doing or saying or thinking or feeling.

The reason this is poor terminology is that your POV character will often be proactive. She'll be doing or saying things that "motivate" the other characters in the scene to "react" to her.

So Swain's terminology is misleading, but it really doesn't matter. What I've found in teaching writers is that they make a quantum leap in their writing as soon as they learn to analyze their writing in terms of MRUs. Scenes that are fuzzy suddenly leap into focus when you break them down into MRUs. Big blocks of complicated and confusing action becomes clear when you put paragraph breaks between Motivations and Reactions.

Some examples would be helpful here. Let's look at a typical example of "fuzzy writing" that clarifies immediately when you try to break it down into Motivations and Reactions:

Harry and Tom pulled out their wands and began casting curses at each other.

Randy sez: What's wrong with this sentence? Isn't it exciting? It's a life-and-death situation. What's wrong with that?

What's wrong is that we're not experiencing it from the inside, we're seeing it from the outside. Furthermore, we're not seeing it in real-time, we're seeing it as a summary of real-time.

First things first. The reason we're not experiencing this from the inside is that we haven't yet chosen a

POV character. We have two choices: either Harry or Tom. If there were other characters in the scene, one of them would work as well.

A good rule of thumb is to choose the POV character to be the one with the most to lose in the scene. Another good rule of thumb is to choose the more likable character.

In this case, since both Harry and Tom could be killed, they both have a lot to lose. But we'll say by fiat that Harry is more likable, so we'll make him the POV character.

Now that we've chosen a POV character, we find immediately that the above sentence is all tangled up. It's showing the actions of BOTH Harry and Tom. Let's break it up into three paragraphs, each focusing on only ONE of the two characters:

Harry pulled out his wand and madly brushed the hair out of his eyes.

Tom peered at Harry through snakelike eyes and pointed his wand at Harry's heart. "Avada --"

"Expelliarmus!" Harry shouted.

Randy sez: Notice that the new version is a lot longer than the original. The original was "narrative summary" and cost us only 14 words in a single paragraph. The new version cost us 34 words in three paragraphs.

If the stakes were low, then there wouldn't be much point in dragging things out in MRUs. It would make more sense to summarize things using narrative summary.

But since the stakes are high, it increases the tension to show the action in more detail, switching focus between Harry and Tom.

Also notice that we've used only a few of our tools. In the first paragraph, we see two actions of Harry. No dialogue, no interior monologue or interior emotion. If we wanted to stretch the tension further, we could add some of these elements.

In the second paragraph, we have two actions by Tom plus a little description plus the beginning of some dialogue. Again, if we chose, we could fill in far more here. More action. More dialogue. More description. Or not. It depends what you're trying to achieve as an author.

In the third paragraph, we have only dialogue. This is pretty sensible here, since the dialogue is interrupting Tom. There's a time and a place for stretching out the tension. There's also a time and

place for compressing.

Now here's a second example that shows a different kind of problem, this time in timing:

Sherlock dived to his right just as Moriarty swung the axe back and then viciously swept it forward, immediately after Inspector Lestrade blew his police whistle far away up the street and both men paused to look before resuming their fight.

Randy sez: Again, there's no POV character, but it's an easy choice to make it Sherlock. The real problem with this paragraph is that the timing is all screwed up. The order of the actions as they appear in the sentence doesn't have much resemblance to the actual sequence of events.

The events happen as follows:

- * Lestrade blows his whistle.
- * Sherlock and Moriarty pause to look.
- * Sherlock and Moriarty resume their fight.
- * Moriarty swings the axe back.
- * Moriarty begins to sweep it forward.
- * Sherlock dives to his right.

In your writing, watch out for words like "after" that indicate that you're showing the effect first and then the cause. In this case, the cause is Lestrade blowing his whistle. The effect is that Sherlock and Moriarty pause to look. It's far less confusing to show things in the order they actually happen.

Also watch out for words like "just as" that indicate that two events are simultaneous. Often, they aren't. Even if they are, you can't SHOW them simultaneous. You have to write one event first, then the other. That's the nature of the written word.

In this case, the action of swinging the axe back and then forward takes a lot more time than the action of diving out of the way. The dive can't possibly happen "just as" the axe swing does. Obviously, you don't dive out of the way until you see the axe coming, so it's clear what the correct order should be.

Now let's rewrite the above in several short, punchy paragraphs that get the order right. Also, we'll insert a little interior monologue for Sherlock, to put the reader more inside his head.

Far away up the street, Inspector Lestrade blew his police whistle.

Sherlock sneaked a look. Help was on the way. All he had to do was fend off Moriarty for a few moments

longer.

Moriarty swung his axe back over his shoulder and then swept it forward viciously like a scythe.

Sherlock dove to his right, out of range of the gleaming blade.

Randy sez: We've expanded the sequence slightly, going from 41 words to 63 words. But the main thing we've done is to get the timing right.

There's a lot more to say about MRUs, and the ideal situation would be to analyze a full scene from a real published novel, paragraph by paragraph. That's tricky to do for a couple of reasons, but I've figured out how to do it.

My coauthor John Olson and I will soon be republishing our award-winning out-of-print novel OXYGEN as an e-book. We'll include a long appendix that analyzes the MRUs of the entire first scene in excruciating detail.

This appendix will be just for novelists who care about such things. If we had a publisher, it would tell us we're stupid to do this, because only one reader in a thousand is a novelist. But we don't have a publisher to tell us we're stupid, so we're just going to do it.

Since OXYGEN will be an e-book, the price will be just \$2.99.

You'll hear about it as soon as it's available. Watch for a "Special Note" e-mail from me sometime in the next few weeks.

4) Marketing: More Secrets of John Locke's Success

Last month I began an analysis of John Locke's latest book on marketing fiction, HOW I SOLD 1 MILLION EBOOKS IN 5 MONTHS, which you can get on Amazon for \$4.99.

Locke has some great ideas, and my goal here is to organize them into something we can all use -- a set of steps to follow when marketing a novel.

As I noted last month, there are six main tasks you need to accomplish in creating and marketing your fiction. Locke doesn't list these anywhere in so many words, nor does he give you time estimates for how long they ought to take. So here's my list:

- * Define your General Target Audience (days of work)
- * Create your book (months of work)
- * Create your platform (weeks of work)
- * Launch your book (one day of work)
- * Grow your platform (ongoing effort for years)
- * Market your book (ongoing effort for months)

Let's look at these elements in turn:

Defining Your General Target Audience

I talked about the first of these, defining your General Target Audience, in last month's marketing column. If you haven't done this task yet, there's just no time like the present, so go have a look now. All back issues of this e-zine are archived here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>

Creating your book

Creating your book is of course a topic I've been teaching in this e-zine for years. Most of what I teach is summarized and organized in my best-selling book **WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES**.

The one main point that John Locke makes which I believe is different from most authors is that he very consciously writes a novel that he believes will delight his General Target Audience -- and nobody else. He really doesn't care if he offends everybody else.

There is real freedom in writing just for a chosen few readers. Make them incredibly happy and don't worry about anyone else. That's the Locke strategy, and I think it's exactly right.

As a matter of fact, you might write a book for some subset of your General Target Audience. This would be the Specific Target Audience for that particular book.

Locke has done that with his western novels, which aren't for all of his fans -- they're only for those of his fans who love westerns.

Creating your platform

There are certain standard elements of any writer's platform, and John Locke has nothing new to say here. His platform uses the same basic parts as anyone else's.

Here are the basic elements of a platform. Again, I'm giving time estimates for how long each of these elements should take:

- * Create a web site (weeks of work)
- * Create an e-mail list for your fans (one day)
- * Create a blog (about a week)
- * Create a Facebook page (less than one day)
- * Create a Twitter account (less than one hour)

All of these are standard parts of your platform. You don't have to have all of them, but most writers have several of these elements. I've listed them in the order which I'd suggest doing them, although there's nothing sacred about this order.

Since we're trying to understand in this article what John Locke is doing differently from everybody else, I'm not going to go into details about how to do any of the above. I've written tons of material in the past in this column on web sites, e-mail lists, and blogging.

You can find excellent books on all of these topics.

Launching your book

You can launch your book in one day, simply by announcing it to your platform. Add a page to your web site with all the details about your book, including an excerpt and directions on where to buy it.

Send an announcement to your e-mail list, giving them a good reason to buy the book right now.

Post a blog entry announcing your book. Ditto for Facebook. Tweet your book.

There, your book is launched. Again. John Locke does this the same way everybody else does.

Grow your platform

It's not that hard to grow your platform. You do this by adding good content to your web site, answering your e-mail, and posting on your blog and Twitter and Facebook.

Your goals are to increase the amount of traffic to your web site, the number of fans on your e-mail list, the number of people who read your blog, the number of fans you have on Facebook, and the number of people who follow you on Twitter.

This takes time and happens slowly. It pays off whenever you launch a new book, because over time you'll build an increasing number of people in your General Target Audience who now know about you.

By definition, your General Target Audience is the set

of people who LOVE your work, so each book launch should get better as the years go by and your platform grows and grows.

Locke really doesn't say much about the mechanics of growing your platform. He does say that he answers all his e-mail himself, and he encourages fans to sign up for his e-mail announcement list. And he tweets a lot, building what he calls his Friendship Circle.

So what is it exactly, that John Locke is doing differently than everybody else? From our analysis above, it's clear that he's doing most things the same as most authors.

The answer is that he tackles the final main task differently. Let's look at that now.

Market your book

Marketing is an ongoing effort that begins the day you launch your book and ends when your book goes out of print.

Locke does some blog interviews, just like most authors. He considers this to be mainly an exercise in building name recognition, and he's probably right.

He also listens to his readers, and this is key. What is he listening for? He's listening to what it is they like (and don't like) about his books.

By listening to readers, Locke is continually refining his understanding of his General Target Audience.

If a reader likes his book, Locke asks himself what it is in that particular reader that makes her like the book.

If a reader hates it, Locke asks what it is about that particular reader that makes him hate the book.

Where does Locke listen to his readers? He reads the Amazon reviews. He reads his e-mail. He reads the comments on his blog. He reads what people say about his books on Facebook and Twitter.

I think this is where Locke differs from most of us.

Most authors read a glowing Amazon review or a fawning e-mail and think, "Wow, I'm amazing!"

Locke thinks, "Wow, I understand my General Target Audience better now!"

Most authors read a scathing Amazon review or an angry e-mail and think, "Gack, either I must be awful or this reader is a jerk."

Locke thinks, "Well, that person sure isn't in my General Target Audience! I guess I understand who I'm NOT writing for a little better now. So how can I revise the marketing copy for the book to attract more of my General Target Audience and scare off those who aren't in it?"

Locke does two other things for his marketing, and these seem to me to be unique. Certainly, these are the things he considers to be different from what everyone else is doing:

- * He writes "Loyalty Transfer Blogs."
- * He taps into the "Viral Circle" on Twitter.

These are going to take some time to analyze, so I'll talk about them next month. They're related, so it makes sense to treat them as two parts of the same basic idea. If you're in a hurry to learn about them right now, go ahead and grab a copy of his book, HOW I SOLD 1 MILLION EBOOKS.

Here's a quick link to his book on Amazon, and of course this link includes my Amazon affiliate code, because I think the book is darned good and therefore I highly recommend it:

<http://amzn.to/ndd258>

Next month, I'll focus on Loyalty Transfer Blog posts and the Viral Circle. See you then!

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping more than a year ago and is one of the most popular fiction writing books on Amazon. You can find out all about WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info/wffd>

If you've already bought the book and like it, I'd be delighted if you wrote an Amazon review. Thanks to those of you who already have! I appreciate you!

I've also been gratified at the response to my latest software product, "Snowflake Pro," which makes it fast, easy, and fun to work through the steps of my well-known Snowflake method for designing a novel. You can find out more about Snowflake Pro at:

<http://www.SnowflakeProSoftware.com>

Currently, my co-author John Olson and I are preparing our back list of novels for publication as e-books. We've been hung up on editing the first of the lot for months now, but we're almost done, and then the others should go much quicker.

John and I are also creating some powerful online tools to make it easy for us to market our work effectively and easily. In due time, we'll make those tools available to other authors. More info on that when the opportune moment arrives.

I normally teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year, depending on my schedule. For 2011, I have decided to cut back on my teaching so I can focus on a major project I'm working on. My schedule for 2011 is now all filled in.

I will be teaching at these conferences in 2011:

Oregon Christian Writers Conference, (August) 6 hours teaching a lecture series named "Fiction 101" and also a workshop titled "E-books 101".

<http://www.oregonchristianwriters.com/summer-conference/>

American Christian Fiction Writers, (September, St. Louis) 4 hours teaching a lecture series on the Snowflake method.

<http://www.acfw.com/conference/>

Novel Writing Boot Camp, (November, Chicago)

2 intense days with 4 drill sergeants and 40 tough recruits.

<http://www.christianwritersguild.com/novel-writing-boot-camp/>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2012 or beyond, email me to find out how outrageously expensive I am.

If you'd just like to hear me teach, I have a number of recordings and e-books that are outrageously cheap.

Details here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info>

6) Randy Recommends . . .

I don't take paid ads for this e-zine. I do, however, recommend people I like.

I'm a huge fan of Margie Lawson's courses, both the ones she teaches in person and the ones she sells on her web site at

<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

Margie is a psychologist who applies what she knows about human psychology to writing fiction. I believe her material is brilliant. Check her out on her web site!

I've also become a fan of Thomas Umstatted's terrific uncommon-sense thoughts on internet marketing. You can read Thomas's blog at:
<http://www.AuthorTechTips.com>

Thomas is especially skilled at helping authors create an inexpensive but powerful web site using WordPress blogs. I am a huge fan of this approach, since it gives the most bang for the buck in an author site. Find out more about this at:
<http://www.UmstattedMedia.com>

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 700 times the price. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

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