

TWC 521: WRITING WITH TECHNOLOGY



A Writer's Guide to the Internet

How Writers can use the Internet to find work, network and promote themselves and their work

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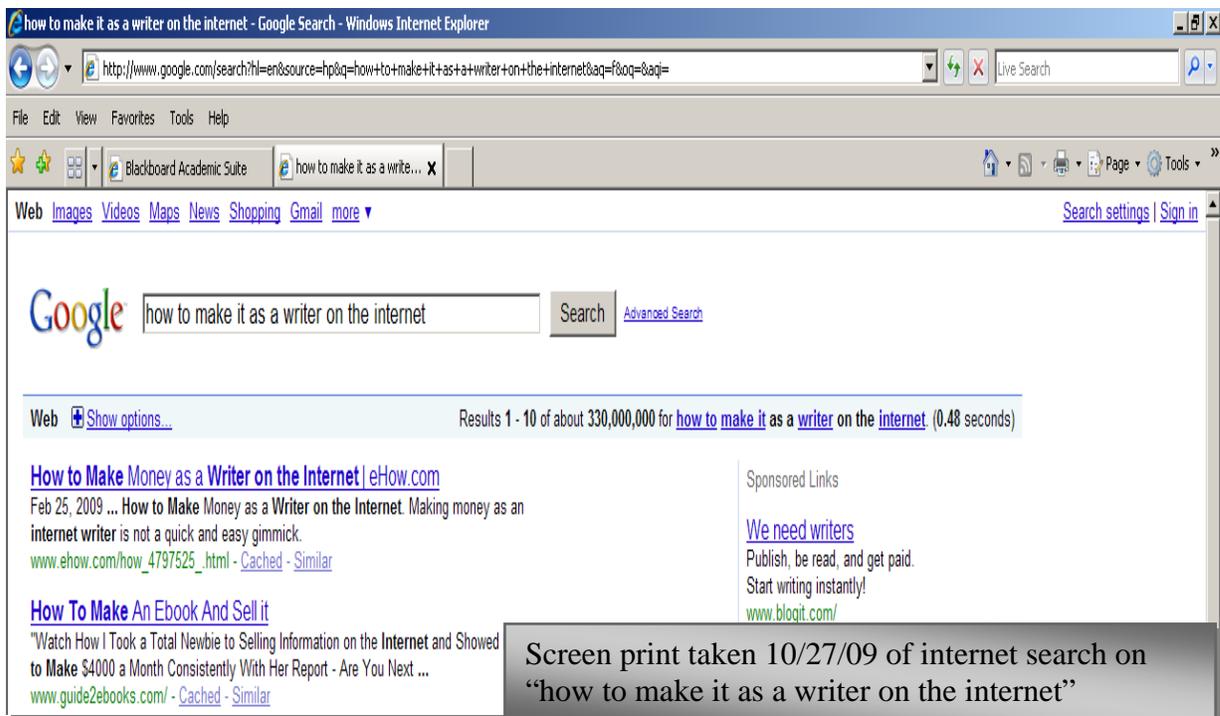
Introduction

We have all heard the stories about the writers who kick started their careers on the Internet. There is the story of the snarky stripper turned blogger who was “discovered” and then went on to write and Oscar Winning screenplay. There is also the story of the frustrated New Yorker who turned blogging about Julia Child into the writing equivalent of a winning lottery ticket. These stories serve as constant sources of inspiration for all of the struggling writers out there (like myself) with day jobs, who toil away behind our computer keyboards in obscurity – and some might say in vain -- waiting for our *Juno* or Julia Child to fall down from the sky and make our dreaded day jobs a thing of the past. So how do we use the Internet to make our own dreams of writing glory -- or, at the very least, our dreams getting paid to work in our pajamas – come true? To answer that question I turned where else but to the internet.

Writer for hire: Will work for advertising revenues

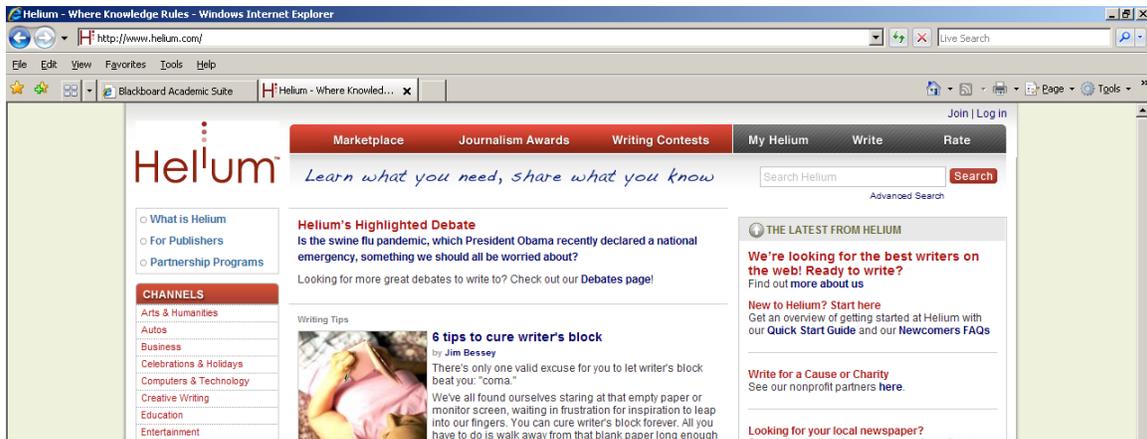
I began my search by typing the words “how to make it as a writer on the internet” into Google’s search engine. Two seconds later, the blue number in the upper left hand corner of my computer screen informed me that I had over three hundred and thirty million results. That’s right, three hundred and thirty million websites that contained some combination or variation of the words “How to make it”, “Writer” and “Internet”.

Now, as an aspiring internet writer, I should find this encouraging, right? I should see it as a sign that internet writers are in high demand and that the likelihood of success is very good? But there is just so much information out there and too much information can be as bad as not enough information. In fact, it can be worse. It serves as a reminder of just how vast the Internet is, and just how much junk and bad information there is out there. This is what I am thinking, as I start to click on the first few links.



Right way, I try to weed out all of the sites where people are trying to sell me something (and there are a lot of them). I try to focus in on the ones that offer real, genuine advice for writers on how to break in to internet writing. The problem with most of this advice is that most of it involves working for little of no money, at least initially. Ehow.com, for example, suggests that writers “estimate {their} skills” initially by posting

articles on Helium.com. Helium is a site generates mini writing competitions offers a vague promise of payment though “advertising revenues”.



Helium.com is a website that offers writing contests that will help you assess your skills and make money. 10/27/09

Once writers have established their skills at helium, e-how suggests that they can go on to do work for established sites, or, better still, create their own blogs and generate income based again on these mysterious “advertising revenues”. There are more vague promises of “six figure incomes” for people who run their own blogs or become SME’s (subject matter experts) and branch out in to technical writing.

As my search continues, I come across another site. This site offers a list of, what they claim to be, the “top ten sites that pay for articles”. Helium tops the list. It is followed by *Hub Pages* (an ad revenue generating site) and *Text Broker* (which boasts a minimum payout is \$10 per assignment).

As writers, we want to believe that all we need to do write a blog and publish it on the web and then sit back and watch the money and the job offers start to pour in. But, the truth is, it’s not that easy. Even people with established careers, sometimes have trouble making a living by writing on the internet. Lee Rosenbaum, for example, a

veteran journalist who specializes in writing about the visual arts, was quite well-known with a successful blog (aptly named *Culture Grrl*) and several rather prestigious freelance gigs (including one with the *Wall Street Journal*). Even with her success, Rosenbaum was forced to scale back her blog because she hadn't "found a way to make it pay" and needed to focus her time and energy on "something that might". It is sobering to hear that even those so-called internet successes have trouble making a living at it.

After exploring the "how to" sites I decide to take a detour and look at a few of the *help wanted* sites to see what is out there in the way of actual jobs for writers. As I scour the few ads I find in Craigslist under "writing/editing" I find a handful of part-time jobs, many of which pay meager salaries. But, like Helium.com, they can help beginning writers get their foot in the door, which is the important thing.

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "phoenix writing/editing jobs classifieds - craigslist - Windows Internet Explorer". The address bar shows "http://phoenix.craigslist.org/wri/". The page content includes a breadcrumb trail "phoenix craigslist > jobs > writing/editing jobs" and a search bar with "writing jobs" selected in the "in:" dropdown. Below the search bar, there are several job listings with dates: "Mon Nov 02" with "Travel Writer - (Phoenix)" and "Intern for Green Social Website - (telecommute)"; "Sun Nov 01" with "Professional Copywriters Wanted (Part-time) - (Gilbe"; and "Thu Oct 29". A text box on the right side of the screenshot contains the text: "Screen print of Craigslist taken 11/3/09. Two part-time jobs and an internship are all that are posted."

Next, I check out Media Bistro, a site geared to help job seekers looking for jobs in the media. These aren't necessarily writing jobs, but there are a few writing jobs posted here and, if you're willing to do a little digging, you can find them.

Then I come to the ad site that specializes in writing jobs. *Freelancewriting.com* is a site that offers a list (complete with links) to other sites where employers post their freelance writing jobs. It is a good resource for anyone who is looking for freelance writing gigs. This site includes links to sites like get a freelancer, ifreelance, simply hired, and even (the earlier mentioned) Craigslist.

The screenshot shows the Media Bistro website in a Windows Internet Explorer browser. The address bar displays 'http://www.mediabistro.com/joblistings/'. The page features a navigation menu with options like Home, Courses, Jobs, Freelance Marketplace, Events, Community, Content, Blogs, Advertise, and Help. A search bar is visible on the left. The main content area is titled 'Job Listings' and includes a 'Work in fashion' link. Below this, there are 'Featured Employers' logos for Courier, Dow Jones, and Gilt Groupe. A table lists 'Jobs of the Day' with columns for Job, Updated, Location, and Duration. The table contains three entries: 'Designer/Animator' (G4) updated 10/22/2009 in Los Angeles, CA; 'System Administrator' updated 10/20/2009 in New York or Darien, CT, NY; and 'Senior Editor' updated 10/19/2009 in New York, NY. A sidebar on the right contains 'mb offers' such as 'nyc course travel writing w/ james sturzf' and 'nyc workshop resume rehab'.

Media Bistro offers job listings as well as other resources for writers.
10/27/09

I click on a few of the links, just to get a feeling for the types of jobs that are out there. Most of the jobs are low paying and very, very part-time. But they are just the types of jobs that will allow writers, trying to build up experience, to add a few paying gigs to their resumes.

Bottom line: Being a freelance writer takes a lot of work. It takes work to find the jobs and even after you make a name for yourself, as Rosenbaum did, you may still not be able to make a living working on-line as a writer. Unless, of course, you find a niche as a Subject Matter Expert or you are able to crack into those mysterious “advertising revenues”. The Internet is a great tool for writers, who are just starting out, but once you become established, then you might need to move on to something where the pay is more reliable.

Writer Networking

These days just about every writer has a website. In fact, having a website is practically a prerequisite for being a writer, at any level. Having a professionally and a well-designed website is necessary, in many cases, just to apply for writing jobs. Websites are great tools that enable writers to share themselves and their work with the widest possible audience.

Another way a writer can get noticed is by creating a blog. Blogs are easy to set up and, with several free services such as Blogspot and Wordpress, they are a very economical way to get your voice out there. As I already mentioned, at least two successful writers got their start by blogging.

Social networking sites offer great opportunities for writers to network with one another while getting their work noticed. In addition to the normal networking sites (Facebook, Myspace, etc.) there are numerous networking sites set up specifically for

writers. These sites, including Author's Den and Nothing Binding, allow writers to post profiles as well as sample their work. In addition to the general writing sites, there are sites that are set up specifically for certain types of writers. For example there are sites that cater specifically to "emerging" or "new" writers, while there are other sites that cater specifically to "scriptwriters". There are so many sites, that there is bound to be something for just about every writer. You just need to be willing to take the time to really explore what is out there in order to find the sites that are right for you.

Concluding thoughts

There are lots of options available to writers today, thanks to the Internet. There are new tools for job searches and there are also lots of sites for writers to network and promote themselves and their work. It is an exciting time to writer, if you are willing to work for very little money and sort through numerous sites to find the handful that are right for you. This paper is meant to help writers to explore their on-line options for employment and networking. However, these are just a few of the avenues. The Internet is vast and there are many more sites out there that can help writers. The key is to be proactive and persistent. Expect a difficult road and be willing to persevere in spite of it and then maybe, just maybe, you'll find your path to Internet writing success.

Sites for Writers mentioned in the paper

www.craigslist.com

www.mediabistro.com

www.helium.com

www.hubpages.com

www.freelancer.com

www.ifreelance.com

www.simplyhired.com

www.authorsden.com

www.nothingbinding.com

www.textbroker.com

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"Google." *www.google.com*. Web. 27 Oct 2009.

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"Media Bistro." *www.mediabistro.com/joblistings*. Web. 27 Oct 2009.