

The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 32300 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 200 of you signed up in October), welcome to my e-zine!

This issue has been deferred by one week so as not to conflict with those pesky elections going on last week here in the US. Aren't we glad THAT'S over?

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 let you update my system.

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.

* I've been experimenting with software lately that automatically tracks where my time goes and gives me a neat report at the end of the week. Want to know more? Read my organizing article, "Rescuing Your Time."

* Part of the art of living is knowing how to apologize correctly. Part of the art of fiction is knowing how to throw a monkey wrench into the finest apology. Why would you want to do that? Check out my craft article, "How To Wreck An Apology."

* One of the most successful marketers I know is Tracy Higley, a novelist, entrepreneur, and mom. When it comes to marketing, you can't afford to be a copycat. You must think strategically and customize your efforts. Get started down that path by reading this month's marketing guest column by Tracy, "Customized

Marketing."

2) Organizing: Rescuing Your Time

I'm experimenting this month with "Rescue Time," a very cool software product that automatically tracks the time I spend on my computer.

Rescue Time is a web application that runs on either Macs or PCs. You install it on your computer. After that, it constantly keeps track of what application you have open and it saves it to the database on the Rescue Time web site. It also tracks which documents you work on and which web sites you visit.

You can open a "dashboard" page on the Rescue Time web site to see how productive you are and get a report on where your time goes every day.

You don't have to enter any data on when you started and stopped tasks. Rescue Time does that automatically.

You do have to tell Rescue Time which applications are "productive" and which are "unproductive". You can also specify which web sites are "productive" and which are "unproductive". You do this once and Rescue Time automatically figures out what percentage of your day is productive and shows you a report.

The Rescue Time people use Rescue Time themselves, and they shoot for 5 productive hours per day. In fact, they don't keep timesheets of time spent on the job. They just use Rescue Time to tell them when they've put in 5 hours of productive time for the day. Wish all employers thought that way!

I'm liking Rescue Time so far. E-mail is my least productive activity. (I love e-mail, but I tend to spend a lot of time on chit-chat when my Evil

Taskmaster believes that I should be actually working.)

I told Rescue Time that I'd like to keep my time spent on e-mail to less than one hour a day. Rescue Time pops up a warning when it detects that I'm getting close to my limit.

If you're a competitive kind of person, Rescue Time will estimate your efficiency and tell you how you stack up against the average user.

If you want to block out all distractions for a set amount of time, you can tell Rescue Time to do that. You tell it how long you want to work. It will block you from visiting any sites you've defined to be "most distracting." When the time is up, the blocks come off. Very nice if you're easily distracted.

Rescue Time also tells you what time of day you're most productive. I'm a bit more productive in the afternoons.

And how much does Rescue Time cost?

There's a Lite version which is promised to be "free forever." There's also a Pro version which costs \$6 per month, paid annually, with a two week free trial. I signed up for the Pro version.

If you're worried about Big Brother peeking at the Rescue Time database, then I'd recommend you not use it. Rescue Time has a nice privacy policy and they have a white paper on their site that describes their encryption and security practices. But the government could subpoena their records, and if that's something that worries you, then don't sign up.

My own opinion is that if Big Brother wants to know what I'm up to, he doesn't need Rescue Time to tell him, so I don't worry about this.

Rescue Time was recommended to me by my friend Rachelle Gardner, an agent who runs a massively popular blog about the publishing industry which you can visit here: <http://www.rachellegardner.com/>

Rescue Time has an affiliate program, but I'm not currently a member of this program. I may decide to become an affiliate in the future, but I want to use the service for a bit longer before I make that kind of endorsement.

However, I thought it was worth alerting my Loyal E-zine Readers of Rescue Time now, based on what I've seen so far.

Check it out here:
<http://www.rescuetime.com>

3) Creating: How To Wreck An Apology

Life means that you often have to say you're sorry.

Part of the art of life is learning how to do that well.

Part of the art of fiction is learning how to do it badly.

The reason is simple. In fiction, you don't want your characters' lives to go smoothly. You want to be constantly causing them trouble. That's what keeps your readers reading.

One way to keep your characters in trouble is to have them screw up an apology that might have got them out of trouble. A really bad apology can make things horribly worse. Don't ask me how I know this.

A good apology has three parts. Each of these is critical. Here they are:

* Make sure you know what you did wrong and how it affected the other person. It won't do to apologize for leaving the phone on the floor if they're actually mad at you because it was hidden. Under a pile of dirty socks. Which totally grossed them out.

* Say the magic words. "I'm sorry for _____. " Fill in the blank with what you did wrong, and make it clear that you know why they're angry at you.

* Take responsibility. This is absolutely the wrong time to make an excuse. It's probably also the wrong time to give any kind of explanation, because that'll usually come off as being defensive or trying to wiggle out of responsibility. It's hard to improve on this: "I have no excuse. I totally botched up."

That's really all there is to it. At that point, the ball's in the other person's court. They can either accept your apology or not.

Part of the hazard of making an apology is that it might not be accepted.

You really only get one shot at it, so make it your best shot and hope the other person is gracious.

Bottom line, it's not that hard to do an apology right. Now let's look at how to do it wrong. You have loads of options. Here are a few. I'm sure you can think of others:

* Don't bother to find out what your real offense was. If Edward tells Bella, "Sorry that I got your birthday present a day late," she's still going to be furious that he bought her a new toilet-cleaning brush with matching plunger.

* Act as if you don't understand why the other person feels offended. "Gosh, it just never occurred to me that anyone would mind me smoking pot while babysitting their kids, but if that somehow bothered you, then I'm sorry. It probably won't happen again." (You'd better

believe it won't.)

* Try to be funny. "I'm sorry I said those pants make your butt look big. That was incredibly stupid of me. It's really your butt that makes the pants look big." (Guys, this is not nearly as funny as you think it is. Do NOT try this at home.)

* Use sarcasm. This is a good way to turn a molehill into a mountain. "I'm sorry I ate all your chocolate. I didn't know it was the only thing keeping you from going postal."

* Throw their own past failings back on them. "I'm sorry I ran over your cat. Now I feel as bad as you probably did when you ran over my dog three years ago, even though you never even said you were sorry and my kids are scarred for life and I still cry every night. The last thing I want is for you to hate me the way I hate you, so I'm really sorry about the cat but I won't miss it yowling every night when I'm trying to sleep."

* Make excuses. "Yes, I should have texted you when I knew I was going to be late, but I had a hangnail and you know how painful that is."

The above are exaggerated to make a point. In real life and real fiction, bad apologies are usually a lot more subtle, but they still grate.

If you're writing fiction, you need conflict. Lots of it. A lame apology is one of many ways to do that.

Of course, be wary of overdoing it. If you're using a bad apology in every scene, your readers are going to start hating you.

Then you'll owe them an apology.

4) Marketing: Customized Marketing

I've mentored a number of writers over the years who've gone on to get published. One of the very first was Tracy Higley.

What astounded me about Tracy right away was her work ethic. When I critiqued her manuscript at a conference one April, I pointed out a systematic problem in her writing and explained how to fix it.

A few weeks later, she emailed me to say, "I took your advice and used it to rewrite my entire manuscript. Can you look at three chapters to see if I did it right?"

I was blown away. First, that she didn't argue with me. Second, that she took my advice. Third, that she got it done in such a short time. And fourth, that she respected my time and didn't ask me to read the whole book.

So I read her chapters and pointed out another systematic weakness in her writing and told her how to fix it.

A few weeks later, she emailed me again. "I did what you said and rewrote my whole book again. Can you read some more?"

We went back and forth for months, honing her work. It was a real pleasure to work with her because she actually took my advice.

By January of the following year, Tracy had an agent. By February, she had sold her book to a publisher. I wasn't surprised at all.

In the years since then, Tracy and I have become close friends. She started a small business and applied her marketing savvy to build it into a powerhouse little company that has given her the freedom to write almost full time.

Whenever I see her, we spend hours talking about marketing. I'm continually amazed at her energy. Tracy knows how to think strategically, but she also gets things done.

When I saw her a few weeks ago at a conference, we sat through a number of marketing talks and then started brainstorming up a course we'd like to teach at future conferences.

I've asked her to share her thoughts with you this month on what she calls "customized marketing" and how you can use it to simplify your life.

Here's a little blurb about Tracy that summarizes who she is and what she does:

Tracy Higley started her first novel at the age of eight and has been hooked on writing ever since. She's authored nine novels to date, including *Garden of Madness* and *Isle of Shadows*. She's currently pursuing a graduate degree in Ancient History and has traveled through Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Italy, researching her novels and falling into adventures. Besides writing books, she's also the CEO of an internet retail company she started nine years ago, and focuses primarily on marketing and promotion within the company.

How Customized Marketing Simplifies Your Life
Tracy L. Higley

With the publishing industry in upheaval these days, writers are paying close attention to buzz words like "discoverability," "platform," and "branding." Where and when is a writer to begin? Marketing ideas and opportunities are endless, and finding time to actually write seems impossible. Posting, tweeting, commenting, advertising. Blogging, sending newsletters, updating my website, growing my email list. Ack! I'm hyperventilating!

Okay, relax, breathe, and let's take a step backward.

I've watched countless writers over the years plunge headlong into marketing and platform-building activities with little or no strategy, except to imitate what seems to work for others. The temptation to mimic successful authors is strong. But imitation is a sure path to burnout, discouragement and inefficiency. In the end, you feel cheated that your time, money and energy achieved different results.

The truth is that those efforts might have led to that author's success, or not. And if the marketing plan did contribute, it's because it worked for that author. It may not work for you.

But marketing doesn't have to be an exercise in throwing everything against the wall to see what sticks. Whether you're already published or working toward that goal, you need a customized plan that works especially for you. This plan starts with

- 1) a clear understanding of who you are as a writer (your brand) and then
- 2) a clear understanding of the types of marketing that flow from and support that brand.

You develop a marketing plan that perfectly suits who you are, and then let go of everything that doesn't. Did you hear that last part? It's important. You don't need to do it all, and in fact, you shouldn't.

The first key is to uncover who you already are as a writer. Unlock the fascinating truths about yourself and your writing, then help readers fall in love with what you write.

I used the "B" word -- BRAND -- so let's define it for our purposes. A brand is not a tagline (because taglines are not very useful). And a brand should not be an artificial stamp that conforms you and your writing to a particular herd. The cattle-connotation of the word is unfortunate. We are not roped, hog-tied and inflicted with our brand. (Unless we do nothing and simply wait for our readers to assign it to us, which they eventually will.) A brand is more like the colorations and markings that appear on an adult animal as it matures. Organic, natural, and part of our true

self.

It's this connection to our truest self that can make our marketing plan customized and refreshingly simple. It can also simplify our writing and our time management by limiting our scope. You may even find it spilling over into the rest of your life, bringing simplicity to your everyday life.

To use the cattle analogy a slightly different way: We are not branding ourselves. We are uncovering our uniqueness and then we are branding everything we do with that mark. In other words, you are not the COW. You are the COWBOY. Figure out who you are, then brand everything you do with your own uniqueness.

Easy to say, hard to accomplish, right? Not necessarily. Remember, we are uncovering, not manufacturing. All the pieces are already there. We simply need to find them, organize them, and make sense of the whole picture.

Let's look at some quick starters on uncovering your brand and I'll show you how I've applied these ideas to myself. Space does not permit a full tutorial. Look for a more comprehensive resource at the end of this article.

1. **Read Your Reviews:** If you're published and have reviews on Amazon, etc., some authors will tell you to never read them, because of the potential for ego-inflation or ego-destruction. Set aside your ego for a bit and learn something. While on those sites, click the hyperlinked number of reviews beside the stars, then find the ratings distribution from 5 stars down to 1 star. I want you to click **ONLY** on the 4- and 5-star reviews. Read them all and make notes of the phrases these enthusiastic readers use to describe what they love most about your writing. Find common threads.

Example: I write historical suspense, set in the ancient past. The phrases people use most when describing my fiction include things like "transporting readers to another place," "I felt like I had been there myself," "it was like taking an exciting

journey."

2. Analyze Your Lifestyle: Start listing your hobbies, your personal style, how you spend free time, places you love. What kinds of books, movies and entertainment do you gravitate toward? What about the way you dress, or the way you decorate your home? What do you find intriguing? Again, list phrases, ideas, random thoughts.

3. Focus on the Sensory: What colors, images, sounds, words, smells, and textures come to mind when you think about your true self, when you're immersed in the things you love most?

Example: A quick summary of my own lifestyle and the sensory elements of my life reveals that I love colors like the Tuscan countryside, traveling the world, visiting museums, textures like rich tapestry, fairy tales and myths and legendary heroes.

4. Feedback: Spend some time with a spouse or trusted friends to get some feedback on what you're seeing. Let them add to the list, give their unique slant on the positive perceptions people have of you as a person. Ask them what is interesting/intriguing/fascinating about you. It may help to go a bit outside your closest circle, to hear more objective ideas of others' perceptions.

Example: In the course of my research, I've been privileged to travel the world. This is one of the things people find intriguing about me, and even a bit mysterious and exotic.

5. Analyze Your Writing: Think about what you've been writing, what you plan to write, what you dream of writing. Where does your writing intersect with some of the discoveries above? (If you find no intersections, I would suggest you rethink whether or not you are writing out of your truest self).

Example: My writing is all about helping readers escape to another time and place, to feel immersed in an exotic culture and setting, and to experience an epic

story that feels larger than life.

6. Distill Your Discoveries: Try to narrow it all down into a few key phrases about who you are, what excites you, and what others find interesting about you. Don't agonize over a tagline, but if you can get it down to a catchy phrase, that's great. It doesn't need to be a forever tagline. It can grow and evolve, and it's more for your own benefit than your readers at this point.

Over time my own brand has evolved to incorporate all of the things mentioned above. Although I may spend an entire day in yoga pants and no makeup, the brand I present to the world is also a facet of my truest self. I promise my readers world-travel, exotic settings and all the fascinating adventures I can bring to my novels.

This is only Step 1, of course. Once we have a brand concept firmly in hand, it will help us focus our marketing efforts to only those things that flow from and support the brand. And it will help us let go of everything else. Simplicity and focus are hugely beneficial concepts in marketing.

There is much more that could be said about uncovering your brand, and using it to customize your own marketing plan. Here are a few resources that may help:

If you'd like to see what my brand looks like in marketing, feel free to explore my website at <http://www.TracyHigley.com>. While you're there, sign up for my mailing list to see the kinds of marketing messages I send to my tribe.

If you'd like more strategies for uncovering your brand, plus a step-by-step outline on customizing your marketing plan, you may be interested in my ebook, **SIMPLIFIED MARKETING: DO LESS AND REACH MORE**.

And since I'm launching a novel this week, I've got a free offer for you! If you let me know you've purchased my latest historical fiction, **ISLE OF SHADOWS**, I'll

send you SIMPLIFIED MARKETING completely free. You can check out ISLE OF SHADOWS on Amazon here:
<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/blinks/higley/isle.php>
and if you decide to purchase it anywhere, request your free copy of SIMPLIFIED MARKETING here:
<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/blinks/higley/bonus.php>

The novel . . . ISLE OF SHADOWS is fast-paced historical suspense with a dash of romance, set on an ancient Greek island. Come escape to beautiful Greece with me, or give the gift of fiction to someone this holiday season.

Remember, if you purchase ISLE OF SHADOWS this week, head to this link:
<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/blinks/higley/bonus.php>
and I'll be happy to send you SIMPLIFIED MARKETING: DO LESS AND REACH MORE free of charge. There's also a bonus section with simple steps to incorporate your brand into Facebook!

I wish you the best in uncovering your unique brand!

Randy sez: I'm working through Tracy's e-book SIMPLIFIED MARKETING right now. I love her thoughts on branding, blogging, and Facebook and I'm looking forward to doing some new things in the coming months.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I recently attended my fourth conference in a twelve-week span, the annual Novelists, Inc. conference. I had a great time and met a number of people that I'll try to introduce you to in coming months.

I'm currently working on a new edition of my novel DOUBLE VISION, to be released in e-book format. I'm also revamping my personal web site.

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping three years ago. For well over a year, it's been the hottest selling fiction-writing book in the Kindle store. 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 flagship software product, "Snowflake Pro," which makes it fast, easy, and fun to work through the steps of my wildly popular Snowflake method for designing a novel. You can find out more about Snowflake Pro at:
<http://www.SnowflakeProSoftware.com>

I normally teach at four to six writing conferences per year. In 2012, I've now taught at four conferences and that's all the teaching I'll do this year.

Why don't I teach at more conferences? Because teaching is an incredibly demanding blood sport and it sucks a huge amount of energy out of my tiny brain. I prefer to put my absolute best into a few locations than to muddle through at many.

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2013 or beyond, email me to find out how outrageously expensive I am. Please be aware that I'm cutting back on my teaching in 2013 to give me a chance to tackle some long-standing projects.

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 Umstattd's terrific uncommon-sense thoughts on internet marketing. You can read Thomas's blog at:

<http://www.AuthorMedia.com/blog>

Thomas and his team are especially skilled at helping authors create a 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.AuthorMedia.com>

I'm watching Thomas's latest venture with interest: The BestSeller Society. I don't know enough to have an opinion on it yet, but wanted to mention it because Thomas is a bright guy who usually has smart things to say. More info on it here:

<http://www.bestsellersociety.com>

Please be aware that in this section I ONLY recommend folks who have never asked me to do so. Tragically, this means that if you ask me to list you here, I will be forced to say no.

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 1729 times the price. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2012.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to e-mail this E-zine to any fiction writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you e-mail the whole thing, not bits and pieces. Otherwise, you'll be getting desperate calls at midnight from your friends asking where they can get their own free subscription.

Of course you should not forward this e-mail to people who don't write fiction. They won't care about it.

At the moment, there is one place to subscribe:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

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Download your free Special Report on Tiger Marketing and get a free 5-Day Course in How To Publish a Novel.

Randy Ingermanson
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>
