part 4

Become a Pro

chapter 17

So You Wannabe a Web Writer or Editor

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Where Web Writers and Editors Come From

Good writing is not data.
—Constance Hale, *Wired Style*

Who knows? We fell into this line of work. For several years, we had written a 3,000-word "At Home" section for *FamilyPC* magazine. Budget cutbacks, fired editors, and a new owner brought our work there to an end. Looking for another gig, we decided to check out the Web. We sold some articles to a new site, named Thunderbeam (because no one else had chosen that as a domain name, the boss told us). A few months later, the editor quit, and we were hired as her replacement for the grand sum of $700 a month. OK, the work was easy (a few articles, a little editing). We learned how to code a little HTML, how to use Photoshop, and how to cut. We went from writing 3,000-word articles to compressing a lot into 500 words. We discovered bullets, chunks, and links. The site morphed into new designs, new names, and new identities several times, and eventually became KBkids.com. In a few years, just by doing it, we became Web writing and editing experts. We left the site, took on Web clients, wrote a book about online shopping and another about digital imaging, and started appearing on TV, radio, and online chats as Web mavens. Sound like something you'd like to do?

The pay

Writing's not terrible, it's wonderful. I keep my own hours, do what I please. When I want to travel, I can. But mainly I'm doing what I most wanted to do all my life.
—Raymond Carver

The pay range for Web writing or editing is as wide as the United States itself. The physical location of the job matters: Silicon Valley still pays the most, with the Boston and New York areas coming in second. And pay depends on skills. You may be able to be a content editor for a site if you have a BA, the "strong attention to detail" that most sites ask for, and a rudimentary knowledge of HTML. That combination of skills will get you about $35,000 a year. On the other hand, at another site, a content editor may show up knowing DreamWeaver, Java, Excel, and XML with at least five years experience in the field. If you have qualifications like that,

you can expect to find a job in the $65,000 to $100,000 range, depending on the location and size of the company.

Content providers, aka "writers," get a little less. If you are looking for your first job out of school, you can expect to make about $25,000. As your experience and knowledge grows, you can make up to $75,000 for a top-notch company. You'll get even more if you are a subject matter expert (called an SME). For example, if you were once a nurse, a medical site would be thrilled to get you and pay you extra because you have both kinds of expertise—medicine and writing.

FAQ on life as a professional Web writer

Q: I'd like to write for the Web, but all of my writing experience is for print publications. How should I approach the Web sites for work?

A: The good news is that many magazines and newspapers now operate their own Web sites, and many of these sites use original content, as well as reprinting articles from their print publication. If you've worked with such a publication or one like it, start there.

We must acknowledge that the reader is doing something quite difficult for him, and the reason you don't change point of view too often is so he won't get lost, and the reason you paragraph often is so that his eyes won't get tired, so you get him without him knowing it by making his job easy for him.

—Kurt Vonnegut, quoted by John Irving, Review of *Hocus Pocus*, Los Angeles *Times Book Review*

Q: Do I need to put up my own Web site if I want to write for the Web?

A: No, but it helps if you have a lot of online clips. This way instead of typing in long, laborious URLs in your query, you can just point the editor to your Web page where you'll have links to your online clips.

Q: Do I need to know HTML or XML to write for the Web?

A: No, but a basic understanding helps. It's easier to edit text that isn't littered with HTML codes, so most editors prefer raw text that has no formatting, no tags, no nothing—so it's easy to fold into a template or sprinkle with tags. Some editors like plain vanilla Word files with an absolute minimum of formatting. Many writers avoid tagging altogether. But if you find you like experimenting with tags for format (HTML) and content (XML), you'll have plenty of opportunities to play with these, on your own site, at startups, and in teams building new templates.

Q. How do I go about getting work at business Web sites?

A. Online job boards have a lot of jobs for Web writers, even during the downturn in the economy. When looking for work, it pays to do a number of things. First, make sure that you have a great resume. Send it out to any place that you'd like to work. (You should also check their company Web site, to see if they list a job board.) Second, network. Let everyone know that you're looking for work. Third, call up a professional recruiter or headhunter. Here are some particularly good job boards for writers:

- Dice.com
- HotJobs.com
- MediaBistro.com
- Monster.com
- Techies.com

FAQ on life as a professional Web editor

Q: Do you need to know HTML to be a Web Editor?

A: It depends. Most sites will create a template for their content. As the editor, your job is to see that the content is correctly poured into the template. You can't manage this feat without a basic understanding of HTML. Also, there are some crucial HTML codes that aren't in the template, and no matter how strong the schema is, some articles just need a little special fillip, and for that, you need to get out the HTML reference and experiment a bit. As in any job, the more you know, the more you'll receive. Ditto for XML.

Q: How easy is it to go from Web writing to editing?

A: We've always believed that the best editors were good writers first. But ask yourself how much you depend on an editor to make your words count. One of the most important tasks for any Web editor is to take a lot of information and make it short but readable. If you like to send in lots of info expecting the editor to cut it down, the editorial life isn't for you. However, if you find that your pieces usually get published pretty much the way you wrote them, then give an editing career some thought.

To write simply is as difficult as to be good.

—W. Somerset Maugham

Q: What tools do I need?

A: You have to enjoy the Web—not just tolerate it. Of course you should have the fastest modem you can afford, the latest Internet browser (possibly two or three), and a current e-mail program. Plus:

- You must use Word, the common application of shops, well enough to follow a template, apply styles, copy and paste, make your text look dramatic, or reduce it to unvarnished, unformatted stream of characters in the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII), or one of its descendants.
- You probably should know how to create a simple Web page. If you're a potential geek, you can write this in a text editor; if you are a lazy consumer like us, you'll want a graphic user interface, like that of Front Page or DreamWeaver.
- You need to be able to use your browser to steal pictures off someone else's Web site (well, you're Press, after all, and you're doing a story about them), use simple bitmap or screen-capture programs to grab images of other sites (screenshots) and edit them (cropping, trimming the edges, resizing, brightening, changing the contrast).
- To keep track of your hours, articles, authors, editorial schedule, and budget, you should get familiar with a spreadsheet like Excel, or a database program (we enjoy FileMaker Pro).

Q: What personal traits make for the best editors?

A: First, you must be organized, self-directed, and flexible. If you don't have these qualities, then sell cars. It also helps greatly to be ethical and persistent. You'll be dealing with a lot of artistic people (Web designers, writers, artists) and a lot of business people (venture capitalists, advertisers, your boss), so you'll probably need a sense of humor, and a little humility.

The harder the writer works, the easier for the reader.

—Donald Norman,
Turn Signals are the Facial Expressions of Automobiles

Web Editing—The Basics

After you've written a letter, memo, or report, the tweaking can be endless. Should it be single-spaced or double-spaced? Bold-face or italic for emphasis? Shadow style section headings?

—L. R. Shannon, New York *Times*, May 11, 1993

Edit visually

You're vying for each guest's attention. A snappy headline may get it. A blinking picture may grab it. But then what? Web readers want to see what the article or site is about in a snap. If they can't figure it out right away, they'll go elsewhere. So, grab them with an attention-getting title, tightly, and then, to hold them, design sparkling subheads.

Good test: Imagine there's no text at all—only subheads. What would you say? How would you list them? Make them the story. (It might be the only thing a reader skims.)

Got some text to go with those subheads? Great. Sprinkle a little text in. (And be sure you don't get sucked into the Web trap of using jargon or techno-babble just because you're on the Web.)

Got a paragraph with more than three sentences? Seriously consider using bullets. Readers like short, insightful, information-packed stories. The shorter, the better.

Want to reference something on the Web? Paraphrase it in one sentence and then provide a link to it. No need for readers to have to slog through the findings if they're not interested.

Make the text consistent

One reason that general-purpose Web sites have had problems making money is that they are very broad. The sites that are doing well have branded themselves into the reader's mind by taking a consistent tone throughout their site, in their e-mail, and in their advertising. Readers appreciate this. They know what to expect. Readers get angry when you change a site that they've become accustomed to. Don't think so? Why did everyone hate the final episode of *Seinfeld*? Didn't Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer always get away with everything? Didn't you love to see them accomplish that? In the last episode that all changed. They were

sent to jail for their past and present "sins." The last episode would have been better if their lawyer had gotten them out on some totally insane technicality after they were sent to jail.

Think globally, act locally

What's the right usage? That's a big debate among Web editors. The Web has ushered in so many new words that we see widely different spelling, capitalization, and even grammar choices on different sites or on different pages within the same site. There are two basic schools of thought about usage: One is to use the AP (Associated Press) Style Guide, which tends to opt for the English Major version of words (*e-mail, Web site, on-line*) and a lot of optional punctuation like commas and hyphens. The other is to use the "common" or "down" style—the way you see these words most often on the Web (email, website, online.) This approach also tends to eliminate all but the most critical commas, decrying colons, and wiping out semicolons. Our feeling is that this "down-style" will eventually win the field.

As an editor, a big part of your job is to decide which style to use and stick to it. When you have time (OK, so stop laughing), you should write up a styleguide for your site and give it out to all of the writers and copy editors, if you have them. It will eventually make your job a lot easier. (Check out the Web Editor's Toolkit at http://www.sciencesitescom.com/webresources.html, compiled by Merry Bruns, Content Strategist, Editor and Trainer of ScienceSites Communications. Bruns gives Web writing and editing workshops, and has done a terrific job assembling a list of resources for the Web editor.)

And make sure that you edit each text a few times. You'd be surprised how many inconsistencies, typos, and grammatical mistakes you miss on the first pass. (You might also want to proofread the text in different browsers, such as Internet Explorer and Netscape. Even look at AOL if a lot of your readers come from there, too.)

And even though this is the Web, print out your final version to make one last editing pass. It's easier to catch little mistakes on paper than on-screen.

There's always a further embellishment. It looks like a last embellishment and then it turns out not to be—yet once more, and yet once more. One is always saying farewell to it, it is always saying farewell to itself, and then it perpetuates itself.

—Harold Bloom, *Paris Review* Interview

Take this test to see if you're up for the challenge

Think you're ready for Web editing? Follow these steps for a crash course:

1. Pick up a copy of *The Smithsonian, The Nation, Vanity Fair, National Geographic,* or any other magazine that has long, leisurely stories.
2. Pick any article that you like and reduce it to half of its original word length.
3. Cut the article in half again, making 4 sections. Write headings for each section.
4. Make each section no more than two paragraphs long. (Hint: use bullets).
5. Give the finished product to a friend to see if the article makes any sense.

Sound silly? Then Web editing is not in your future. As an editor, more often than not, you'll be expected to take vast amounts of information and cut to the core, finding the nugget for your readers.

Take a look at these paragraphs and see what happens when we edit them for the Web.

> Mesa Communications released the results of a year-long study today. According to John McCurran, Chief Strategist for Mesa, more people than ever are using the Web, and even though there have been a lot of dot-com layoffs in recently months, consumer spending at online stores is at an all-time high with an expected $10 billion being spent on consumer goods in the first quarter of the year alone. These figures are good news for online stores looking for more venture capital money.
>
> Women still have a small lead among purchasers at online stores (52%). The majority of women who purchase on the Web are in the 25–40 age range. Books still continue to sell well, according to McCurran, but apparel sites are on the rise, especially those with either a physical or catalog presence.

Mesa Communications found that customer service and personalization were big reasons for the upsurge in apparel sites. Ease of returns is also a factor. "E-Commerce is here to stay," said McCurran.

OK. Now you want to summarize these findings for your site or for a newsletter.

Mesa Communications released the results of its year-long study of e-commerce today. They say e-commerce is healthier than ever with consumers expected to spend $10 billion online this quarter.

Other highlights:

- 52% of all purchases are made by women.
- 25–40-year-olds are the women mostly likely to buy on the Web.
- Sales of apparel are catching up to sales of books.
- Consumers opt for stores with good customer service and personalization.

Even when I think I've made all the changes I want, the mere mechanical business of touching the keys sharpens my thoughts, and I find myself revising while doing the finished thing. In a way the machine acts as a stimulus; it's a cooperative thing.

—Henry Miller, *Paris Review* interview

A rose by any other name...

We use the term *Web editor*. But, as with so many things on the Web, you'll see the same job described in many ways. So be careful when looking for a job. Don't discount a good possibility because of the job title. When the Web started, we just borrowed job titles from the magazine and newspaper worlds. Then, as the Web evolved to include audio and video, we started taking job titles from the movies and TV. Finally, the Web said, "Hey, we want our own job titles," so we got a whole new set of terms. Here are some titles that you should check out on the job boards to see if the job really is Web editing or not:

- Content developer
- Content strategist
- Executive producer
- Information manager
- Managing editor
- Producer
- Project manager

The Debate: Freelance Gigs vs a Staff Job

We once edited a site that put up three to four articles a week, dealt with dozens of freelance writers, answered queries, wrote a monthly column for the site, managed a budget, and participated in all sorts of marketing, advertising and design meetings—all from the comfort of our home, 500 miles away from the head office. (And this was before we could get ISDN and DSL lines!) Yes, freelancing can be done (after all, this is the Internet), but staff jobs predominate, and there are pluses and minus to both situations.

For instance, if you discover that the staff job of your dreams is located 1,000 miles away, wait before you sign up for the all-expense-paid move. There are a lot of financial considerations to think about, especially what kind of salary you'll need in a new town. For example, you can live well on $50,000 a year in Albuquerque, New Mexico. But in Silicon Valley, you won't be able to qualify for a garage mortgage on that. So how do you know? One way is by going to a HomeStore (http://www.homestore.com) and clicking Moving. Fill in the information for the Salary Calculator to compare the cost of living in hundreds of communities in the U.S. For staff jobs, the biggest plus and minus is the site—you have to be there. Here are some other advantages and disadvantages to each way of earning a living.

I revise a great deal. I know when something is right because bells begin ringing and lights flash.
—E. B. White, *Paris Review* Interview

The pluses of working on staff

- You get benefits such as health, dental, and life insurance.
- You may get Workman's Compensation benefits.
- You can count on a paycheck during sick days and vacations.
- You can enjoy the camaraderie with your fellow workers.
- You probably get a pretty good computer and quick modem.
- Someone else has to repair your network.
- You have plenty of time to schmooze—the challenge is finding time to do any writing.

- If you get laid off, you get some kind of compensation package.
- Important! You get the office gossip over the cubicle wall, so you know before lunch about the new site redesign, and don't waste any more time on the old one.
- The company has a clear picture of you, your work, and your value. The boss knows you are not lying in a hammock all day.
- The job title gives you something good for your resume.
- You get free cake when it's a co-worker's birthday.

The minuses of working on staff

- You have to work long hours, often without overtime or comp time.
- You squeeze into a small cubicle, far from the sunlight in a maze.
- You share the printer with the rest of the staff.
- You discover your lunch has been stolen out of the fridge.
- You can't hold long, loud, private phone conversations.
- You have to be careful about sending e-mail messages. Your surfing gets monitored, perhaps.
- Too many meetings.
- Everyone has an opinion about your new article.
- The coffee is lousy, unless you work near a Starbucks.
- You have to spend more money on clothes and childcare.
- You have little time and less freedom to moonlight for other sites.

The pluses of being a freelancer

- You can work all day in your slippers.
- You can take as much time off as you want, as long as you get the job done.
- You can have bad hair days and no one knows.
- You get all comments filtered through a single contact person, so you don't have to beat heads together, to get agreement. You just get told what direction to run in.
- You can write for many places at once, so you don't get bored or cramped by continual politicking.

I cut adjectives, adverbs, and every word which is there just to make an effect. Every sentence which is there just for the sentence. You know, you have a beautiful sentence—cut it.

—Georges Simenon, *Paris Review* interview

- You can take a walk anytime to relieve sore-butt syndrome.
- No one is looking over your shoulder to see what you're looking at on the Web.
- You don't have to freak out when one of your kids is sick.
- You can order whatever darn office supplies you like.
- You never have to leave your dog home alone.

The minuses of being a freelancer

When we tested our first invention, a computerized reference manual that was obviously marvelous, we found that students did better with the original paper book.

—Thomas Landauer,
The Trouble with Computers

- No paid sick leave or vacation time.
- No paid benefits, such as health, dental, or life insurance.
- No company-paid pension.
- No options.
- Drastic ups and downs in your cash flow.
- You have to pay for office equipment yourself (even though this equipment is tax deductible).
- You don't have any serious water-cooler discussions.
- You miss out on fast-breaking technical information, and more important, you don't keep up on the gossip at the office.
- It's harder to network with other professionals because you only meet them online or by phone.

Freelance Markets for Web Writers and Editors

Sure, some thoughts and ideas are complex, but the real test of the power of the idea—and of the thinker—is the ability to translate it into terms that the rest of us can understand.

—Donald Norman,
Turn Signals are the Facial Expressions of Automobiles

Here are some markets for freelance Web writers and editors. They pay.

We're tired of publishers who tell us that if we contribute articles for free we will have a wonderful chance to express ourselves, get great exposure, and bring traffic to our own site. We'd rather get a direct transfer to our bank account. When Sam Goldwyn was wooing Bernard Shaw for the rights to make a play into a movie, Goldwyn kept talking about art. Shaw said, "The difference between us is that you are interested in art, and I am interested in money."

E-mail newsletters

People like having information delivered straight to their inbox. E-mail newsletters save impatient folks a lot of time they would otherwise spend clicking around and up and down. Most e-mail newsletters are very narrowly defined; they are tailored for a specific audience. You might find ones relaying the latest Hollywood gossip, little-known history facts, breakthroughs in medicine, or whazzup with the wrestling crowd.

The writing style for these online newsletter is brief and breezy. People are looking for fascinating content fast. And what better way to remind customers or readers about your site than to send them periodic newsletters about your service? If you think your writing talents might go in this direction, take a look at Shagmail.com (http://www.shagmail.com), a site that offers subscriptions to over 70 different e-mail newsletters.

An editor should tell the author his writing is better than it is. Not a lot better, a little better.

—T. S. Eliot,
***Paris Review* interview**

E-mail newsletters are being used by corporations, e-commerce sites, writers, Webzines, and Internet radio stations—you name it. This growing field will only get bigger. If you can do this kind of writing well, you'll be able to line up a lot of business for yourself. And the pay ain't bad either. You can expect to be paid anywhere from $40 to $100 per hour. Visit:

- CyberTip4theDay (http://www.cybertip4theday.com)—Sends out a daily free newsletter with a tip in the category or categories that you choose.
- Switchboard.com (http://www.switchboard.com)—Offers maps, yellow-and-white page directories to portals, and they also send out e-mail newsletters for business owners.
- Writing for Dollars (http://www.awoc.com)—This newsletter is great for freelancers in two ways: You can submit articles for their free weekly newsletter, and you keep up on sites looking for freelancer writers.

General news sites

The news sites have taken huge hits. Some have folded, while others have announced huge layoffs. The bad news for freelancers, (now, anyhow) is that the news sites are reusing more and more content from their paper publications, from partners, or from syndicators. For example, MSNBC used to be freelancer friendly, paying about $1 per word. Now, they get most of their content from staffers and from *Newsweek*. If you find a news site looking for freelancers, expect an average of 50 cents per word. Sites to explore:

- ABCNews (http://www.abcnews.com)—Looking for all sorts of stories. Go to their site and check out the various departments.
- CNN (http:www.cnn.com)—General news for CNN or financial pieces for CNNfn (http://www.cnnfn.com).
- Correspondence.com(http://www.corresponden.com)—If you have a nose for news, but want to stay a freelancer, try this place (see Syndication section), which uses freelancers to cover breaking stories from around the world.
- New York *Times* on the Web (http://www.nytimes.com)—By the time this book reaches you, this site may be by subscription only (a la the *Wall Street Journal's* interactive WSJ.com), but so far it's free. Technology articles are a good way to break in.
- *USA Today* (http://usatoday.com)—Takes a few articles a month. Favors the high profile, late-breaking news story.
- *Wired News* (http://www.wirednews.com)—Emphasis is on Net culture, technology, business, and politics.

No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft.

—H. G. Wells

Another way to report the news is to write news-type articles for various sites. You usually have to be an expert in a particular field or write like one.

- *Editor & Publisher Interactive* (http://www.mediainfo.com)—Looking for newsy articles about the online and newspaper industry.
- Plansponsor.com (http://www.plansponsor.com)—This is the Web site for the magazine *Plan Sponsor*. The audience is managers of pension funds. The site is looking for writers who can submit 500-word newsy articles for their readership.

Trade sites

These are sites that cater to professionals in a certain field. They are looking for information to make them richer, save them time, and get a leg up on their competition, learning about new technologies or advancements in their respective fields. You have to know something about the profession, but you can pick up a lot if you are a quick study. Generally, your expertise will determine the amount of $$$ you get for a story. The circulation figures for the publication (the eyeball count, combined with any subscription numbers) also affect the pay. Expect anywhere from 25 cents to $2 per word.

- PubTown (http://www.pubtown.com)—New portal for magazine professionals who want to find out about the latest trends (has a job line, too).
- FashionWindows (http://www.fashionwindows.com)—If you have ideas how to turn a department store window into a thing of beauty, then this is the site for your talents. Stories with photos a big plus.
- Industry Click (http://www.industryclick.com)—For executives in the online and paper catalog biz.
- Quill (http://www.thequill.com)—How-to articles for the beginning writer.
- Web Monkey (http://www.webmonkey.com)—Looking for hi-tech articles for Web builders and developers. Knowledge of Java a big plus.

- Wine Spectator (http://www.winespectator.com)—This site isn't just for people who are in the trade. Wine lovers are encouraged to read the colorful articles and wine reviews.
- Writer Online (http://www.novalearn.com)—Ezine and resource center for writers. Writers' guidelines can be found at http://www.novalearn.com/wol

Popular health and science

Information about health, especially alternative therapies, is mushrooming on the Web. A few years ago, medical sites were paying big bucks for contributions. Unfortunately, their business models weren't the best and many folded. The ones remaining are still looking for solid reporting and good writing, but they prefer writers who have some expertise in the subject. The pay is all over the place. If you are a health professional, expect to be paid more, sometimes up to $2 per word.

- FitnessLink (http://www.fitnesslink.com)—Looking for anything on diet, exercise, or fitness for men and women.
- HealthyFamilyMagazine.com(http://www.healthy-magazine.com)—This is a good place to try if you are new to this niche. The pub is new and isn't paying much (they paid with comp copies of the paper mag for the first issue), so your competition won't be very stiff.
- KidsHealth (http://www.kidshealth.org)—Oft quoted site for articles and information about healthy living for young kids and teens.
- Self (http://www.self.com)—Online arm of *Self Magazine*.

Marketing communication and public relations

Most businesses are discovering that they need a Web site to stay competitive, even if they don't sell anything on the Web. In most cases, these Web sites serve as marketing tools, a way to get the word out on their company or product to the public at large. Often, the content for these sites is written by PR firms that the businesses hire. Unfortunately, a traditional PR agent isn't necessarily very good at hyping her client on the Web. More and more these firms are looking for writers to help fill this gap. Look at the online job

boards under Public Relations or just under Writer. These jobs can be done in-house or out. If you are bidding on a job, you should know that the average pay is about $75 per hour.

- MKTX (http://www.mktx.com)—The merging of high-tech with public relations. Most of their articles are hidden in the client-only section, so click on the Principals link to get more info.
- Promo (http://www.promo.com)—Looking for how-to articles, trends, profiles, and anything having to do with promotion.

Travel

An editor will usually edit one kind of material at a time, beginning with the text.
—Chicago Manual of Style

Travel sites have been quite successful on the Web. In general, the sites are not looking for destination pieces, but articles with a narrower slant, such as how to work out when traveling, where you can save money on an expense account, or what to do with the kids when your flight is delayed. Sometimes, you can find a travel section within a larger site. You should also check for sites focused on big cities, such as New York, Seattle, Los Angeles, even Nashville because these sites often publish touristy-type articles. These usually pay pretty well.

- CitySearch (http://www.citysearch.com)—This is the general site that will lead you to close to 50 specific city guides. Know a city well? Then query the individual city's site with your idea.
- Discovery Channel (http://www.discovery.com)—Prefers travel articles that complement their TV shows. So turn on that TV!
- Maiden Voyages (http://www.maidenvoyages.com)—Articles for female travelers.
- NationalGeographic.com (http://www.nationalgeographic.com)—You know the name, but did you know that you have a better chance here if you can supply photos, video or art?
- Travel by Road (http://www.travelbyroad.net)—Articles and tips for happy campers in the Southwest and Mexico.

- Trip.com (http://www.trip.com)—Looking for articles for the business traveler.

Subscription sites

While general content sites such as *Slate* and *Salon* have had trouble finding a money-making business plan, sites focused on specific content have been booming, making lots of money in subscription fees. What makes these sites so popular is that they offer lots of small tidbits of top-notch content for a narrowly defined audience. For example, diet sites are cashing in on the $40 billion that is spent each year on weight reduction products and methods in the U.S. But they're not the only ones that offer specific information that people are willing to pay for.

Editing is a craft. Practicing a craft means recognizing and transcending its constraints.

—Judith Tarutz, *Technical Editing*

- Ancestry.com (http://www.ancentry.com)—The third largest subscription site on the Web. They charge their 200,000 members $59 a year for information and genealogy resources.
- Asimba.com (http://www.asimba.com)—The prices vary, but members get to consult with personal coaches and trainers online, as well as pore through the information on nutrition, training gear, and more.
- eDiets (http://www.ediets.com)—Starting at $10 a month, this site offers 35 boards with over 250,000 postings, all about losing weight.
- SellYourBrainFood.com (http://www.sellyourbrainfood.com)—Gives information to authors and publicists about promoting books online. It has a subscription base of 1,200 paying $19.94 a month.
- WeightWatchers.com (http://www.weightwatchers.com)—Recipes rule on this interactive section of the popular magazine.

E-commerce sites

This is the area hurt most by the dot-com bust of the new millennium. Many e-commerce sites offered their customers lots of articles hoping that readers would turn into customers. In the lingo of the time, content was supposed to make the sites "sticky."

Unfortunately, many of these companies went bust.

However, original content is not dead on the e-commerce sites. Reviews are the mainstay of many e-commerce sites. An average review of a book, video game, toy, or CD goes for $50. These are the types of reviews some e-commerce sites are looking for.

- Amazon.com (http://www.amazon.com)—Book reviews (no, duh).
- CDNow (http://www.cdnow.com)—Music albums.
- Family Wonder (http://www.familywonder.com)—Family-oriented videos, CDs, video games, TV shows, toys, and books.
- KBkids.com (http://www.kbkids.com)—Kid's software reviews.

Syndication

There's a good news/bad news scenario about syndicating, or reprinting, your work on the Web. First, you have to maintain the rights to your material. Second, you have to find a place that will syndicate your articles. Details like these are still getting worked out on the Web, and you'll probably never make loads of money this way, but you might be able to make a few extra bucks. Why is the pay so low? Well, these companies are still trying to figure out a good business model. The popular syndicate, Themestream, folded this year. Some writers self-syndicate their work. How do they do it? They compile a list of Web editors and e-mail a list of articles available. You'll make more money this way because you won't have to split the fee, but you'll also spend more time doing it. However, the outlook is not all dim in the syndication world. With the recent downturn in the economy, newsrooms, newspapers, magazines, and Web outlets are letting staff writers go and are looking for cheaper content alternatives. Buying content from syndicates will be one way to go. Watch for this trend to continue.

Here are some online syndication places:

- @Large Features Syndicates (http://www.atlargefeatures.com)—This might be a good place to try because it is new. They syndicate your work to newspapers, and you retain all rights to your material, plus

The editor doesn't count spelling errors and judge the writer accordingly; the editor is a reader, user advocate, and writing consultant.

—Judith Tarutz, *Technical Editing*

you get 75% (not the usual 50%) of all revenue generated from your work.

- Correspondent.com (http://www.correspondent.com)—Not a syndicate in the traditional sense of reusing previously printed material. Here you sign up as one of their journalists and then file original news articles that are sent out along their wire to hundreds of newspapers and Web outlets across the country. (Correspondent.com is based in the U.K.) The more your article is picked up, the more money you make.
- Featurewell.com (http://www.featurewell.com)—Still a good place for freelancers to syndicate their work. Featurewell likes longer articles and buys a lot from print. They sell primarily to Web sites and magazines. Authors receive 60% of the sale.
- Indipen.com (http://www.indipen.com)—You set the price of your article and Indipen then syndicates it worldwide. They take a 15% cut of any sale.
- ISyndicate (http://www.isyndicate.com)—A big wheeler-dealer in the field, they aggregate (pull together) tons of content (from the likes of you) and distribute it to major corporations; they also make money setting up little syndication services inside a corporate Intranet.
- iTravelSyndicate (http://www.itravelsyndicate)—They send an e-mail out to travel professionals listing the articles available (which usually go for $100-$200). Freelancers set the price and iTravel keeps 40% commission.
- Jasmine's Web (http://brandijasmine.com/web/writers/iwrite.html)—Good place for freelancers who self-syndicate their columns. There's no fee to be listed, but the site's owner asks for a donation via PayPal, if you sell your work. Nice concept. Plus Brandi speaks up for freelancers.
- MediaBullet (http://www.mediabullet.com)—Freelancers set the fee and MediaBullet retains a 10% fee. Sells mostly to newspapers. Is also looking for packages that contain video, photos or graphics.

Most editors do not spend their days sequestered in dark, quiet rooms, making cryptic scrawls on manuscripts.

—Judith Tarutz, *Technical Editing*

- ScreamingMedia (http://www.screamingmedia.com)—This was one of the first Web syndicates and now is one of the slickest. Unfortunately, they rarely buy from freelancers, preferring to buy from outfits offering lots of content.
- SecondRights.com (http://www.secondrights.com)—Looking to buy second-rights for technology and computer-related articles for resale to newspapers, magazines, and Web sites. Writers set the fee and negotiate directly with the editor. SecondRights takes a 10% finder's fee for each article sold.
- YourNews (http://www.yournews.com)—This is another syndicate that mostly buys from large print (*Business 2.0*) and Web (C|Net) content providers. About the only thing they are looking for now from freelancers are news packages that contain audio and video.

Zines

Webzines, more commonly known as zines, haven't grown up yet. Oh, the zines themselves have evolved into first-rate publications, but they are struggling to find ways to earn a steady stream of revenue. Unfortunately, some good zines have gone belly up, and others have had to reduce the money paid to freelancers. Some of the zines doing the best are those that have well-defined, niche audiences.

Some authors need to be discouraged from distracting the reader and interrupting the subject matter by frequent remarks on the structure of their work.

—Chicago Manual of Style

- eGrad (http://www.egrad.com)—Firsthand advice articles for the new college grad on subjects ranging from paying back loans to negotiating a better salary for that first job.
- GenerationJ (http://www.generationj.com)—Mostly funny, very hip zine for Jewish GenX'ers
- Salon (http://www.salon.com)—Looking for big stories...the unique and different. Salon makes money by syndicating its content worldwide, so an international slant to a story is always welcome.
- Slate (http://www.slate.com)—Microsoft's zine is hard to break into, but is the best paying of the lot.

- SonicNet (http://www.sonicnet.com)—Zine from MTV focusing on anything having to do with music or the music biz.
- Windowbox.com (http://www.windowbox.com)—Especially looking for articles about city and container gardening.

Other sources for work

- Content Exchange Classifieds (http://www.content-exchange.com/cx/app/classifieds—Leads to freelance and staff online writing and editing jobs.
- MarketsforWriters.com (http://marketsforwriters.com)—Web site from Anthony and Paul Tedesco, authors of *Online Markets for Writers*. Buy the book, and then sign up at the site for frequent updates to their markets section.
- MediaBistro.com (http://www.mediabistro.com)—Use the search to filter out the staff and print jobs. Good place to keep abreast of the comings and goings of editors and publishers.
- Newsjobs.net (http://www.newsjobs.net)—Jobs for online and print journalism, plus links to other job resources.
- Writersmarkets.com (http://writersmarkets.com)—You'll get articles, as well as a list of markets all tailored to free-lancers. They also accept short articles.