

Stet

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

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IWOC'S NOVEMBER MEETING

From technical documentation to writing for stage and screen

BY JAMES J. HODL

Have you ever had a great idea for a stage play, movie, or even a television script; but then thought that you couldn't do justice writing it because your field of writing expertise was deeply rooted in reality? Well, think again!

Roger Rueff, who holds a PhD in chemical engineering, and once worked as a process engineer on oil rigs off Louisiana's Gulf Coast for Marathon Oil and Amoco, has authored and had produced projects in all three areas of entertainment. And in his presentation, "Writing for Stage and Screen," at the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, November 8, Rueff will explain how he did it, and how you might too.

"Life is a mixture of practicality and passion, and I work both into everything I do," says Rueff, who currently earns his main income as a technical documentation writer through his Naperville business Write Now Inc.

But Rueff also has authored four stage plays: *Hospitality Suite*, *Exchange of Vows*, *Mary Had* and *So Many Words*. The latter won the Best Writing and Ted Schmitt awards of the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle and a Best Writing Award from Dramalogue. Rueff also adapted *Hospitality Suite* into the movie script for *The Big Kahuna*, a 2000 film starring Danny DeVito and Kevin Spacey as weary salesmen arguing over religion and other matters during a business convention. And he authored the "God Lives" episode of the *Magic Door Children's Theater* broadcast Sunday mornings on WBBM-TV Channel 2.

Rueff, who recently was elected an IWOC director, promises to explain the intricacies of writing for these markets, as well as how he arrives at his ideas and researches each project. He may even discuss some future projects.

"Writing for Stage and Screen" will be the centerpiece of the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, November 8 at the Chicago Athletic Club's 7th Floor Lakeshore Room, 12 S. Michigan Ave. Come at 5 p.m. to network with other professional freelance writers over gourmet cookies and coffee. The main program begins at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC professional members; \$5 to associate members, and \$15 to nonmembers.

Following the meeting, attendees are invited to surf on down to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to further discuss the night's topic or to continue networking. 

"Writing for Stage and Screen"

Roger Rueff

Tuesday,

November 8

Chicago Athletic Association

12 South Michigan

Avenue,

7th Floor, Lakeshore Room

Networking 5:00 PM

Program 6:00 PM

Professional members free

Associate members \$5

Nonmembers \$15

iWOC

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Are You a Team Player?

BY HARRY J. KARABEL

Today, there is no north or south. Today, a city is united. Today, the palette is black, white and silver. Today, that tributary in my DNA that forever links me to the roar of Midway jets, the boxcar bang of the Grand Trunk railroad yards, and the smudge of being from that other side of town is running fast and frothy. Today the White Sox are the World Champions.

This is important to me for reasons I can only barely fathom. The inextricable link between where you are born in the great city of Chicago and which team is your team is a simple matter of genetic and geographical fact. We all like to be proud of where we're from and we all like to have any reason at all to make our identity more significant, more important, and more understandable to others. That's why we call ourselves fans, of sports teams, rock bands, movie stars, even writers. "This is who or what I like," we say. "So this is who I am."

Long before he was anybody's father, my father played AAA ball for the White Sox organization. He was a catcher, and pitchers liked him. Despite my DNA, I came to baseball late and I am only now learning that catchers do more than crouch in that danger zone with a big mitt. They know the batters. They know what kind of pitches they like, where they will swing, and where they will wait: a brainy, intellectual pursuit uncharacteristic of the dad I knew. He probably tried to explain it to me more than once. But I was a hopeless, half-blind, brainiac geekoid with a paranoid fear of having heavy objects thrown in the general direction of my face. So we didn't play ball or talk or watch baseball.

This was no fault of the game. Television certainly shoulders part of the blame. Back in the days of black and white baseball, TV cameras were as large as cars, built to house their own clumsy technology, and certainly not



for portability. Back in those 3-camera broadcasts, you couldn't see the pitcher's nose hairs or the batter's sweat and you hardly ever saw anyone spit.

(There is, as my wife will tell you after getting hooked on the game during the playoffs, much spitting in baseball).

Even in the fall of 1959, when I first heard the words "World Series," I was unimpressed. Time moves slowly when you're being held captive during a 3-hour haircut on a hot Saturday afternoon, while your dad is giving you a haircut following the step-by-step instructions on his Sears Cut-It-At-Home Barber Kit. From my perch on a barstool in front of the television in the kitchen, wrapped in an old sheet, my neck itchy, baseball made time move even slower. When I did complain dad said, "wait'll you see what happens if they win."

The celebration was unlike anything I had ever seen. Too bad the game wasn't this fun. They yelled and screamed and showered each other with champagne. They had done something important and unusual, and they acted like kids. Dad knew he couldn't get me excited about the game. But he also knew I'd be enticed by the celebration. And from that, I might begin to understand why teamwork was so important.

If you have labored for any time as a writer in corporate America, you are probably a little jaded about sports metaphors. You may be a little tired of teamwork. But today, basking in the afterglow of our Boys of Summer, of our celebration of the fall classic, of all those post game interviews where player after player stressed the value of the team to achieving this ultimate victory, I decided that the timing might be right for talking teamwork once again to our membership.

(Continued on page 3)

How to Succeed in Business Writing by Really Trying:

Words to the Wise in Two New Books

BY ELAINE FIEDLER

If you had to come up with 101 tips for marketing yourself, where would you start? Jane Ranshaw, business communications consultant, started with Tip #1: "Develop a mission or vision statement" when she wrote her book *101 Tips for Marketing Your Services*.

And with the spirit of a true marketing maven, Ranshaw will be sharing her knowledge and

Tip #4: Be a good listener.

presenting her book at the IWPA Book Fair on Saturday, November 19, from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. The Illinois

Woman's Press Association is sponsoring its book fair at The Chicago Cultural Center to showcase 30 Illinois authors, including Ranshaw. Their fiction and nonfiction books – often self-published – cover a wide swath, including biography, history, healthcare, spirituality, mystery and romance.

Jane Ranshaw – a former IWOC president – will be exhibiting not one but two books. Ranshaw is a business writing and communications consultant and trainer who has worked with numerous Fortune 500 companies over the years and has been a speaker and panelist at various professional events locally.

First published in 1995, her *101 Tips* sold well. And for good reason. Ranshaw did some hands-on marketing to promote it, carrying copies of the books into bookstores and asking the managers if they wanted to sell them. Barbara's Bookstores and American Management Association outlets that sold business books agreed. Ranshaw has now updated her *101 Tips* to include



Jane Ranshaw will be exhibiting her books at the IWPA book fair, November 19th.

how to market on the Internet and advice for novice and seasoned consultants in the new business climate. "I was running into a lot of people whose positions were outsourced and they asked me how to market themselves. There's a different breed out there now. And so I decided it was time to update."

LEARNING TO MARKET YOURSELF

What does she think is important for consultants to know about marketing their services?

"At the core of any marketing plan is networking," said Ranshaw. "One of the best ways is to make

sure you make yourself visible inside a professional association. Choose the group or groups carefully and match their goals to yours. Volunteer with professional associations and get involved with a committee. That's how people get to know about you and your work. IWOC has been extremely helpful to me that way.

Another example: I've admired a couple of people in my business, and I decided to approach them, to tell them that. They were very warm and helpful and we came to be friendly. But it doesn't always work. Networking is like dating. There's a chemistry that may or may not happen.

Tip #27: Don't take rejection personally.

And what if you're not naturally assertive or a great conversationalist or you're just plain shy?

(Continued on page 5)

Team *(Continued from page 2)*

Sometimes, it seems that's all I talk about. We are a volunteer organization, and we need more volunteers. I've said it a dozen times in at least as many ways. Still, we struggle trying to do all the things we could do as an organization because so many members simply do not want to get more involved. They choose to ignore that valuable bit of wisdom from baseball aficionado Tom Waits who said, "you cannot win if you do not play."

Getting involved stirs the great cosmic pot of opportunity, and sometimes, that opportunity comes your way. Maybe you haven't batted since August and now it's the World Series and it's the top of the 14th and there are billions of people watching you sweat,

scratch, and spit. But you can still keep your eye on the ball, hit away, and give everyone a game to remember. The team will thank you, the fans will thank you, and you'll feel better than you will sitting at home waiting for the phone to ring.

IWOC's your team and we invite you—all of you—to find some way to step up to the plate. You have value, or you wouldn't be here, because this is not a game for the weak or the timid. The team needs your wisdom, experience, energy and expertise, even if you're not on first rotation, even if you only come into the game for that one, occasional magic moment when we need you the most. Give the team reason to celebrate your contribution. And give the coach a good reason to talk about something else. ✍️

Blogging for Fun and Profit

BY MARY MADIGAN

Blogs, which began as personal, Web-based journals, have expanded to become an immediate, interactive medium for corporate communicators, online publishers and guerilla marketers. A panel of professional bloggers shared their insights at the October IWOC meeting.

It was a tough choice: go to IWOC for the program on “Writing for Blogs,” or stay home and watch the White Sox play the Angels in a play-off game for the AL pennant. Those of us who attended IWOC heard (and sometimes participated in) a lively presentation on blog-writing, or “blogging,” by Brent Brotine, Rachele Bowden and Larry Bodine, three writers who are involved in developing successful, commercial blogs.

BLOGS GIVE CORPORATE MESSAGE IMMEDIACY AND PERSONALITY

Brent Brotine, freelance writer and past president of IWOC, teaches a PR course through the University of Phoenix that includes an entire unit devoted to blogs as a corporate communications tool. The growing importance of blogs in the corporate communications mix, he believes, reflects the benefits that blogs offer—a distinct personality behind the message; immediacy; a means of holding a two-way conversation; automated distribution; and a vital tool for crisis communications.

“Although blogs have the feel of casual conversations,” Brotine says, “corporate bloggers should observe some basic rules. They need to be truthful, consistent, thick-skinned, authoritative, aware of their industry and open to ideas.” When corporate communicators follow these rules, the blog can be an effective, credible source of information for employees and customers.

BLOG-ZINE GIVES READERS THE REAL SCOOP ON WHAT’S HAPPENING IN CHICAGO

Rachele Bowden, a Public Relations professional at a Chicago agency, talked to us about Chicagoist.com, the blog-zine she edits in her “free time.” If you want to find out what’s happening in and around Chicago, get other people’s insights, and voice your opinions on what’s cool and what’s not, Chicagoist.com is the place to go. “It’s like a conversation with a very clued-in friend,” says Bowden. “People don’t have to go to a lot of Web sites to find out about Chicago events, restaurants, music and so on, because we’ve done that for them.”

Bowden and the other Chicagoist.com bloggers spend several hours every day, five days a week, writing posts for the blog-zine, which is updated six to twelve times a day. Why do they do it? “We really love to write,” Bowden says. “We sell advertising, but for now Chicagoist is a hobby.”

BLOGGING NETS BUSINESS FOR MARKETING CONSULTANT

For Larry Bodine, a strategic marketing consultant to legal professionals, his blog is a tremendously effective guerilla-marketing tactic. “By creating a blog and posting items that interest your target audience, you publicize yourself as an expert,” says Bodine, “and that gets you business.”

Because search engines such as Google list the most recently updated Web sites first, a blog that you update daily will give you visibility on the Internet. “If you create a blog, commit to updating it daily,” Bodine advised. “Write about your own work and things your customers are interested in. Keep your posts short, informal and concise. The rule is three ‘graphs and a link.” Bodine’s other tips for writing for your blog included commenting on communications by your clients or industry that you think were done well and synopsising postings on other blogs to which you include a link. “Above all,” he says, “always tell the truth and never defame anyone with falsehoods.”

PROGRAM PROVIDES MARKETING IDEAS AND SOURCE FOR SOX INFO, TOO

In the end, those of us who chose to attend IWOC’s October meeting learned about a communication medium with the potential to change much of what we and our clients do. And we didn’t have to sacrifice the Sox game; we can read and chat about it at Chicagoist.com. 



SIGNPOSTS IN THE BLOGOSPHERE

The following is a list of Web sites to help you navigate the blogosphere:

- **Search for blogs:**
<http://blogsearch.google.com/>
www.ysearchblog.com/
- **Get aggregated feeds from your favorite sites:**
www.newsGator.com
www.technorati.com
www.bloglines.com
- **Create a blog for free:**
www.blogger.com
www.blogSpirit.com
www.blogit.com
- **Create your blog (with more features) for a small fee**
www.typePad.com
www.bloglines.com

Spotlight on success:

Members win new business with a little help from IWOC

For Jeff Steele, Ellen Krupp and Dennis Byrne, IWOC membership has been worth its weight in gold. They were good enough to share their stories telling how IWOC—through listings in the printed and online directories or jobs posted on the Writers' Line—helped them build their business.

Jeff Steele tells his story this way: "I've gotten only two clients from the IWOC directory. One initially contacted me in August 1995 and gave me my first assignment in December of that year. I still write regularly for the client, who hired me for three different projects as recently as a few weeks ago.

"The other first began using me in 2003, and with each succeeding year I've written more and more for this client. That's two clients, only two, but together they have awarded me tens of thousands of dollars of business, which isn't a bad return on investment on the \$2,000 or so I've spent on IWOC membership fees since 1992."

Ellen Krupp's story highlights the value of the online directory: "I've been a member of IWOC for a long time (maybe 15 . . . 20 years?)," Ellen remembers, "and the only calls I've gotten (from being in the directory) have been really strange ones. Not even related to the kinds of writing I do! I could never figure out why these people called me, but I always went through the direc-



tory and tried to direct the person to someone who had the right kind of expertise.

"But since the first of the year I've had as many as five contacts about potential jobs, just from being on the IWOC website. I don't know how people found their way to the site but they have contacted me (and others--rats!) by phone and email about very promising projects.

"One of these contacts led to a project that really paid off for me, although I know I got the job in part because a current client who is listed on my resume turned out to be a former employee of the person who contacted me. My current client gave me a recommendation, the project was successful, and I'm fairly confident it will lead to more business in this department and opportunities in other departments that I'm preparing to mine.

"IWOC really paid off for me, and I didn't have to lift a finger!"

For **Dennis Byrne**, it was the Writers' Line that yielded gold. "It was interesting," relates Dennis. "I had looked at the Writers' Line only a few times and never really found a fit. Then a saw a job in Northbrook, where I live, sent in an e-mail, and got the job. So, the first time I used it, it paid off." 

Succeed (Continued from page 3)

"You need to get involved in a committee. You don't have to blow your own horn. Make your work shine, and people remember you. . . . Another thing, when you're in a group, don't go to the most outgoing person in the room. Go talk to another quiet person like you. Go to 3 or 4 meetings and find another person at each meeting and start building up your network. There's a phrase, "the strength of weak ties" – know a lot of people a little bit. You can learn a lot that way."

BRUSH UP YOUR GRAMMAR

Ranshaw will also have available her new "Consultant's Quick Guide to Grammar and Style," a short reference that includes the most common mistakes made in business writing today and shows how to easily correct them. It grew out of consulting on business writing and talking with executives and managers who wanted practical help with language usage and

style. She noted that many trainers themselves needed some basic grammar reminders as well.

As a special offer, Ranshaw says that if you buy either "101 Tips for Marketing Your Services" or "Consultant's Quick Guide to Grammar and Style," you get her "6-Page Action Planner for Consultants" free. The Planner is a 12.95 value. After the book fair, the books will be for sale at www.abebooks.com, which sells titles from independents. Her page is hoosierjanebooks.com.

For more on Jane Ranshaw and other marketing and writing tips, visit her Web site: www.ranshawconsulting.com

The IWPA Book Fair will be at The Chicago Cultural Center at North Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street, Saturday, November 19, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Authors will be exhibiting throughout the Randolph Cafe and Visitor's Information Center.

Sounds like a good opportunity to do a little networking, doesn't it? 



Join us for IWOC's 25th holiday bash

It's not too early to see if you have remnants of last year's IWOC holiday party feast on your best dress or wine spots on your mistletoe tie. This is the *one and only* notice you'll get about this year's winter gala in *Stet* because there won't be an issue in December. So mark the date right now – December 13 – and plan to come and celebrate beginning at 6 p.m.

This year we're partying at in a private room at Buca di Beppo, a delightful Italian restaurant conveniently located at 2941 North Clark Street. (There are several of these restaurants in the city, so be sure to note the address.) The menu will include salad, entrée *and* pasta, as well as dessert. Choose your beverages from a full-service cash bar with reasonably priced wines.

We'll all raise a nostalgic glass to longtime Santa Robert Shoemaker, who now lives on the west coast and won't be there, but not to worry. Whether you've been naughty or nice, rumor has it that another jolly red-suited figure will have something for you.

Our party in December will mark the end of IWOC's 25th year celebration, and in that spirit we're bringing you this holiday party at a price close to what we might have paid in 1980: \$28. (Last year's party was \$35, and you'll still have to pay that if you wait to pay at the door because we really want a count earlier.) Valet parking is only \$8, and there's plenty of public transportation nearby.

Since we're still celebrating our Silver Jubilee, why not bring friends, family, and non-IWOC colleagues. We want to end this year with a special sendoff.

Very soon there will be a PayPal option on the website – you'll get a notice when it's up there – and we'll also have a downloadable form to pay by check. The entrée options will be posted on the forms. Please register as soon as the opportunity is available so Santa knows how big a bag to pack. It's a great party. Don't miss it!

IWOC Welcomes New Members

IWOC recently grew stronger, with the addition of three new members. Karleen S. McAllester, Jennifer Quinn and Ava Whaley joined us during October.

Welcome, Karleen, Jennifer and Karleen. We're delighted to have you, and we hope to see you at our monthly meetings.



Calendar

November 8 (2nd Tuesday)

IWOC monthly meeting: "Writing for Stage and Screen" with Roger Rueff

. Presentation on how one writer made a successful transition from technical writing to writing plays and movie scripts. At the Chicago Athletic Association, 12 South Michigan Avenue, 7th Floor, Chicago. Networking at 5 PM; program at 6 PM. Professional members free, associates \$5, nonmembers \$15.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted. The groups welcome nonmembers.

November 3rd (1st Thursday)

IWOPR monthly breakfast: Join the Rogers Park IWOC contingent for breakfast at 9 AM at the A&T Grill, 7036 N. Clark St., Chicago. For more information, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

December 8 (Special Date, Due to Thanksgiving)

IWOOP monthly lunch: The West Suburban group meets at noon at Poor Phil's at 139 So. Marion, Oak Park. Contact Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065 for more information.

Check out
IWOC's Web site at
www.iwoc.org