

JULY MEETING

Blagica (Blah-gee-tsa) Blogs & You Can Too!

BY DAVID EPSTEIN

"It's next to impossible to have a discussion about the Web these days without someone invoking Web 2.0. Popular media, blogs, trade pubs, and technology magazines: are all talking about a revolution we're supposedly in the midst of. Unfortunately, nobody has any idea what it is."

The rest of this article by Sean Carton (Click Z Network, March 5, 2007) summarizes six key elements of this web revolution. You can read it at: www.clickz.com/showPage.html?page=3625146.

Blagica Bottigliero has an idea of what this revolution is, because she is immersed in it. Tuesday, July 8, she will share with IWOC members and guests her first-hand experiences in building a writing-based business in this brave new world. She is energetically building a family of blogs, web-based businesses, and community networks, using "Web 2.0" capabilities that enable writers and readers to participate in interactive online conversations.

Her home website (www.blagica.com) defines "Blagica" as a noun with three meanings:

1. Macedonian name that means sweet;
2. Chicago-based consultant, entrepreneur, and blogger;

3. Your daily resource for unique observations on culture, life, and the web.

The "What I Do" link on her home page leads to a page that further links to some of her past and current activities. Current projects include Bsolutions, a service that helps small and medium-sized business work learn to use the web; the Gals' Guide to living in the Big City for young college graduates; CondoPerks, a loyalty program for condo associations; and Chicago Tech Report, which covers news and events in Chicago's online marketing and Web 2.0 communities.

All these are examples of how a professional with writing talent and experience can find markets and build new businesses online. One key difference between earlier approaches to the Internet and "Web 2.0" is that the old way was a traditional one-way publishing model, with information going from authors out to readers. Now, it's more like a constant worldwide conversation—literally, a "buzz." Blagica will explain how professional writers can get in on that conversation and use it for fun, profit, and community



building.

In addition to blogs and services that generate revenue directly, through online advertising, or other marketing

arrangements, Blagica is also Vice President for Partnerships of CIMA (Chicago Interactive Marketing Association), a contributor to the NBC5 Street Team, and a member of the Second Ward Citizen Advisory Committee on Development. In addition to all that, she is an active participant in four well-known social/professional networks: Naymz, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Before launching her own business, Bsolutions, in 2005, she had worked in online and interactive marketing for Giant Step (now part of ARC Worldwide), Orbitz, and CoolSavings (now known as Q Interactive).

Networking with snacks and beverages begins at 5 p.m. and the meeting at 6. Nonmembers are cordially invited. The meeting is free for IWOC members and \$15 for nonmembers. Plan to stay for a buy-your-own dinner at a nearby restaurant after the meeting. Remember: the location is National-Louis University, 122 South Michigan, Room 5008. 🍷

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF



Fore!



I played hooky this morning and went to the driving range when there was billable work to be done at home. Yes, I know... I shouldn't have. But to paraphrase Jesus, let he or she who is without sin cast the first invoice. And paraphrasing Jesus seems appropriate here considering the number of times I've heard his name invoked on a golf course.

I used to shoot in the high 80s—back when I was in graduate school and playing hooky from a scientific instrument instead of a keyboard. But when I left the corporate world in the early 1990s to pursue the freelance life (that slippery rascal), I gave up golf as an unaffordable indulgence.

Plus, my son was a toddler at the time, and it seemed absurd to pass five hours of my life on a golf course when I could be home spending time with him. Also, somewhere along the line, the greens fees around Chicagoland started launching themselves into the ionosphere, creating an economic disincentive to taking up the game again. I remember when I could get a twilight fee at Arrowhead in Winfield for seven dollars. (Of course, I also remember when a gallon of regular gasoline sold for a quarter... and I never did give up driving.) In any case, my post-corporate-life circumstances have constituted sort of a rolling perfect storm that has kept me off the links for the better part of twenty years.

Next Tuesday, though, all that will change, and I'll be teeing up balls at a cli-

ent-appreciation golf outing thrown by my accountant. I know, I know... if he's got the money to throw a golf outing, maybe he could charge a little less for his services, instead. But he's done right by me for years, and his fees are pretty reasonable, actually—so I'm screwing the protest tantrum and pulling on the golf glove. Plus, I have it on good authority that a drink cart will be making the rounds all afternoon long, and that's more of what the day will be about... that and bawdy jokes.

Even though I have a perfectly legitimate cover story for not playing well (the umpteen-year hiatus mentioned above), I also have no desire to completely embarrass myself at the outing, so I went to the driving range this morning to reacquaint myself with my clubs. After an hour or so on the range, I can safely say this about us (me and the clubs)—I remember when the faces of my irons were nearly pristine. They remember when my beard lacked shades of gray. I remember when the shaft of my 3-wood didn't rattle. It remembers when I swung its head a little faster through the ball. My putter doesn't shine as it once did... neither, admittedly, do I.

It's odd how many memories we have locked away inside our heads just waiting to be triggered by some tactile sensation or movement. Things we might not have thought of in years that suddenly rush to the fore when we feel or do something that harkens to a long-ago action or part of a former lifestyle.

As I teed up range ball after range ball this morning, I could feel old vaults opening inside me—some containing stories and punch lines, others filled with random moments that, for some odd reason, stuck.

I remember taking shelter under an oak tree during a sudden rainstorm one Saturday afternoon at the Vieux Chênes golf course in Lafayette, Louisiana—where I worked right after college as a process engineer for Marathon Oil Company. I remember the barrage of heavy raindrops pelting the leaves all around me and the eerie crackle and flash—and ear-splitting boom—of a lightning bolt striking the ground not more than twenty yards away... destroying the white, metal half-pipe marker of the ladies' tee. It was not long after that I learned of Lee Trevino's famous comment after being hit by lightning during the 1975 Western Open: "If you are caught on a golf course during a storm and are afraid of lightning, hold up a 1-iron. Not even God can hit a 1-iron."

I remember standing on the driving range of that same course one evening after work—in the shade of a stand of tall pines, my clubs laid out on the ground behind me, belting balls eastward past the shadow line with my 3-wood... and looking on (out of the corner of my eye) as a total stranger snatched my 5-iron and ran off to the far end of the range tees... where he proceeded to beat the living bejeezus

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Print or Screen or Zine: An Entrepreneurial Spirit and Persistence Lead to Success

BY AMY WILLIAMS BERNSTEIN

Last month, *Stet* promised that in the June program, "From Print to Screen to Zine: Ruth L. Ratny Shows You How to Get Hired," Ratny "will tell all." And the veteran journalist did not disappoint.

During the program on June 10, Ratny was unguarded and candid in recollecting her career and advising fellow journalists. IWOC vice president Catherine Rategan played the role of interviewer, eliciting sometimes humorous responses from Ratny, whom she has known for more than 30 years. The interview at times took on the feel of a casual conversation between two long-time friends.

A Visible Influence

Ratny has been active in Chicago's film and video scene since the 1960s. She launched *Screen* in 1979 and led the magazine for 23 years. In 2002, she left to start a new venture: ReelChicago.com.

Rategan and Ratny began the program discussing the impact *Screen* has had on Chicago. When Ratny created it as a newsletter, it was the first publication to cover the city's fledgling film and video industry. At that time, Ratny explained, there was very little movie filming in the city. The largest producers of films were companies like Standard Oil and Sears, which had film departments. Ratny recalled that the first 16mm film she ever saw was called *From Trees to Tribunes*. Like many children who were impressed by the film, Ratny immediately told her

mother, "I want to work for the *Tribune*."

"Those were sponsored films. Now we call it branded entertainment or product placement," said Ratny.

Rategan credited Ratny's work with helping to keep film business in Chicago. By publicizing the film industry and creating a sense of community, she made the city more film-friendly and convinced some businesses not to go elsewhere to shoot. "The more *Screen* talked about the business, the more it grew," said Ratny.

Today, Chicago is famously film-friendly. Stumbling upon a film shoot and gossiping about which stars are in town are part of the experience of living in this city.

Advice to Writers

Ratny's reminiscences on Chicago's film industry were fascinating, but Rategan made sure to ask plenty of practical questions of interest to the IWOC audience.

"What are today's growth industries where freelancers will find opportunities?" Rategan asked. Ratny responded that trade publications are a thriving outlet that will not disappear.

Rategan asked how a writer can best market his or her services. "Websites are essential," said Ratny. "In my day it was [publishing] a book."

Ratny also stressed the

importance of being persistent. "One phone call or email isn't going to make it," she said. A writer must start with a good presentation and good writing samples, then

"make as many phone calls as it takes to get that interview." Ratny believes that, at least in the film industry, a face-to-face interview is the best way to sell an idea. On the subject of finding story ideas, Ratny said that she gets ideas by talking

to people. "Everything is a story," she said and advised writers to "constantly think of how to make what you see and hear into stories."

At one point Ratny turned to her audience and asked, "How many of you have a prospect list?" Most people raised their hands, which pleased her. Making a list of prospective outlets for one's writing is a good first step, because it helps a writer focus his or her efforts. The next step, she said, is to go through that list and call the editor of each publication.

Ratny's New Venture

Ratny plans a major relaunch of ReelChicago.com this fall. The new site will be updated more often with more information and more resources, such as a business directory, that will serve the site's growing global audience. Ratny said she was surprised to learn that the site has 10,000 readers in China. The new site will also incorpo-

rate microsites tailored to specific audiences and blogs by industry insiders. Ratny's new role will be "curator" of stories written for the site. Ratny admitted she wasn't sure what this term means, but she said she plans to simply do what she does best: find the stories that will be most suitable to the publication's readership.

How does she like to work with freelance writers? Ratny said she looks for writers who have at least general knowledge about the many elements that go into making a film. She prefers to receive pitches by email, and she likes article that are no more than 500 words. When Rategan asked about ReelChicago.com's turnaround time, Ratny responded that she generally allows writers to take the time they need to get the story. Now that she works with an online medium, she said, "as soon as you send me a story, I can run it."

Just as she was about her title of "curator," Ratny was honest throughout the program, admitting that she doesn't understand much of the technology she now works with. "I stopped trying to figure all this out when [film] went to digital," she quipped.

Despite her avowed lack of technical expertise ("I know nothing about the Internet except 'send' and 'receive.'"), Ratny has long been in the forefront of media's technology revolution. Under her

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Ruth Ratny

July Question of the Month

Describe an out-of-the-ordinary situation in which you networked with someone and got some business.

BY KAREN SCHWARTZ

Katie Valentino: A few years ago I was in Vegas working a trade show for the police and



security industries – my family owns a company that manufactures police

leather goods – when I stumbled upon a very good contact while walking across the casino floor, a Budweiser in one hand, a chocolate chip cookie in the other. At the penny slots, I met several of our customers and we began talking about our interests outside of sales. I mentioned my writing background and learned that many of the exhibitors used freelance writers for their newsletters and brochures. They also told me about the many trade magazines that were at the show. Since my mind was set on working with our customers and selling our products, I had failed to see the writing opportunities available to me. The next day (after losing tons of money at the Wheel of Fortune machine), I visited all of the trade publications to introduce myself and gather sample publications. If I hadn't

stopped at the penny slots, my mind probably wouldn't have thought about visiting exhibitions beyond my immediate demographic.

Karen Schwartz: About eight years ago, I attended my nephew's bar mitzvah in Cleveland. My



younger sister – the bar mitzvah boy's mother – had invited her college roommate to the event. I started chatting with this woman and learned that she worked at a real estate trade association in Chicago. She gave me the name of the editor of the association's main publication, whom I subsequently contacted, and I went on to write numerous articles for that very well-paying publication.

Jim Kepler: Years ago, before IWOC and with just one freelance job under my belt, I signed up for a series of proofreading classes at the Illinois Printing Industry Association. I rode the el home with another class member every week and finally, after a month, got up

enough courage to timidly hand her one of my newly-minted business cards. At the time the only thing I knew about "networks" was limited to ABC, CBS and NBC. I thought no more about it; again, I had no idea what networking was or how to do it.

Three years later I received a call from Follett Publishing



and was asked how soon I could write a couple of social science workbooks; the editor had been given my card by my former classmate. Three years! I couldn't even remember the woman's name; much less that she had my card. Since then, I go nowhere without my business cards.

Tip: If someone – anyone – asks you to recommend a good restaurant or book or computer wizard, jot the name on your business card and hand it over as you're talking. It will reinforce your helpfulness, courtesy, and knowledge. And don't limit this practice only to business contacts. You never know

when or where your card may be passed along to a potential new client. 📌

If you have a question you'd like answered in Question of the Month, please send your suggestions either to Karen Schwartz at writerks@sbcglocal.net or Joen Kinnan at jkinnan@comcast.net. We welcome all suggestions whether work-related or not.

PayPal Fixed; Early-Bird Deadline Now July 15

The PayPal membership renewal form is fixed, and we've extended the early-bird discount to July 15. It's tight, but we're behind schedule, so please renew ASAP by PayPal or paper forms plus check to the office. Paper form is new, so read instructions. We're also giving the 15 percent discount to new members who join during the renewal period, so tell interested nonmembers: Now is the time! Both forms available from members-only section on website. 📌

Renew IWOC Membership by July 15 and get 10% off your dues. Starts now! PayPal or Paper.



It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line

Browse Resources

See What's Doing in IWOC Events

WWW.IWOC.ORG

out of something that had emerged from a nearby patch of long grass. The something, it turned out, was a cottonmouth snake—a not-uncommon sight on the course. Only after the creature was dispatched to snake heaven (if there is one) did the executioner notice the brand markings on the bottom of the club. He looked a bit sheepish, embarrassed by his brutal faux pas, and apologized. But the one memory that really came out of nowhere this morning harkens back to yet another Saturday at Vieux Chênes, when I hooked up with one other single (a guy with a nasty and incurable hook) and two friendly, cart-riding Texans who I'm guessing were oilfield salesmen by trade. At the fifth tee, while we waited for the incurable hooker to tee up a shot we knew would take a Great Circle route to the fairway, one of the Texans reached into his bag and pulled out a putter.

"Whaddya think of that," he said, handing the putter to me like a trophy. And it did look like something to be proud of—an unusual club with what appeared to be a wooden shaft... a long, gnarled limb of driftwood, perhaps, or maybe a heavily knotted piece of pine. In any case, it was darkly golden, heavily shellacked, and it shone in the morning sunlight like a putter handed down from on high. And he kept it in a long, cloth sleeve to preserve its glory.

"It's beautiful," I said.

"Guess what it's made of."

I've never claimed an expertise in finished woods then or now—but I gave it a shot.

"Oak?"

He shook his head and grinned. "That there's a bull's dick." Whoa.

"Really," I offered with a polite-but-genuine sense of amazement—and quickly handed back the club, struck with a sudden anxious urge to have it out of my possession. I mean... I know the bull was not using it anymore and might even have been pleased to learn that it had taken a place of honor in this guy's golf bag... still...

"I know a place in Kentucky that makes everything out of 'em," he said, his voice brimming with the pride of the South.

"You don't say."

Then we heard the satisfying thwok of a driver making sweet-spot contact as the hooker launched his tee shot into the air somewhere over the Oklahoma panhandle... followed by a self-loathing, expletive-ridden tirade as it hooked back onto the fairway and skittered deep into the left rough.

I can't wait for Tuesday. 🍷

Calendar

July 8

IWOC Monthly Meeting. Blogger extraordinaire Blagica Bottigliero will explain how professional writers can use blogging and online communities to expand their networks and reach a wider audience of potential clients. Tuesday, July 8 at National-Louis University, Room 5008, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Program 6 p.m. Networking 5 p.m. Nonmembers, \$15; IWOC members free. For more information, call 847-855-6670 or visit www.iwoc.org.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted, but call ahead in case of cancellation. The groups welcome nonmembers. If there's no group in your area, why not start one? Contact webmaster@iwoc.org.

July 24 (4th Thursday)

IWOOP Monthly Lunch. Near-west suburbanites meet at noon on the 4th Thursday of the month for lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. This group doesn't always meet, so be sure to check to see if there is to be a lunch meeting this month before you show up.

August 7 (1st Thursday)

IWORP 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 info, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

June Recap *Continued from page 3.*

leadership, *Screen* was one of the first publications to put its content online. ReelChicago.com has already incorporated viral marketing techniques, which Ratny explained as finding the people with lots of connections and letting them spread the word. Ratny seems to be a rare person who does not fully understand how new Internet-related technologies work but has an innate understanding of how they can be used to reach out to and appeal to an audience.

Even this admirer of new technology has a soft spot for print. When Rategan asked if there is still a need for storytelling, Ratny brought up the *New Yorker*, which she said is a favorite magazine, even though the stories are "never-ending." She's convinced that some print publications will survive on the strength of their storytelling. "Some say print will go away," she said, "but I think there's something magical about print." 🍷

IWOC Welcomes New Members

Marcie Hill
Sarah Lockhart
Frank Mauceri