



Remember the 3 P's of promotion

These days, writing is just part of the story; focus your efforts as well on these pillars of marketing theory

WE'RE PERHAPS NOT all as hard-nosed as Samuel Johnson, who once said, "No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money."

But unless you expect someone, someday, to come to you begging to publish everything you've ever written *and* pay you handsomely for it, the effort you make in marketing your work could be as important as the time you spend writing.

You don't need any fancy strategies. Simply build your efforts around three pillars of marketing theory: product, placement and price.

Product

No matter what you're working on—short story, children's novel, how-to book or travel piece—you should develop a strong *statement of purpose* to convey the central theme or intent of your work. This keeps you on-topic as you work on the project. It's also essential when you pitch a work in progress to an editor or publisher. And it can be a valuable element in promoting the published work.

In the past, you could hook editors with great ideas; they'd help you develop them into publishable pieces. These days, limited budgets and staff shortages mean most editors are looking for a product that's as close to publishable as possible.

When you're ready to submit—whether it's a query letter, article or complete manuscript—make sure it's the best it can be. Check and double-check that your work is accurate and error-free, and that it conforms to the individual publication's guidelines or

letter of assignment.

While your work in progress—whether it's on your computer or circulating among publishers and editors—is your primary product, *you* are the secondary product.

Each contact you make with an editor, agent, publisher, reader or bookstore customer helps define you as someone who means business.

Develop appropriate marketing tools such as business stationery and a Web site, and develop a professional manner, as well. Your business card and letterhead, and the way you conduct yourself by phone, e-mail and in person, reflect the quality of your work.

Placement

A few years ago, when new writer Cathleen Vecchiato's short story was accepted by a literary journal she'd only seen listed in a market directory, she was so thrilled she ordered extra copies for friends and family. Months later, when the journal appeared in her mailbox, she was mortified to learn that the photocopied and coil-bound publication was not the elegant literary journal where she had imagined seeing her story and byline.

Identify markets where you'd most like your work to appear, and then perfect your aim so you hit the mark. Collecting samples of every target publi-

cation can be unrealistic and expensive. Buy as many magazines as you can afford, and then use the resources of your writing community to learn about additional market opportunities and the publication experiences of other writers. Subscribe to online listservs and writers' bulletin boards. Join writing organizations. Then follow up on the leads they generate.

A number of print directories are out there, but more frequently updated Web resources such as *The Writer's* own Market Listings page, New Pages and Writers Write (see Resources, page 46), may be better at helping you keep current with who's looking for what and how your work might fit in.

Price

Payment doesn't always come as cold cash. All of the following examples count as legitimate forms of payment if they help you reach your goal: exposure from a personal essay published in a national newspaper; the prestige of a story in a literary journal that pays only copies; an article and bio (which includes a pitch for your other projects and credits) in a new nonpaying publication that might later lead to

paying assignments.

Perhaps you began by writing articles for free; as you accumulate writing credits, you may continue to do so. But

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for many, work went on dawn till dusk.
from can to can't

• And once work was over, it was time to debauch. *cut the wolf loose*

An excellent place to establish voice through word choice is in transitions between paragraphs. In a section on Seth Bullock, the Deadwood pioneer whose letter to Congress helped establish Yellowstone Park, I described how he ran away from home in his teens to have adventures in the Wild West. His older sister caught him and sent him back to Canada. The next paragraph opens: “But young Seth had jackrabbits in his socks, and the second time he came to America it was for good.”

I was careful not to overdo this reliance on period diction to establish voice—after all, I didn’t want to come off as Yosemite Sam. Familiarity breeds

contempt, and I strove to avoid the Zane Grey, B-Western clichés (tin-horn, pard, yellow-bellied, skunk-bit coyote, etc.) in favor of authentic diction less commonly known to the pop culture: *whack the cork* (shut up); *buck out in smoke* (die in a gunfight); *stretching the blanket a mite* (exaggerating); *syphillization* (civilization).

Of course, voice isn’t just a sprinkling of colorful phrases. It includes sentence style, the manner in which point of view is used, mood and tone. I had noticed how some historians tend to set scenes in the style of fiction writers, thus pulling the reader in. What follows is the conclusion of a key paragraph describing 1876 Deadwood in my early draft:

A famous 1876 photo of Main Street in Deadwood shows a town already built up

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while still building. The street looks more like a muddy buffalo wallow than a thoroughfare and seems completely blocked by building materials.

What I wrote was true, but I was simply describing the photograph as a journalist might. My revision shifted away from the photograph but provided just as much truth. By incorporating fiction technique with images, and judiciously employing direct address in the second person, both immediacy and voice emerge:

The main street was a thick gumbo of mud, night slops, tripes, all of it attracting a shifting black blanket of flies. And if your claim played out, the saloons paid good money for rat catchers.

Voice is the personality and identity of writing, the quickest way we might recognize who the author is without being told a name. Establishing a strong voice, in fiction or nonfiction, helps writers avoid the bland anonymity that makes it impossible to hook, and hold, readers. Finding a voice in nonfiction can be especially challenging, but some sly creative thinking (borrowing from fiction) helped me to, well, “jump over a snake.” #

John Edward Ames

John Edward Ames’ most recent novel, *Deadwood Gulch*, is due out in November from Signet under the name Ralph Compton. As Judd Cole, the New Orleans writer wrote the Cheyenne and Wild Bill series of Westerns, and his historical novel *The Unwritten Order* was a finalist for a Spur Award.

BEFORE AND AFTER

How voice emerges

Problem

One important chapter in *The Real Deadwood* is “Panning for Color,” a detailed description of working and living conditions for Black Hills prospectors in 1876. I needed a vivid immediacy that gave voice to the writing, but my careful reportorial stance, in the first draft, produced functional but uninspired paragraphs such as this:

Working conditions for those early prospectors defy belief today.

They spent most of their day in ice-cold streams, quickly ruining the only shoes they had. While their feet and legs were numb with cold, their faces, necks, and arms were cured to leather by a merciless sun. Food was always scarce and awful, overworked backs always sore, the Indian threat always present—the dreaded sound of an

eagle-bone whistle meant the Sioux were in battle mode.

Solution

I rewrote this and other passages to incorporate more period diction. I also “set the stage” a la fiction writing and literally pulled the reader into the scene by direct address:

But put yourself in their soggy and ruined shoes. All day long your feet and legs are in ice-cold water while a sun hotter than the hinges of hell bakes your face, neck, and arms lobster red. Your stomach is pinched with hunger, your back feels like it’s been hammered hard, and one ear is cocked for the shrill, terrifying sound of eagle-bone whistles—O Jerusalem! The Sioux in battle mode!

—John Edward Ames