

Leaning into Your Expertise



FALL 2021

04

*A Quarterly Publication  
of the American Society of  
Journalists and Authors*

# ASJA MAGAZINE

## DEVELOPING YOUR EXPERT SELF



# CONTENTS

FALL 2021

## Features

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>>>>

# 22

WHEN KEYWORDS  
DRIVE CONTENT:  
SEO STRATEGIES FOR  
FREELANCERS

by Kelly K. James

>>>>

# 30

KNOWLEDGE IS KEY: WHAT  
ALL WRITERS NEED TO KNOW  
BEFORE SIGNING WITH A  
LITERARY AGENT

by Rudri Bhatt Patel

## Plus

---

>>>>

# 16

MEET ASJA'S NEW  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:  
JAMES BRANNIGAN

by Laura Laing

>>>>

# 26

PROVING YOUR VALUE:  
GET MORE CLIENTS BY  
EXPLAINING THE VALUE OF  
YOUR CONTENT MARKETING

by Margie Zable Fisher

>>>>

# 34

NETWORKING FOR  
WRITERS IN AN ONLINE AGE

by Ami Neiberger-Miller

>>>>

# 18

ASJA HONORS SEVEN  
MEMBERS WITH  
2021 EXCEPTIONAL  
SERVICE AWARDS



18



22

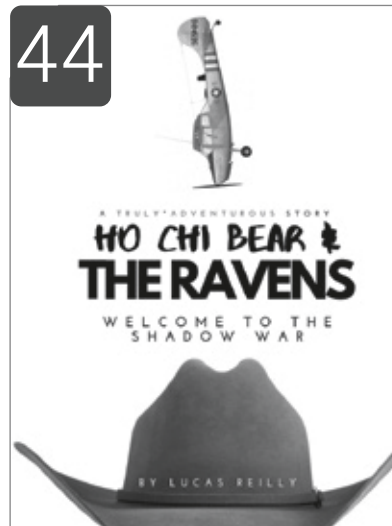


26



# ASJA MAGAZINE

44



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## COLUMNS

- 5 From the President's Desk
- 6 From the Editor
- 13 2022 Conference News
- 14 From the Agent
- 40 Tools of the Trade
- 46 The Last Word



## DEPARTMENTS

- 8 Member News
- 12 Paycheck
- 12 Events Calendar
- 42 Volunteer Spotlight:  
Kristine Hansen
- 44 Market Report:  
*Truly\* Adventurous*



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*Founded in 1948, the American Society of Journalists and Authors is the nation's professional association of independent and entrepreneurial nonfiction writers. ASJA is a primary voice in representing freelancers' interests, serving as spokesperson for their right to control and profit from the uses of their work wherever it appears. ASJA brings leadership in establishing professional and ethical standards, as well as in recognizing and encouraging the pursuit of excellence in nonfiction writing. Since 2010, the ASJA Educational Foundation has been offering programming that covers all aspects of professional, independent writing for both established and aspiring writers. ASJA headquarters is in New York City.*

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LAURA LAING

*Freelance Writer  
and ASJA President*



*From the President's Desk*

# WRITING WITH A HILLBILLY ACCENT

Growing up in Southwest Virginia, my accent was as thick as a blackberry bush growing in full sun. I said things like, “Whycha open the winda? We ‘bout to git some weather.” I called my father “Diddy” and my mother “Momma.” If I needed something to write with, I asked for an “ink pen,” because otherwise, you might think I needed to replace a missing button. I can’t even phonetically spell the way I still say “oil.”

Everyone talked like I did. We were taught never to say “ain’t” in school, and I followed that rule. I learned proper grammar and used it when I needed to. Honestly, though, I didn’t notice my accent most times. Trout don’t know they’re swimming in creek water.

But when I visited my cousins in Northern Virginia, their friends were amazed by my accent. “Say something,” they’d shout, and when I couldn’t think of anything to say, they’d feed me lines. I was a party trick. And I started to feel real dumb.

By the time I got to college, I knew I’d better talk right. When my hillbilly accent slipped out, I could feel the room go cold. Fellow students would stare at me, and I worried that they thought I was stupid. I started enunciating the endings of words and finding the different ways an “e” and an “i” could feel in my mouth. I still had a slight twang, but people began telling me that my accent was pretty. They stopped gawking, and I liked that better.

At the same time, I came out as a lesbian, and I learned completely different ways to hide myself and to be found. Being closeted meant I could get a job after graduation. Befriending the field hockey team meant a new set of friends, many of whom were also queer. Cutting all of my hair off meant I might be recognized by other lesbians (an experiment that failed miserably). Changing my accent split me from where I grew up. Coming out to myself split me from a far larger part of the world, including my hometown.

I don’t tell these stories because they’re sad. They’re ordinary, really. In his fantastic podcast, “Dolly Parton’s America,” Jad Abumrad devotes an entire episode to the process of trading in the Appalachian accent for something more mainstream, advice that is still passed down to teenagers leaving the mountains for college.

And millions of queer people around the world have found themselves leading double lives, losing life-long friends, and being rejected by their families (something that I, thankfully, never experienced). But even straight folks with midwestern accents can tell stories of how they changed themselves to fit in. It’s but one element of the human condition.

I’ve had to hide both my accent and queerness at various times throughout my life. And when I hear the lilt of the mountains in the grocery line or identify tell-tale signs of queerness at the local coffee shop, my heart flutters a bit. That sense of kinship, of belonging, can’t be beaten. In those moments, I long to share my stories, the maps of my childhood, the lists of people we might know in common, the memories of marches on Washington, and the dull fear of rejection or rage. Age has made me more eager for these connections, more willing to seek them out. These connections have also informed my writing career, but it took time to embrace that I am an expert whose voice is worth listening to.

As a staff writer for a weekly business paper in 2005, I was told by my editor that I could not report on LGBTQ+ issues. At that time, the ethics were clear: queer reporters might introduce bias into those stories. I had already rocked the boat at a previous publication by quietly coordinating a public rally against anti-gay legislation in Virginia’s General Assembly. I didn’t feel that I could push back on something more, even though I knew that my experience as a queer person allowed me better insight into those stories. Two years before, I had taken a reporter from another newspaper to task for putting the word marriage in quotes in a story about same-sex marriage. (Same-sex marriage wasn’t legal at the time, but my wife and I had been married in our church years before.) In an email, that straight reporter told me he had buckled under pressure from his editors to include the quotation marks, even though he thought they were unnecessary. He also thanked me for sharing my story, saying that he’d never use the quotation marks again. But I didn’t see my experience as expertise.

Since then, these ethics have changed dramatically. Queer reporters are not only welcome to report LGBTQ+ stories but may

be expected to. That can be problematic, too. Writers—especially freelancers—should be able to choose the beats they cover and decide not to report on a particular story for a variety of reasons. And encouraging a marginalized person to be the voice for an entire, diverse community is unfair at best. But I created a career of writing about things that mattered to me because of who I am and where I’m from. It’s still hard to come out to editors. I always hear a tiny voice telling me that mentioning my wife might be a step too far.

Funnily, my accent has been much harder to embrace. This has a lot to do with the unrelenting stereotypes about Appalachia and then the blame that progressive America put on the region for Trump’s presidency. (For the record, I cringed when Hillary Rodham Clinton erased an entire region by proclaiming confidently that “we’re going to put a lot of coal companies and coal miners out of business.”) I am proud of where I grew up, but when meeting with New York editors and publishers, I automatically, without thinking, turn my voice into something that I’ve grown to dislike. It feels like pretending, like shame. At the same time, I haven’t lived in the Appalachian Mountains since I was a teenager, so when I slip into my accent, I feel mocking somehow. Because I abandoned it—the accent and the place—I question my right to say “lightening bug” instead of firefly and “haint” instead of ghost.

Expertise is a funny thing. It includes the things we’ve been trained in or educated about, like engineering or baking. It also includes who we are: parents, people of color, avid readers, gamers, dog lovers. While some of our work as freelancers is done purely to pay the bills, other assignments pull from our whole selves, including where we grew up and who we love.

Blowing down straw houses of assumptions and stereotypes can feel exhausting but also thrilling, no matter the subject. Countering misunderstandings through writing has been one of my greatest pleasures, but first, I had to embrace my experience as expertise. I feel the burden of responsibility, yes, but also a powerful hope that because of something I wrote, someone might learn something important about other human beings and, selfishly, about me.



STEPHANIE  
VOZZA

*Freelance Writer  
and ASJA Editor*



*From  
the Editor*

# LESSONS IN RESOURCEFULNESS

**W**e're all experts at something. For example, I can make the perfect salad dressing with my eyes shut, getting the proportions of olive oil and red wine vinegar just right. My family always asks me to bring the salad to holiday dinners. (I'm also a pretty good business writer.).

Figuring out what you're good at, however, isn't always so clear. Several years ago, I thought I should get into health writing because I'd heard it's a lucrative niche. I sent out dozens of LOIs and wrote pitches to magazines with little success. So, I hired a coach to help me figure out what I was doing wrong. She looked at my materials and couldn't figure out why I wasn't getting more work. Then we chatted about my background, and I mentioned that I had launched an ecommerce business and sold it to FranklinCovey five years later.

"Why aren't you writing about small business???" she yelled into the phone.

It seemed so obvious, but I had overlooked my expertise in the area, thinking small business would mean small paychecks. I was wrong. Very wrong.

If you're not sure of your strengths, it can help to get an outside opinion. But asking someone, "What are my strengths?" can feel awkward.

I recently interviewed Samantha Clarke, author of *Love It or Leave It: How to Be Happy at*

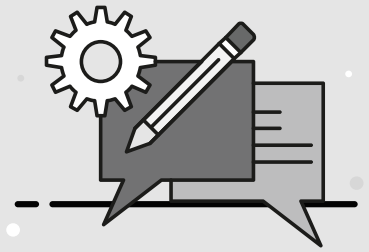
*Work*, for an article. She suggests asking your network these questions:

- *What are the key things that you come to me for?*
- *How do I inspire you in your life?*
- *What are the ways I solve problems for you?*

"It takes us out of our head," she said. "The people who are closest to us are the people who know us and our core skills. It's a great way to start deciphering who you are and how you show up in the world."

Leaning into your expertise and developing your expert self can help you flourish, and that's what this issue is all about. From proving your value to honing your skills and maximizing your results, you'll find articles that help you support your excellence.

Once I leaned into writing about small business, my own small freelance business took off. So, what are you good at?



## NEW ASJA MEMBERS!

OCTOBER 2021

### PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS

Jennifer Bryant  
White Plains, N.Y.

Emily Erickson  
Playa Vista, Calif.

Hilary Hattenbach  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Michael Hodgson  
Evanston, Ill.

George Hulme  
Los Angeles, Calif.

Jana Meisenholder  
Columbia, Md.

Amanda Norcross  
Chicago, Ill.

Leslie Quander Wooldridge  
Latham, N.Y.

Jessica Rao  
Fort Myers, Fla.

Laurie Ruettimann  
San Jose, Calif.

Katherine Todrys  
Farmington, Mich.

Christine Wolf  
Washington, D.C.

### ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Christine Arata  
West Chester, Penn.

Crystal Chan  
San Francisco, Calif.

Courtney Hall  
Raleigh, N.C.



# ASJA >>>> Membership Benefits

## *Often Forgotten Membership Benefits*

Did you remember that ASJA provides membership benefits that go beyond this magazine, the annual conference and Client Connections, Pitch Slams and Special Interest Group (SIG) events?

KNOW SOMEONE WHO MIGHT BE ELIGIBLE  
TO JOIN ASJA? SEND THEM OUR WAY!

>>> Some benefits you may not have  
taken advantage of lately include: <<<



### **Delta Airlines**

Special discounted airfare  
for ASJA members traveling  
across the world, up to  
10% of the fare.



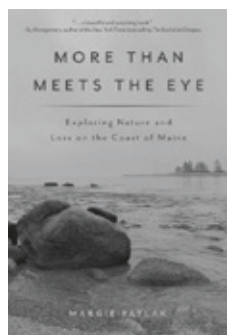
### **Avis Car Rental**

A corporate discount  
program for ASJA  
members to enjoy  
low rates.



## MEMBER NEWS

### »»»» Book News



Award-winning science writer **Margie Patlak**'s nature memoir *More Than Meets the Eye: Exploring Nature and Loss on the Coast of Maine* was published on May 1, 2021 by Down East Books/Rowman and Littlefield.



**Candy Arrington**'s new book *Life on Pause: Learning to Wait Well* was recently released. It explores why we view waiting negatively, the emotions inherent in life pauses, and the benefits of learning to wait well.



**Liz Alterman**'s young adult thriller *He'll Be Waiting* was released April 6, 2021, and was praised by award-winning author Keri Kelly for combining a "coming-of-age plot about grief, trauma, and love with an edge-of-your-seat thriller filled with dynamic and unforgettable primary and secondary characters."

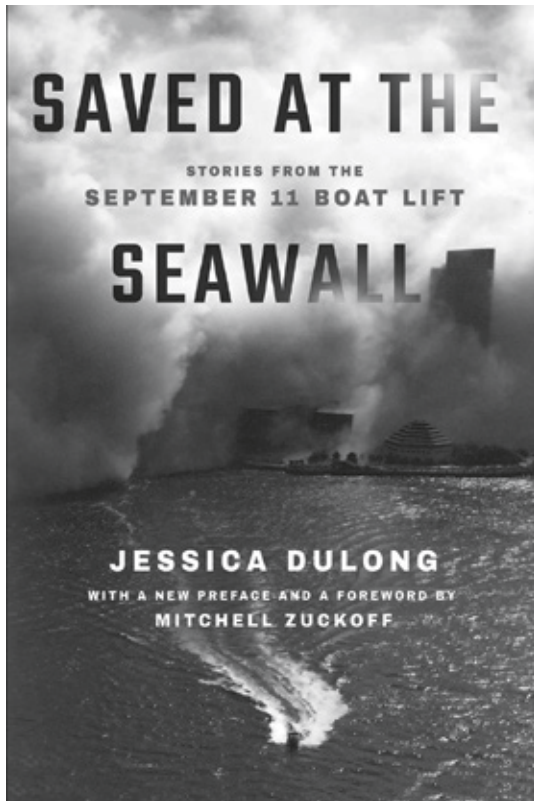


**Susan Johnston Taylor** has sold a children's poetry collection to Gnome Road Publishing. *Colorful Creatures: Poems About Animals in Surprising Shades* takes kids around the world to discover a rainbow of animal colors and poetic forms. It's slated for publication in spring 2023.



**Randi Minetor** saw the release of two books on June 1: *Birding Florida*, the second in the Falcon Guides Birdfinding series featuring photography by her husband, Nic Minetor; and the tenth edition of *New York Off the Beaten Path*, an extensive revision of the 2007 version (written by other authors).





**Jessica DuLong's** book *Saved at the Seawall: Stories from the September 11 Boat Lift* is now available. It is a definitive history of the 9/11 boat lift, when mariners evacuated nearly 500,000 people from Manhattan. Journalist Garrett M. Graff called it "the greatest 9/11 story you've never heard."



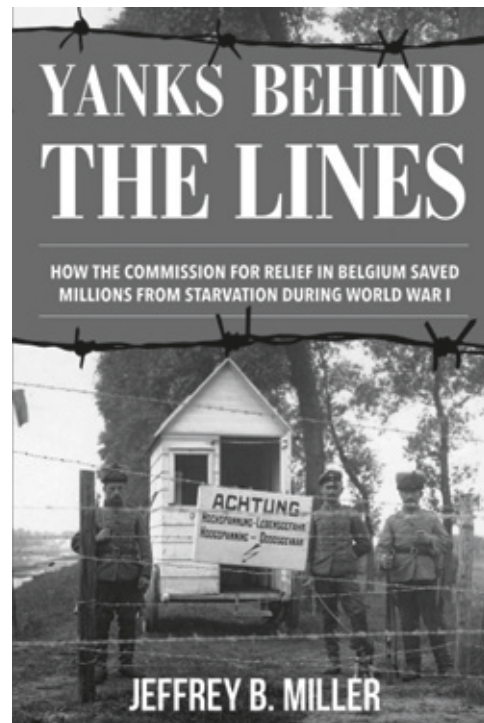
Longtime ASJA member and former ASJA Weekly editor **Barbara DeMarco-Barrett** announced her new book *Palm Springs Noir*, published by Akashic, which launched July 6, 2021. Barbara edited the collection and contributed a story. Kirkus gave it a nice review in its May 1, 2021 issue. Barbara's first book, *Pen on Fire*, won the ASJA Best Book Award in 2005.



*Got news to share with ASJA?*

*Submit your items at*

*<https://asja.org/Member-Networking/submit-member-news>*



**Jeffrey B. Miller's** book *Yanks Behind the Lines* (Rowman & Littlefield) is a finalist in War & Military History in Foreword's Indies Book Awards, and a finalist in History in the Colorado Book Awards. Kirkus states: "It is dramatically gripping ... An impressive blend of painstaking historical research and riveting storytelling."



## Articles and Accolades

**Christine Arata** published an article, "When Your Therapist Recommends Buddhist Meditation," on *Spiritual Direction*, a Catholic website.



**Harvey Rachlin** wrote an opinion article for the *New York Daily News* entitled "A New Good-Cop Routine: Have Police Officers Do Out Positive Reinforcement Too." The article makes a case that law enforcement should reward good behavior by civilians.



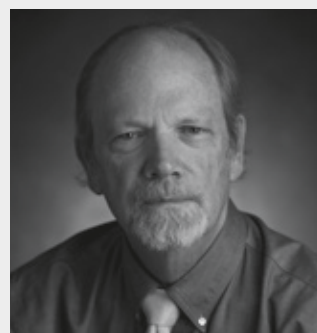
**Deborah Lynn Blumberg** had an op-ed published in the New York publication *The Forward*. The column deals with the PRO Act, a bill currently before the Senate that has a concerning clause in it for freelancers, including freelance writers and editors. In her piece, Blumberg shares a story of her great great grandfather Gertz, an entrepreneur, and relates how she's worried that the PRO Act could damage the small business she's built as a freelancer.

**Dan Zukowski's** latest feature in the July 2021 issue of *Trains* magazine describes how the Red Cross helped fight the 1918 flu pandemic during wartime with the aid of Pullman railroad cars outfitted as rolling medical laboratories. Research included Army Medical Department records, Surgeon General reports of the time, contemporaneous newspaper accounts, speaking with archivists and authors, and retrieving files and photos from the Library of Congress.

**Kris Herndon** published an article about a new surgical wrist implant in the *Greenwich Sentinel*.



**Katie Navarra** has completed Level I facilitator training for equine assisted life coaching. Her story "Leading the Way," published in the Spring 2021 issue of *Chrome Magazine*, describes how the work provides powerful transformations, whether personal development and leadership/team development.



Thoroughbred racing historian and former ASJA president **Milt Toby** published "¡Viva Cañonero!" in the May 2021 issue of *Mid-Atlantic Thoroughbred* magazine. The cover story celebrated the 50th anniversary of the colt's victory in the Preakness Stakes at Pimlico Racetrack in Baltimore, Md.



**Harriet Riley**, a New Orleans-based freelance journalist, recently published her latest article for *Mississippi Folklife* on the story of family-owned Peter's Pottery and their hopes to revitalize the historic Freedman's town of Mound Bayou in the Mississippi Delta.

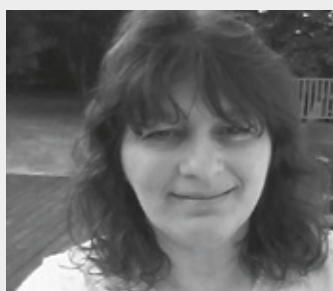


**Veda Boyd Jones** has a short fiction mystery in the May 24, 2021 issue of checkout magazine *Woman's World* and a short story in the June 14, 2021 issue.

**Holly Leber Simmons** published an article for *Northern Virginia Magazine* on a topic every parent of a school-aged child is thinking about: how to prepare children emotionally for the (hopeful) return to full-time in-person school in September.



**Christina Hernandez Sherwood** wrote the cover story for the Spring/Summer 2021 issue of *Columbia Medicine* magazine about the hunt for COVID-19 antibody treatments. It includes the story of how Regeneron's therapy — the one President Trump received during his infection — grew out of an idea proposed in a Columbia biochemistry lab decades ago.



**Bobbi Dempsey** has been named a reporting fellow at the Economic Hardship Reporting Project, where she will write essays and reported pieces on topics related to poverty and income inequality. She will also continue to serve as an economic justice fellow at Community Change.



**Dan Drollette** is attending the Logan Science Journalism Program, a joint project of the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) and the University of Chicago, as a biomedical fellow. The program offers science journalists a change to immerse themselves in the process of basic biomedical and environmental research.

Profile writer **Michele Meyer's** feature "The Architects of Glamour: Mark Badgley and James Mischka," on the fashion designers behind Badgley Mischka, ran in the May 2021 issue of *Palm Beach Illustrated*.

**Christina Leimer** published an article about San Francisco's Supervisors asking corporate landlords to help their tenants with pandemic-related back rent and another about home funerals, a practice that increased during the pandemic.



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# PAYCHECK

## PERSPECTIVE

### IIAD TRADE PUBLICATION

Article

**Scope of work:** 1000 words**Total fee:** \$1,000.00**Article terms:** POP

Published by Imagination Content, last minute article on "How Can Community and COVID Exist?" about communicating virtually on projects for interior designers. I was provided with contacts. Payment slow mainly because they neglected to send me a W9 form, which I delayed sending back to them. After that it took about a month. No edits. The editor is great.

**Feedback:** 10

## ARGYLE GROUP

White paper

**Scope of work:** 2000 words**Total fee:** \$3,500.00**Article terms:** Acceptance

I was hired to write a white paper for one of the firm's clients, based on material provided and supplemented by material I found. Argyle merged with another company in the midst of my assignment and for some reason that made payment more difficult. It took more than 90 days for payment to be made and that was made only because I refused to submit other work in process. I'm still waiting for payment of another piece.

**Feedback:** 1

*Help your fellow members by submitting a paycheck report. Simply visit the Member section of the ASJA website. Under the Paycheck tab, click on Report a Paycheck. Knowledge is power!*



*To protect the confidentiality of information filed with Paycheck reports, additional details, including rights and more, are available at [asja.org/paycheck/report-a-payment](https://asja.org/paycheck/report-a-payment)*

## EDUCATIONAL

### PUBLISHER

Books

**Scope of work:** 800 words**Total fee:** \$1,000.00**Article terms:** Acceptance

I LOVE writing for this client! They publish HiLo books (high interest level, low reading level) and I've written two fiction readers for them (assigned at 800-1,000 words but I've tended towards the lower end of that range). Payment for the first one came a week after I submitted, before I'd even invoiced. Revisions on both readers were very minor, and I hope to write many more!

**Feedback:** 10

## ASJA EVENTS CALENDAR

### *Virtual Pitch Slam and Virtual Client Connections*

Check the ASJA website for the latest details.

### *ASJA 51st Annual Conference*

May 1-2, 2022

Hyatt Regency Jersey City on the Hudson  
Jersey City, N.J.



## Announcing ASJA's Annual Conference 2022

# WE'RE MOVING TO JERSEY CITY!

Mark your calendars for ASJA's first in-person conference in two years. Let's gather at our new venue, Hyatt Regency Jersey City on the Hudson, with unparalleled views of New York City.

Sessions for journalists, content marketers, and book authors, as well as information you need to hone your craft and build your business.

Client Connections (for Professional Members only) on Monday, May 2: Your chance to meet with the top editors, publishers, agents, and clients in the business.



### GET A LOAD OF THIS VIEW!

Client Connections will be held on Monday in the Manhattan Ballroom with a mind-boggling view of New York City. Then we'll host a networking cocktail hour to close the conference. Make sure your travel plans include this special event!



MAY 1 & 2, 2022

➤ *Registration opens in late 2021. Check the ASJA website for details.*



### Jersey City? Isn't that too far away?

Heck no, it's just across the Hudson River from our previous hotel—an easy ride on the New Jersey PATH Train or if you want a more scenic route, the New York Waterway Ferry. From there, you'll be at the Financial District, where you can continue to the World Trade Center or take the subway, a taxi, or Uber/Lyft to anywhere in Manhattan. And getting to Jersey City is a cinch flying into Newark Airport.







## >> Eavesdropping on the Agent



# ANSWERING WRITERS' BURNING BOOK PUBLISHING QUESTIONS

**B**ack in February, ASJA Weekly editor Holly Leber Simmons voiced, as she called it, “a wee bit of a rant” about editors and marketing directors habitually deleting pitches and LOIs from writers who are unknown to them. Besides this being a waste of the writer’s time, said Holly rightfully, it’s “just rude.”

Then she suggested using a clever “keyboard shortcut” most email providers offer that allows you to auto-populate a standard brief, courteous response. I’m all for it.

I’m sure that we agents receive as many pitches from strangers as do editors and marketing directors, and maybe more. I respond to all the pitches and inquiries I get, even if it’s just a one-sentence “thanks, but no thanks,” and refer the writer to my website so they can get a better idea of what I am interested in. I understand from my colleagues that I’m rare in this regard—apparently lots of agents do not reply to people they don’t know if there’s no interest.

As unfortunate as that is, what I find even more unpleasant are the editors who don’t respond to agents, including agents they’ve been pitched to and even bought books from for years.

Shocking? Yes, at least to some I mention this to. Not because we’re agents and are therefore superior beings, but because, as Holly said, it’s just rude.

If I can find the time to respond to everyone, why can’t you? We agents refer to such elusive editors as black holes. We know it’s unlikely we’ll hear from them—maybe the project we’re pitching is simply too small potatoes for them—but we email them again and again anyway because...well, that’s our job.

I want my clients to know I’m approaching all the relevant editors for their books, and if they ignore me, at least I tried. I’ll never forget the time I approached an editor at a small publishing house about a project I thought she’d love, and after a half-dozen or so non-responses, I finally contacted her boss to ask why this editor wasn’t answering.

“If she ignores you that means she’s not interested,” he said.

Well, I’m a college grad—I could have deduced that on my own—but still. We’re both professionals. Shouldn’t we treat each other as such?

As an agent I also follow up assiduously, making sure to get some feedback for my clients about their book proposals, even if it’s a pass. I think editors reviewing a pitch or a proposal owe writers that much.

I get frustrated with clients who say, “Well, Linda, since we didn’t hear back from so-and-so, I guess it’s a pass,” and while it probably is, I am relentless about squeezing some answer out of these editors, pro or con.

Editor feedback is valuable when it’s thoughtful (I’m not talking about flip answers like “It’s not right for my list”), which is why I push so hard to get it. I’m sure some of these editors are sick of hearing from me for the sixth or seventh time, but I wear my badge of Bad/Annoying Cop with pride.

So, maybe you feel a little better now hearing that even literary agents occasionally get the silent treatment from editors. What should you do if you’re treated that way? If you have developed a thick skin—which as an experienced freelancer, you should have by now—then you keep trying and don’t take it personally. And if you’re going to be wounded every time some editor or marketing director ignores you, two can play that game: Just ignore them, and move on.



LINDA KONNER

*ASJA member and president of  
the Linda Konner Literary Agency*

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*“Editor feedback is valuable when it’s thoughtful, which is why I push so hard to get it. I’m sure some of these editors are sick of hearing from me for the sixth or seventh time, but I wear my badge of Bad/Annoying Cop with pride.”*

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**Got a Question for Linda?**

Send it to [asjamagazineeditor@gmail.com](mailto:asjamagazineeditor@gmail.com)

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Linda Konner launched the Linda Konner Literary Agency in 1996. She represents approximately 75 authors of adult nonfiction books.



LAURA LAING

*Freelance Writer  
and ASJA President*

# MEET ASJA'S NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JAMES BRANNIGAN

James Brannigan has had first-hand experience as a freelance writer. As a public relations undergrad at Iona College in New York, his mentor, the late Thomas Callahan, helped him get his first bylines and coached him on pitching a story to *Rolling Stone*. The magazine passed on his music-festival pitch, and James got a clear picture of what the members of his future client (ASJA) go through on a regular basis. It wasn't until he read Callahan's obituary that James learned that his mentor was a member. By then, he was already working for ASJA at Kellen.

James became Executive Director of ASJA on July 1, following the five-year tenure of Holly Koenig. Holly was promoted to Executive Vice President last spring, and it was time to turn the reins over to Brannigan, who had been preparing for the position for several years. "I am thrilled, pleased and proud that James will be moving into the role of ASJA Executive Director," says Holly, who will remain an active part of ASJA's management. "Behind the scenes at Kellen, James has received extensive leadership and skills training. He's not just deserving but he's ready, and he's excited for this new challenge."

"I have a strong passion for journalism," Brannigan says, "and had dreamed of becoming a journalist while I was growing up." This is a big reason that his work with ASJA is so rewarding. He also has a passion for association management, having worked with the Society of Pediatric Pathology, the Association of Fundraising Professionals NYC Chapter, and the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America in the past, and currently with the Home



*"I appreciate the passion that volunteers bring to the table," he says. "It's infectious and makes the work that much more rewarding."*

JAMES BRANNIGAN

Fashion Products Association and the New York Society of Association Executives. James has been with Kellen since high school, first as an intern when he was a senior and then as a summer temp as a college student. He joined Kellen full-time in 2015, just months after earning his undergraduate degree. In the spring of 2020, he began the MBA program at CUNY Baruch College, focusing on finance and general management.

If you know James, it's because you've volunteered for ASJA, you've sent an email to the main ASJA address, or you've met him at the registration table at one of our in-person conferences. In particular, his positive, can-do approach to the problems that inevitably arise when hosting a conference like ours has been invaluable to our volunteers, speakers, and moderators. And then there's Client Connections. "Wendy Helfenbaum took me under her wing when I first started at ASJA and was told I'd be working on a 'speed-dating program' that she runs," James says. "We've now worked on more than a half-dozen Client Connections programs together, each with a new wrinkle compared to the last." This trial by fire didn't frighten James away. Instead, he's become one of Client Connection's most ardent promoters and advocates, putting in countless hours to overcome the technical difficulties of this unique program.

"Something that many members may not realize is that staff feels the same levels of frustration with our website [and technology] as members do," he notes. He feels fortunate to be the staff lead on redesigning our website and looks forward to it being live. "ASJA with 21st century tech? Sign me up!"

But it's not technology that gets James excited about coming to work—it's the people. "I appreciate the passion that volunteers bring to the table," he says. "It's infectious and makes the work that much more rewarding." ASJA's mission to support independent



*"This is an exciting time to be a part of ASJA, and I'm grateful to be serving as the Executive Director as we go through this journey."*

JAMES BRANNIGAN

professional writers is also a big motivator, and he takes his role in advancing our profession seriously. Of course, his enthusiasm for our work must be tempered by the limitations of time. According to the math, he should be spending about 40% of his workweek on ASJA responsibilities, but with conferences and unexpected emergencies, that balance is never realistic. "The plus side is that when my schedule permits, I'm able to be incredibly responsive," he says. "The flip side is when my schedule is more unforgiving, and my inbox is starting to fill up with emails."

James also balances the day-to-day tasks with big-picture planning. He remembers the 2018 Board of Directors strategy meeting in Baltimore a year after he joined the team. "Part of that discussion was looking at what ASJA was and what ASJA could be," he says. "I can confidently say that in my time with the organization, we've evolved into the organization we thought we could be and set ourselves up for the organization we want to be." That includes building a new website and advocating on behalf of our members and other freelance writers. But he's not stopping there. "I strongly believe that ASJA can become the lead organization for the profession and serve as the go-to destination for clients looking for professional freelancers."

Growing membership is a central initiative for the coming years. The new website will help considerably, and having James at the helm is another benefit. Part of the reason for ASJA's decline in membership is that we haven't been able to attract younger members. James' age and his experience increasing the membership of other organizations at Kellen helps set us up for success.

We're looking forward to taking advantage of having a GenZ at the helm to guide us in bringing in new Professional and Associate members to the ASJA fold.

"I have seen first-hand the potential ASJA has to grow, and a part of that comes in embracing the philosophy of what ASJA can be, not what we've always been," he says. We will remain a professional organization that vets its writer members based on experience and clips, but James is looking forward to ASJA having a louder bullhorn that will reach qualified members who don't know about us yet. "This is an exciting time to be a part of ASJA, and I'm grateful to be serving as the Executive Director as we go through this journey."

James also looks forward to meeting more members, and he encourages us to get involved by volunteering—in small or big ways. "I hope we'll work together in the coming year," he says.



*ASJA Honors Seven Members with 2021*

# EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE AWARDS

**F**rom time to time, ASJA members go above and beyond to serve members and other professional freelance writers.

Since 2019, seven ASJA members have worked tirelessly to oppose several anti-freelance bills and laws sweeping the country. In honor of their tremendous work, ASJA recognizes **Randy Dotinga, Debbie Abrams Kaplan, Kim Kavin, JoBeth McDaniel, Jen Singer, Milt Toby, and Karon Warren** with 2021 Exceptional Service Awards. This special honor is given out only periodically when members have demonstrated sustained efforts beyond the ordinary.




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*WHILE THE FIGHT IS FAR FROM OVER, ASJA  
WOULD LIKE TO STOP AND RECOGNIZE THESE  
MEMBERS FOR THEIR LEADERSHIP AND HEROIC  
EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF FREELANCE WRITERS.*

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Because of these members, ASJA has been at the forefront of the fight against legislation that threatens the freelance business model. In California, Randy Dotinga and JoBeth McDaniel were among the first to recognize the dangers of California's AB5. In 2018, Randy went to work organizing and leading a group of more than 20 journalism nonprofits to fight AB5, focusing on lobbying state legislators. Once the bill passed in September 2019, they researched legal options and alerted ASJA's Board of Directors the need to file a lawsuit. In the meantime, JoBeth spearheaded a campaign to educate ASJA members and other freelancers about how the ABC test in AB5 (and later, the PRO Act) could harm their careers. Randy and JoBeth helped build a case against AB5, providing the legal team with the stories of freelancers who were negatively affected by the law. The broad coalition of advocates they helped build eventually convinced California lawmakers to remove or reduce some of AB5's restrictions on freelance journalists, including the 35-articles cap.

As president of ASJA, Milt Toby guided the organization by launching the First and 14th Amendment lawsuit against the state of California. American Society of Journalists and Authors v. Bonta was filed in December 2019, after AB5 was passed but before it went into effect. Led by pro bono attorneys at Pacific Legal Foundation, ASJA joined the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) to fight the state on the grounds that AB5 limits a free press. (The name of the case was changed from American Society of Journalists and Authors v. Becerra after a new attorney general was appointed). As an attorney, Milt was particularly well suited for leading this effort. Sharing his professional expertise, he helped the Board and members understand the importance of such a step and our chances of winning. Regardless of the outcome of this case, ASJA has taken a stand against AB5 in the courts.

Meanwhile, in New Jersey, the state legislature introduced its version of AB5. ASJA members Debbie Abrams Kaplan, Kim Kavin, and Jen Singer swung into action and stopped the New Jersey bill from advancing through a combination of grassroots organizing, lobbying, and a media campaign. They branded

Fight for Freelancers New Jersey and encouraged freelancers in other states to fight measures there, too, creating Fight for Freelancers groups in New York, Massachusetts, and elsewhere. When pressure emerged at the federal level to advance the PRO Act, with anti-freelancer language similar to the state bills, they created Fight for Freelancers USA. Karon Warren then stepped up and became an invaluable partner in helping to lead the federal effort from Georgia.

Everyone honored with this award did all of this while managing their own careers, families, and the effects of a worldwide pandemic.

Our case against California's AB5 is still working its way through the courts, and AB5 is still causing problems for professional freelance writers in California. The New Jersey bill was reintroduced, but so far, lawmakers have not attempted to advance it again. Massachusetts and New York lawmakers are now discussing compromise legislation of various kinds. The PRO Act is stalled in the U.S. Senate, unable to get a filibuster-proof vote. It has not passed because of the tremendous work that our members and others have done to educate Senators about the deleterious effects of the measure on professional freelance writers. Our members are aware of these dangers—and have acted—because Randy Dotinga, Debbie Abrams Kaplan, Kim Kavin, JoBeth McDaniel, Jen Singer, Milt Toby, and Karon Warren sounded the alarm and taught us what to do.

Together, these ASJA members have inspired and fueled the efforts of writers and other freelancers from coast to coast who have created hundreds of resources, articles, op-eds, social media posts, and letters to legislators on this topic. While the fight is far from over, ASJA would like to stop and recognize these members for their leadership and heroic efforts on behalf of freelance writers.

Randy Dotinga, Debbie Abrams Kaplan, Kim Kavin, JoBeth McDaniel, Jen Singer, Milt Toby, and Karon Clark Warren, we cannot thank you enough.

ASJA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## AWARDEE BIOS



RANDY DOTINGA

Randy Dotinga, former president of ASJA, has been a full-time freelancer for more than two decades. On behalf of independent journalists, he led opposition to the devastating California law known as AB5 and successfully lobbied legislators to fix it. He also spearheaded ASJA's First Amendment lawsuit targeting AB5 in federal court. He specializes in writing about health/medicine, history, politics, books, and the odd & unusual. He lives in San Diego.



DEBBIE ABRAMS KAPLAN

Debbie Abrams Kaplan is a journalist and content marketing writer who focuses on medical/healthcare, supply chain, and personal finance writing. And sometimes the medical/healthcare supply chain. Debbie was happily not involved in politics or advocacy until late 2019 when AB5-type legislation was introduced in New Jersey during the lame-duck session. Testifying in Trenton that fall was eye-opening, and it set the stage for what would become a second full-time volunteer job as a co-leader of Fight for Freelancers. During this time, Debbie learned a lot about worker misclassification issues, how to lobby and how the legislative process works. And importantly, the power of the pen. Fight for Freelancers became known among New Jersey legislators, lobbyists (local and national), and the media for its effectiveness and instrumental role in helping kill the bill. When the PRO Act became a more serious threat in and after the 2020 election, the broader Fight for Freelancers USA group was ready to tackle the insertion of the ABC test in all federal legislation. Debbie has been an ASJA member since the mid-2000s and is currently the ASJA advocacy communications chair for PRO Act legislation.



JOBETH MCDANIEL

JoBeth McDaniel is a journalist and nonfiction author who serves as the chair of ASJA's First Amendment committee. She is a plaintiff in the ASJA/NPPA federal lawsuit against California AB5.



KIM KAVIN

Kim Kavin has been a full-time freelance writer and editor since 2003, following a decade on staff at newspapers and magazines. She writes primarily about two things that millions of Americans love: boats and dogs. Kim's writing about boats has earned a Folio: Eddie along with numerous awards from Boating Writers International, while her writing about dogs has earned the ASJA's Donald Robinson Prize for Investigative Journalism, won numerous awards from the Dog Writers Association of America, and been featured on CNN, Sunday Page 1A of *The Washington Post* and more. Since 2019, Kim has written for *The Hill*, NBC's *Think*, and others about anti-freelancer legislation. She created *Entrepreneur's* "Campaign for Our Careers" in opposition to the anti-freelancer PRO Act. In her spare time, Kim volunteers her time as an alumna mentor for interns in the Dow Jones News Fund editing program, which she attended after obtaining her bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Kim also volunteers as co-leader of the Fight For Freelancers groups that she helped to create. She lives in New Jersey with her two shelter mutts. Learn more at [www.kimkavin.com](http://www.kimkavin.com).



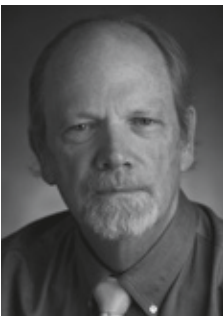
JEN SINGER

Jen Singer is a freelance ghostwriter, editor, and writing coach. She is a co-founder of Fight for Freelancers New Jersey and USA, a nonpartisan, grassroots, self-funded group of independent contractors that seeks to remove the ABC Test component of the PRO Act from labor, employment, and tax law.



KARON WARREN

For 20 years, Karon Warren has covered numerous topics for print and online publications ranging from business and real estate to home improvement and health to personal finance and travel—and much more. Her work has appeared in such outlets as *USA Today*, *Healthgrades*, *DeSoto Magazine*, *GEORGIA Magazine*, *FamilyVacationCritic.com*, *Bankrate.com*, and others. A member of ASJA since 2011, Karon has volunteered in many capacities, including volunteering at the New York conference and the one-day Atlanta conference, serving as a Virtual Client Connections host, and proofreading and writing for the *ASJA Magazine*. A firm believer that every citizen should vote in all local, state, and federal elections, Karon never imagined getting involved with political advocacy until the PRO Act reared its ugly head. She got involved with Fight for Freelancers USA after hearing about the harm of the ABC test in the PRO Act and seeing the work by the Fight for Freelancers New Jersey founders.



MILT TOBY

Milt Toby is honored to be included among this group of truly remarkable advocates. He's also in awe of the workload they shouldered while maintaining a freelance career and some semblance of a personal life. Milt writes about horse racing—not much advocacy work there. But he knows the territory. Much of his legal practice was representing inmates on Kentucky's Death Row. The ability to translate dense legalese into language that non-attorneys can understand is what he brought to the table when the Board of Directors first considered filing a lawsuit questioning the constitutionality of AB5 in California. He's never been prouder of his colleagues than when the Board voted unanimously to join the lawsuit.

## GET INVOLVED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE PRO ACT!

At press time, the PRO Act is still in the Senate. Regardless, we don't expect this issue to go away any time soon. Please contact your Congressmembers to let them know how the PRO Act would hurt your freelance writing business. We are finding that personal stories from our members make a big difference. Find your Congresspersons at [www.govtrack.us/congress/members](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members). If you speak to a Congressperson, please share the details of that conversation at the Fight for Freelancers Facebook page. That information can help others tailor their discussions with elected officials, and it's how we learn what those in Congress think about the bill.

If you need information about the status of the PRO Act or what it says, visit [www.fightforfreelancersusa.org](http://www.fightforfreelancersusa.org) and join the Fight for Freelancers Facebook page. These grassroots organizations are not part of ASJA but have the most up-to-date information about the PRO Act and primers on various aspects of the bill.

If you hear of similar bills being introduced in your state, please email that information to [asjaoffice@asja.org](mailto:asjaoffice@asja.org) or post about it on the Fight for Freelancers Facebook page.

ASJA is continuing to work with the Kellen Public Affairs office to fight the PRO Act and other efforts to limit freelance writing in the country. From time to time, we'll ask members to meet with elected officials or to write op-eds. If you can help with those efforts, please respond to announcements as they appear via email or in *The Weekly*. This work takes many people. The more people who speak up, the more our message will be taken seriously.





*When Keywords  
Drive Content:*

# SEO STRATEGIES FOR FREELANCERS



KELLY K. JAMES

*Freelance Writer*

Kelly K. James is a longtime freelancer and ASJA member who writes about health, fitness and nutrition from her home in Downers Grove, Illinois.

After freelancing fulltime for more than 20 years (and as a member of ASJA for nearly all that time!), I took a day job writing content for an internet marketing agency in January, 2019. One of the drivers for doing so was my quest for affordable, quality health insurance – since my divorce a couple of years prior, the cost of my coverage had skyrocketed. I also wanted to see if I could handle working in a corporate environment again. Freelancing had spoiled me, but I promised myself I'd try it for a year. Two years later, I'm still there, but I still do some freelance work on the side.

I had done some SEO (search engine optimization) work before, but at my day job I'm immersed in it. The content division of my company produces both onsite and offsite content for clients. A quick primer: onsite content refers to your client's website, including the home page, landing pages and blog pages (if the client has a blog); this content is routinely optimized to include the SEO terms, or keywords, that help the page rank on Google.

Offsite content refers to the infographics, guest blog pages, and other pieces of content our company creates that are then published on third party sites and include a backlink. Google takes these kinds of links into account when determining a site's authority, so they also affect SEO results. (We don't bother with SEO with offsite content because we're not as concerned with the page's ranking as we are having the backlink.)

In the last two years, I've learned to draw a distinction between writing and content. With the former, you're judged on the words you choose, and how you use them. With the latter, yes, your writing matters but Google is more concerned with the keywords you use and other factors like metatags and headers that affect how its algorithm ranks a page. As a content writer, your job is to weave those keywords into your copy, a task that sometimes requires creativity and ingenuity as well as a little extra caffeine.



*As a content writer, your job is to weave those keywords into your copy, a task that sometimes requires creativity and ingenuity as well as a little extra caffeine.*

Some keywords are simply more difficult to incorporate into content than others. Below I've included examples of the kinds of keywords (which are in yellow) that can present challenges, and some strategies for working them in:

No  
>>>  
1

*Problem: Awkward keyword*

*Solution: Make it into a question*

Sometimes the keyword is an awkward phrase that is hard to shoehorn into a sentence. Take the keyword, is there Juvéderm near me. That's not a phrase you might typically write for a client's landing page, but this keyword had search volume. To work it in, I turned it into a question, writing: "Wondering, 'is there Juvéderm near me?' You're not the only person who's interested in looking more rested and youthful...."



No  
>>>  
2

*Problem: Plural keyword*

*Solution: Make comparisons*

I run into these a lot (think a keyword like "content marketing agencies," which is more difficult to work into content than "content marketing agency"). Surprisingly, the singular and plural versions of the same word often have different search volumes, so sometimes I'm tasked with working a plural keyword into content when a singular one would make more sense.

I often write something like, "Comparing content marketing agencies? ABC agency is a leading content marketing agency with experience working with start-ups in a variety of verticals." The key is to keep the keyword plural, though I'll often include the singular version as well to cover my bases. Regardless, don't assume that you can make a singular keyword plural, or vice-versa, without double-checking with your client.



No  
>>>  
3

*Issue: Repetitive keyword*

*Solution: Use stop words*

Keywords reflect what people search for. This means they may not always make sense, but as a content creator you have to insert them into your work as seamlessly as possible. That's where stop words can be invaluable. Stop words are short words, like "are," "because," "of," "the," and "and" that Google ignores when it reads content, and they are invaluable to writers. (You'll find a list of stop words at <https://www.ranks.nl/stopwords>.)

Stop words can help you address repetitive keywords. Take the keyword, "spider vein treatment sclerotherapy." In this case, sclerotherapy is a type of spider vein treatment, which makes the keyword duplicative. To the rescue? A stop word such as "like." I wrote, "Thinking of treating your problem veins with a spider vein treatment like sclerotherapy?" (You can also use punctuation to achieve the same end, such as with, "A well-known spider vein treatment, sclerotherapy generally poses few risks.")



# No >>> 4



*Issue: Incorrect keyword*

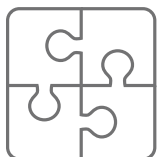
*Solution: Explain the discrepancy in the content*

In this case, the client was a high-end travel company that specialized in ecologically friendly trips to the North and South Poles, targeting well-heeled travelers that wanted to tick those destinations off of their bucket lists. The keywords, as you might expect, included, best time to visit northern lights, best time to see northern lights, best time to see aurora australis and northern lights best time to see them.

The problem was this – the keyword, best time to see aurora australis, was simply incorrect. The northern lights are also known as the aurora borealis, not the aurora australis. Yet the SEO specialist had found that people used this keyword to search for the northern lights. In this case, you have to get creative with your language, including the keyword even though technically it's incorrect.

So I wrote, "Have you ever wondered when the best time to see the aurora australis is? That term refers to the southern lights, but if you're interested in the northern lights, or the aurora borealis, read on for a closer look at this natural phenomenon..."

# No >>> 5



*Issue: An acronym in the keyword*

*Solution: Define the acronym before the keyword*

Acronyms are common in both everyday language and in keywords as well. The problem arises when we, as writers, want to define the acronym when it's used—yet doing so will interrupt and thus break the keyword. In this case, my keyword was IPL photofacial. IPL stands for "intense pulsed light," but I can't define it in the keyword, so I wrote: "Different modalities are used for photofacials, including intense-pulsed light (IPL) treatments, which can address a variety of skin issues. An IPL photofacial is often used to lessen the appearance..." The acronym has been defined, without breaking the keyword.



# No >>> 6



*Issue: Lots of keywords*

*Solution: Make a list*

Sometimes you have a slew of similar keywords to get in and simply shoehorning them in sounds repetitive and awkward. In that case, consider creating a list. For example, I had keywords that included the brand names of some nicotine products for an e-commerce client, like Rogue nicotine pouch ingredients, VELO pouches ingredients and ZYN pouches ingredients. I wrote, "Want to learn more about Rogue nicotine pouch ingredients, VELO pouches' ingredients, ZYN pouches' ingredients or any other brand of nicotine pouch? You've come to the right place." See what I did there? Three keywords in one sentence. No, it's not grammatically perfect or even that well-written, but remember with content, getting keywords in trumps your artistic way with words.

It's taken a while to get used to the idea of keywords driving my work, which is one reason I continue to do writing that has nothing to do with SEO. But I've found a way to welcome the challenge of writing content that includes keywords, yet has some creative flair, as well. Do the same and you'll not only make your current clients happy but have a valuable skill to attract new ones as well.



# PROVING *Your* VALUE

MARGIE  
ZABLE FISHER

*Freelance Writer*



*Get More Clients by  
Explaining the Value of  
Your Content Marketing*

»» Margie Zable Fisher's interest in business led her to get a degree in finance and an M.B.A. Prior to starting her writing business, she worked for Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, and founded her own P.R. firm. She credits her mom, a successful freelance writer and author, as well as a generous community of writers, editors, and authors, for continuing to help her hone her craft and grow her business. Margie writes about health and fitness, business, aging and re-tirement, and lifestyle, for clients and media outlets including Parade.com, NextAvenue.org, Livestrong.com, Insider.com, Entrepreneur.com, and many more. Learn more at [margiezfisher.com](http://margiezfisher.com).

I got a referral a few months ago. The company had been thriving during the pandemic, and its clients were Fortune 500 companies. Even though the company charged its clients plenty of money, my contact wanted to pay me peanuts for content creation. We didn't end up working together.

After railing against the unfairness of it all for a day or two, I thought about it, and came to a sad realization: I was partly to blame. Why? Because I didn't give her what she wanted.



## What Content Marketing Clients Want

Unlike in the journalism world (although that, too, is changing), content marketing clients don't hire writers because they appreciate the quality of our writing and our ability to meet deadlines (although they expect those, too). Ultimately, they hire us for this one reason: to create content that brings value to the company.

Most large companies and some smaller, savvier organizations understand the value of content marketing. In initial discussions, they will often already have an idea or even a fully formed strategy for content marketing, and how to measure it.

Yet many potential clients, while they know they want to use content in their marketing efforts, don't understand its value, and it's our job to educate them. This is where I failed in my discussions with the client. Since I didn't explain how the content I produced could provide value to her company, how could I ever hope to change her mind about what she would be willing to spend in return for that value?

Reader, I resolved to never let that happen again. And I don't want that to happen to you, either.

## The Basics: Understanding the Value of Content Marketing

Here's a quick way to understand what marketers are looking for in terms of content marketing value.

In the Content Marketing Institute's 11th Annual B2B Content Marketing Research survey, respondents shared "Goals B2B Marketers Have Achieved by Using Content Marketing Successfully in the Last 12 Months." Here are some major ones:

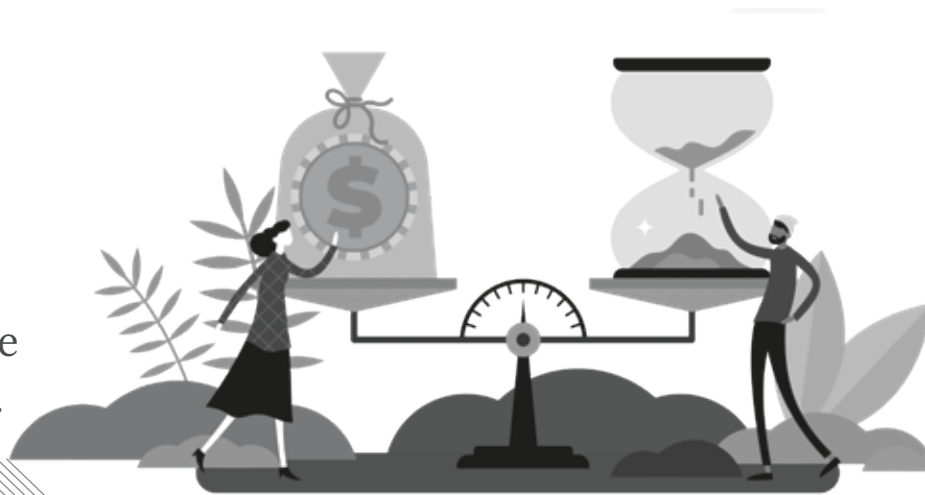
1. Create brand awareness - 87%
2. Generate demand/leads - 75%
3. Generate sales/revenue - 51%
4. Build a subscribed audience - 45%

While many marketing tactics can lead to these results, content marketing is generally more cost-effective—62% less than traditional marketing, according to Demand Metric.

Let potential clients know that by using content marketing, they can achieve those common marketing goals, at a lower price. Your work is done, right? Hang on. Not so fast.



When you spend money on content marketing, it can take time to see the results, and it's not always easy to determine the monetary value of those results.



## The ROI of Content Marketing

The four goals stated above contribute to the ultimate number important to marketers: the return on investment of content marketing efforts. Most marketers, even those at smaller companies, will use ROI and other associated terms to make buying decisions. You'll need to understand them, too.

## Return on Investment (ROI)

$$\text{ROI} = (\text{Amount of Money Generated} - \text{Amount of Money Spent}) / \text{Amount of Money Spent}$$

For example, Company A spends \$100 and makes \$1,000.

$$(1000 - 100) / 100 = \text{ROI}$$

$$900 / 100 = 9$$
, so the company achieved 9 times its ROI

ROI is usually stated as a percentage.

Multiply your result x 100 =  $9 \times 100$  or 900% ROI

The reality: Measuring the ROI of some marketing activities, such as a Facebook ads campaign, is relatively easy. Measuring the ROI of content marketing, however, can be difficult. When you spend money on content marketing, it can take time to see the results, and it's not always easy to determine the monetary value of those results. That's why the ROI of content marketing is usually measured through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

## Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

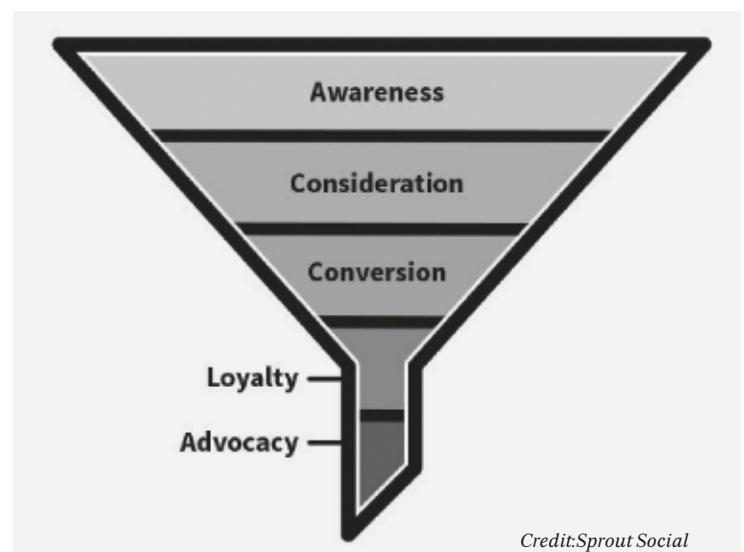
KPIs are measurable values that show progress in reaching a specific business goal. For example:

- KPIs to increase brand awareness include new website visitors, return visitors, time on site; SEO, measured by keyword position ranking on search engines, SEO traffic, and domain authority
- KPIs to generate demand/leads include gated content signups, demo request signups
- KPIs to generate sales/revenue include new sales
- KPIs to build a subscribed audience include newsletter signups

KPIs are often tied to activities associated with the Marketing Funnel, which is a visual representation of the stages of marketing in the buyer's journey. At the top of the funnel are marketing initiatives that aim to provide awareness about a company's products and services to a large number of people. In the middle of the funnel, other marketing activities help potential buyers learn more, and gain trust as they consider buying those products and services. Finally, at the bottom of the funnel, marketing tactics are used to convert those prospects to buyers, then to loyal customers, and, finally, advocates.

"Content can be used to create value for all parts of the marketing funnel/buyer's journey," says Jordan Teicher, director of content at Contently, which powers the content marketing programs of American Express, RBC, Marriott, Dell, and hundreds of others. He shares examples of types of content, and the area of the funnel where they usually fall:

- **Awareness/Top of Funnel:** blog posts, infographics, e-books, social media posts, videos
- **Consideration/Middle of Funnel:** case studies, white papers, webinars, newsletters
- **Conversion/Bottom of Funnel:** customer stories, testimonials, one-sheets, sales decks, self-assessments/quizzes



Credit: Sprout Social

## Measuring Success

In order to determine the value of content marketing activities, you must be able to measure them. There are several tools that can help you do that. The most important one is Google Analytics, which shows how users find and use your website. The best part? It's free.

"I couldn't do my job without Google Analytics," says Andy Crestodina, chief marketing officer and cofounder of Orbit Media Studios. "I use it to tell me exactly which of my articles are getting read, which ones get people to subscribe, which articles to promote on social media, which ones that are losing traffic from SEO and need to be rewritten, and more."

Crestodina also uses SEM Rush, an SEO tool that provides keyword research, runs SEO audits of a blog, looks for backlinking opportunities, and more. All of the content marketing experts I spoke with use it, too. You can try it for free, and plans start at \$120 per month.

Other tools can help you measure the value of your content marketing efforts. Email service providers, examples include MailChimp, Aweber, and Constant Contact. Prices range from free to \$20 a month and more. Social media analytics software, such as Buffer, is another tool, with prices ranging from free to \$99 per month.

## Putting It All Together

To determine the ROI of content marketing, you'll need KPIs that you can measure. Those KPIs will be tied to content marketing activities, at various levels of the marketing funnel.

Wondering where to start? Here's a process you can follow – marketing goals, KPIs, content, timeframe, tracking, measuring, and tweaking:

"The first phase of our partnerships usually starts with a content strategy, during which time it's incredibly important to establish marketing goals and quantifiable KPIs against which we can measure our content marketing efforts," says Caila Ball-Dionne, director of editorial operations at Masthead Media, a full-service content marketing agency serving brands in technology, healthcare, travel, apparel, home goods, and more. "We then determine the content needed to achieve those KPIs, track and measure those KPIs, and adjust the content strategy as our partnerships continue - making tweaks as needed if we aren't meeting the KPIs at the desired pace."

Ball-Dionne shared two examples of this process that Masthead might use with clients:

### 1. Marketing Goal: Build brand awareness

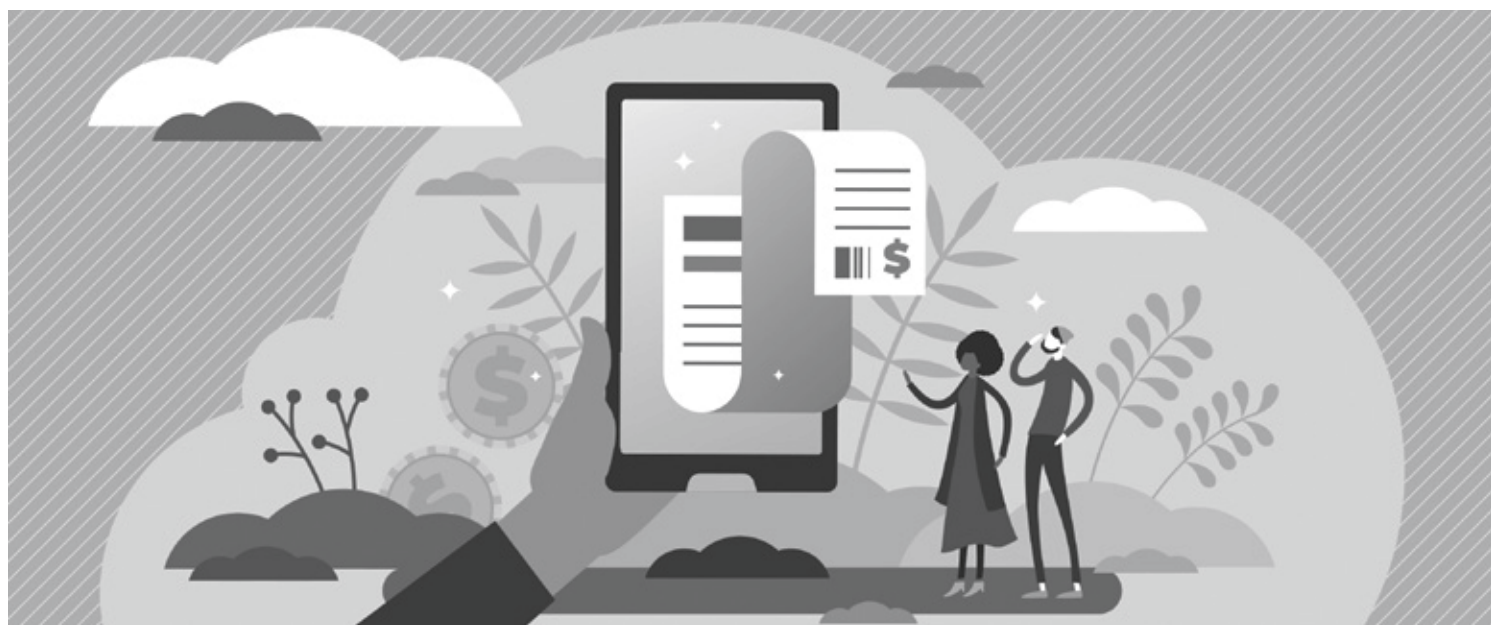
- **KPI:** Improve ranking on target keywords within a specific, priority topic cluster - moving rankings from page 2 to page 1 (results 1-10 in Google Search)
- **Content:** 20 SEO-optimized blog posts
- **Timeframe:** 12 months
- **Tracking/Measurement tool:** SEMRush
- **Potential Tweaks:** Six months in if we are not seeing fast enough upward ranking movement, we might recommend optimizing and republishing previously posted content within that topic cluster. In addition to making sure past content has current information and well-targeted keywords during this update, we would link it to the newer content we are creating to further boost it.

### 2. Marketing Goal: Lead generation

- **KPI:** Add 100 new email addresses to internal list
- **Content:** Gated White paper
- **Timeframe:** 12 months
- **Tracking/Measurement tools:** Google Analytics + newsletter software (Google Analytics can show if people clicked "sign up for a newsletter" but not if they follow through and enter their information to actually receive the newsletter.)
- **Potential tweaks:** If we are not on track to gain 100 new emails by month three, we might change the call-to-action wording, or suggest an additional content piece to drive traffic to the gated white paper, such as a blog post or infographic.

## Moving Forward

From now on, when you meet with potential clients, remember to give them what they want: a clear explanation of the value that content marketing will provide to them and their organization. Speaking the language of ROIs, KPIs, and marketing funnels shows that you understand their needs, and will help you close more sales.







# KNOWLEDGE IS KEY

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What All Writers Need  
to Know Before Signing  
with a Literary Agent

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*In terms of a long-term strategy, it is best to ask questions, review all documents thoroughly, and potentially contact an attorney to look at the contract.*

It is a monumental step to secure an agent before your work potentially heads to publication, but it is not the time to rush. Many writers may feel overwhelmed and excited with multiple agents' interest and work quickly to sign documents to seal the relationship.

It is understandable to want to move forward rapidly because a writer does not want to lose a specific agent's interest. However, in terms of a long-term strategy, it is best to ask questions, review all documents thoroughly, and potentially contact an attorney to look at the contract.

This is not a one-dimensional approach; it involves several perspectives. Let's consider what a writer, an agent, and an attorney would advise before writers solidify this relationship.



RUDRI  
BHATT PATEL

*Freelance Writer*

Rudri Bhatt Patel is a former attorney turned writer and editor. Her work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *JSTOR Daily*, *Saveur*, *Business Insider*, *Civil Eats* and elsewhere. She lives in Phoenix with her family.

## A WRITER'S VIEWPOINT

Writers should not be afraid to ask questions, and if the agent is reluctant or seems bothered by the inquiries, it might not be the right fit.

USA Today best-selling author Nicole Evelina has had two agents over the course of her career. She admits that when she signed with the first agent, she did not ask enough questions and now realizes that was a mistake. She recently signed with her second agent and asked the following questions:

- Why did you choose to offer me representation?
- What attracted you to my work?
- Where do you see this book going (both in terms of submitting to publishers and next steps of working on it)?
- Do you consider yourself an editorial agent? Why or why not?
- What do you expect from me as a client and from our relationship?
- What should I expect from you?
- How will we communicate and how often? (Email, text, Zoom, etc.) Are you open to having standing check-ins every two weeks/month/etc.?
- May I speak with some of your current clients to understand what it is like working with you?
- How do you see my career progressing? What would you like to see next from me?

Of these questions, Evelina thinks those focused on communication are the most critical. “We all have things that are deal breakers, and it is better that you have an idea of what you are getting into rather than going in blind and getting burned,” she says.

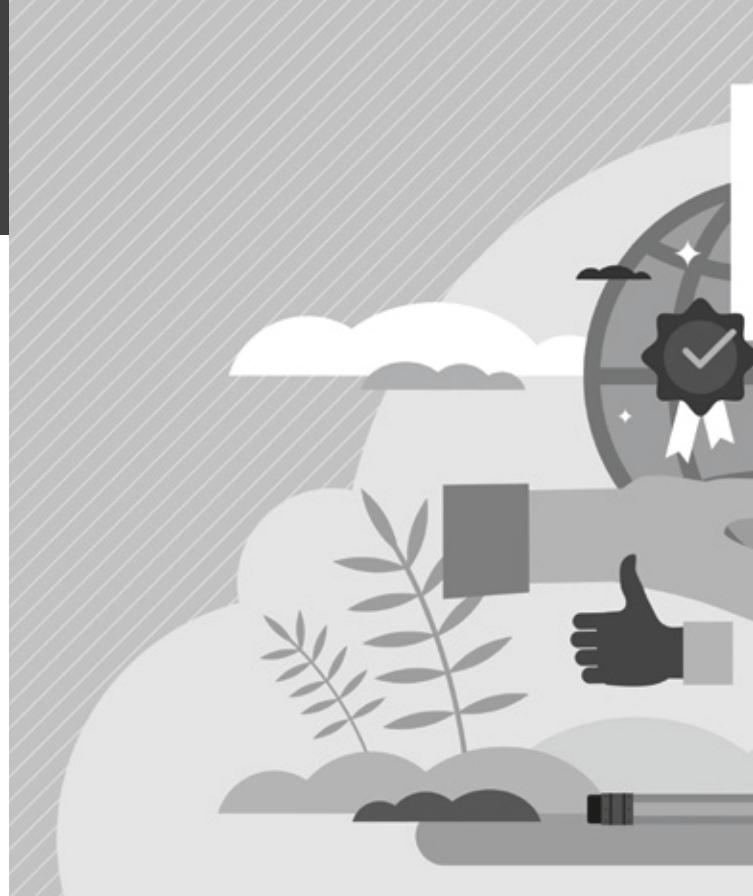
Stewart O’Nan has retained the same agent throughout his career. He encourages writers to “be patient, and if you can, ask the agent’s current clients how they like working with them.”

“Try to avoid agents who don’t understand your work, or want to change it in essential ways,” advises O’Nan. “Your agent should be one of your very best readers. While technically not an editor, through the conversations you have about your manuscript, they should be able to make your book better.”



*“Your agent should be one of your very best readers. While technically not an editor, through the conversations you have about your manuscript, they should be able to make your book better.”*

STEWART O’NAN



## WHAT A LITERARY AGENT WANTS WRITERS TO KNOW

Literary agents are in the business of selling their clients’ work and strive to represent writers to the best of their abilities. Eric Smith, literary agent and young adult author, has the following advice for writers considering representation with an agent: “Just ask anything you want regarding representation. I’m an open book, as are most agents in this industry when it comes to working with authors.”

Smith recommends asking questions on communication style. For example, “What is it like to work with you and how do you communicate with your authors?” Some authors want that constant stream of information and feedback; others do not want to hear from you unless there is good news.

“There’s no wrong or right way to work with your agent, only a wrong and right way for YOU. So, you should tell an agent what your expectations are going to be,” suggests Smith.







*“Most good agents are more than just sales reps. Good agents are your first editors, advisors, and market consultants.”*

ERIC RAYMAN

#### ATTORNEYS WEIGH IN ON LITERARY AGREEMENTS

Once writers work through the initial excitement and conduct due diligence on the agent and ask basic questions, they might consult with an attorney to review the contract.

“First time writers are so glad to have someone take an interest in their work that they will sign anything,” says Eric Rayman, partner and attorney who focuses on media, publishing, and copyright at Miller Korzenik Sommers Rayman LLP. He admits it is not easy to find an agent for a writer’s work and, of course, the right agent. “Most good agents are more than just sales reps. Good agents are your first editors, advisors, and market consultants,” says Rayman.

He adds that agents should be able to evaluate a proposal and assist in helping the writer revise it. One of the keys in this process is to find an “agent who knows the publishing field you’re entering into, whether it is fiction, a cookbook, journalism or history, etc.” It is important for the literary agent to know the editors of each respective field.

There are common parts of a contract a writer must review before signing with a literary agent. M.J. Bogatin, partner and attorney at Bogatin, Corman & Gold, wants writers to look at the scope of exclusivity. Find out if the agent is representing the writer on a single project or multiple projects and what rights and options are covered. Generally, if the writer is working in multiple spheres—such as film, tv, and academia, the scope of the agreement should apply only to the single work and not to other potential branches of that project.

Second, writers must evaluate the term of the agreement. “A limited term with a literary agent is advisable,” says Bogatin. If the relationship is not working for either the writer or the agent, there should be a provision so that each party can terminate. Typical terms are from one year to 18 months.

Third, if the author is involved in translations of the work,

make certain the representation does not extend to foreign publishers. The writer may want to independently establish those relationships.

Bogatin cites potential red flags for a writer:

- The agent requests the writer sign the agreement the next day.
- The agent has a nontraditional commission rate, which is usually more than 15% without a subagent.
- The agent adds unconventional contract clauses.
- The writer is being charged extra expenses, such as a “pitch package,” that aren’t part of the agreement.

According to Bogatin, here are some general questions a writer should ask agents regarding literary agreements:

- What should writers expect from a book that is co-authored?
- What is the minimal advance for the writer?
- What is the royalty rate for book sales?
- Will the agent look for a publication that matches the vision of the writer?
- Will the agent be involved in the marketing of the work?
- Is the book release following conventional patterns, i.e., hardback release first followed by a paperback release?

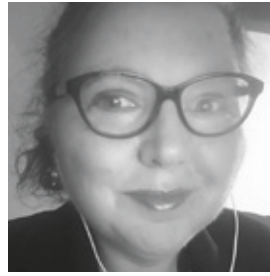
Tami Kamin Meyer, writer and attorney, suggests that “writers will likely want to consult with a lawyer to remove subjectivity when considering whether to accept a contract or not. In other words, having an objective person read it removes the emotions from it all.” Meyer encourages writers to read sample agreements, speak with others in similar situations, and learn about agents who have a good reputation.

Ultimately, Meyer says, “Writers must look out for their own best interests.”



AMI NEIBERGER-MILLER

*Freelance Writer*



# Networking for Writers in an

# ONLINE AGE



When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it was the death knell for cocktail parties, coffee klatsches, and in-person conferences. So how did writers network to find work and keep their income pipelines full?

Zoom happy hours may have surged in popularity for keeping friends and family connected early in the pandemic, but networking effectively online requires far more than a webcam and a glass of chardonnay or merlot. It requires strategy and thoughtfulness. We talked to a few ASJA members and freelancers to find out how their networking strategies have shifted.

Three strategies—live online events, outreach to individuals, and self-marketing through posting on social media—helped writers bring in business. Live virtual events like ASJA Tele-Connections, conferences, webinars, and networking coffees helped many writers find work and build connections. One-on-one outreach to people hiring in the content area writers specialize in, and outreach to former clients also helped bring in business, as did online marketing through LinkedIn and other platforms.





Three strategies—live online events, outreach to individuals, and self-marketing through posting on social media—helped writers bring in business.



### *The Most Popular Platform: LinkedIn*

LinkedIn remains the most popular social media platform for writers seeking work, enabling them to connect with subject matter experts and people seeking to hire writers.

"I am regularly seeing my students get work simply by having a reasonably well-defined niche and a reasonably good LinkedIn profile," said Pam Neely, a freelance writer who has branched into coaching and teaching other writers. "Then they send connection requests to the sort of people who might hire them in their niche/industry, and they start getting inquiries about work."

ASJA member Katie Navarra has used LinkedIn to post, comment, and connect with others. She's also picked up work through a virtual coffee hour with professionals spanning many industries, and used email, phone, and video calls to follow up on letters of introduction and pitches. An organization Navarra belongs to allows members to send out as many as three

press releases a month, so she has utilized it to promote her writing services.

### *Virtual Events Nurture Connections*

ASJA Tele-Connections and the ASJA virtual conferences got writers connected with many potential clients. Lisa Rabasca Roepe took advantage of virtual programs offered by ASJA, the National Press Foundation, the Solutions Journalism Network, the University of California Irvine Center for Storytelling, and those Tim Herrera from the *New York Times* organized for freelancers early in the pandemic.

"These programs have all been very useful in terms of helping me generate new ideas to pitch, and different ways of looking at topics that have been very popular this past year—such as writing about women leaving the workforce or the pandemic's effect on the workplace," said Roepe.

## *Marketing Through Social Media Posting*

Posting on social media platforms can help, too, if writers curate their posts to appeal to the right kind of audience that will hire them. “If a writer has a niche, finding great content to post to social media actually just helps them learn more about their industry and their niche, so doing the research to find great content and post it to social serves a dual purpose,” said Neely.

Some have found other social media platforms helpful. ASJA member Alesandra Dubin found Clubhouse, a new audio-only social networking platform, to be a surprisingly useful networking tool, and she says it’s fun, too.

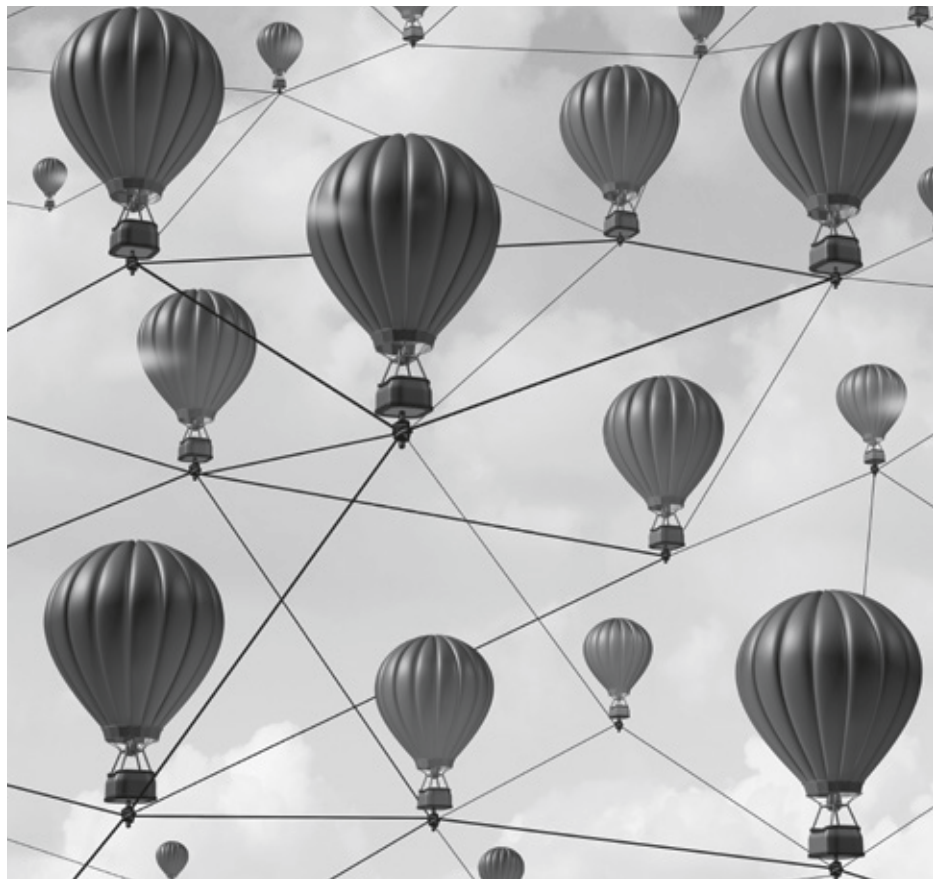
“I’ve been using it to stay in touch with colleagues across the country, build my brand as an expert and thought leader in the lifestyle media space, and discover new opportunities,” said Dubin. She regularly gets emails that begin with, “I really enjoyed listening to your thoughts on Clubhouse!”

Dubin credits Jennifer Goforth Gregory for driving home the importance of having a proper standalone writer website for potential clients—which proved itself in spades. After publishing her website, she shared the news on her social media platforms.

That post led directly to a new client from someone already within her network. And because that client had a positive working experience with her, a referral led to Dubin adding a Fortune 100 client, too. “By that measure, my new website is directly responsible for many thousands of dollars in new work and long ago paid for itself,” said Dubin.

## *Follow-Up & Niche-Focusing Still Matter*

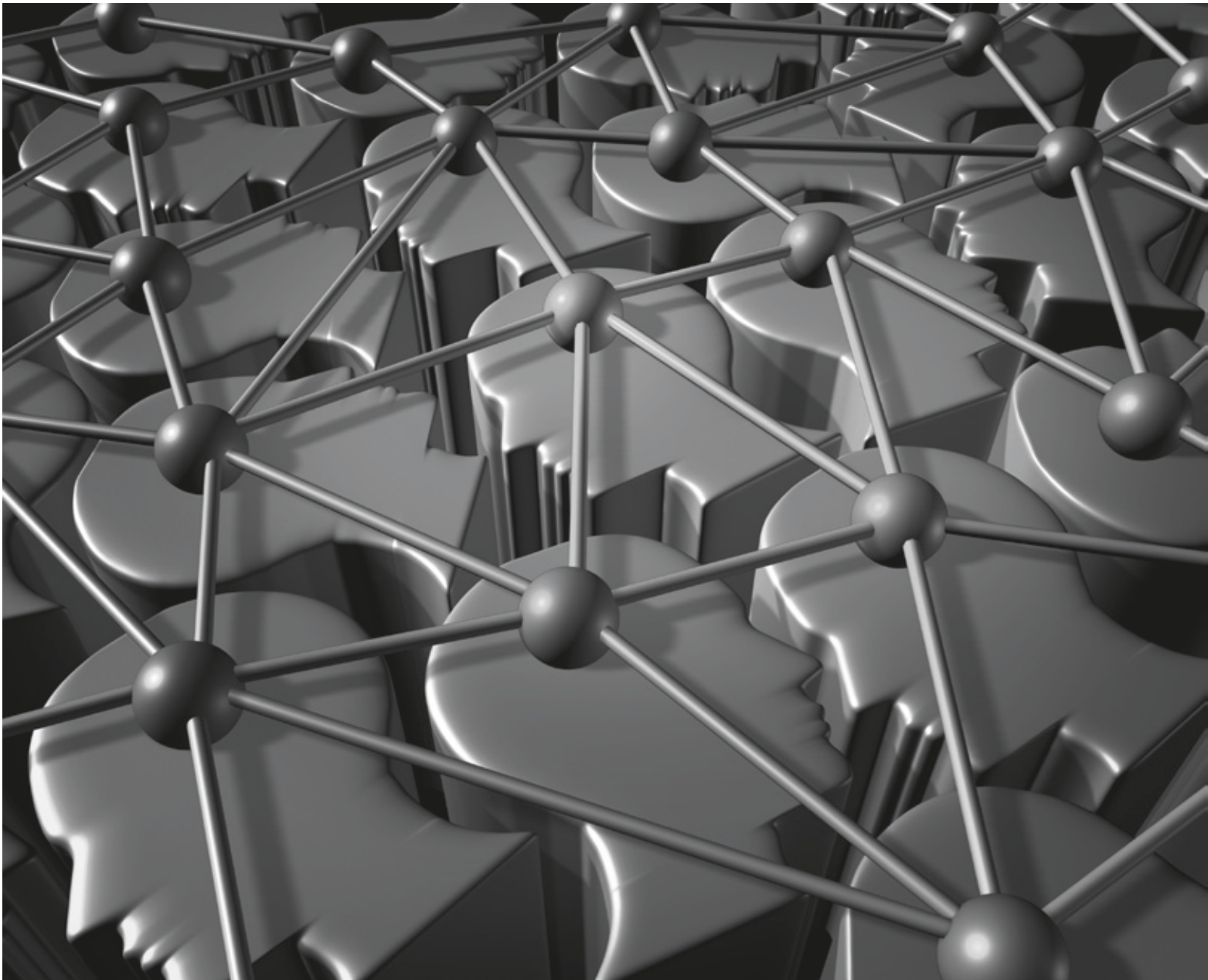
She also says that being tenacious about follow-up matters even more now—so long as it is done respectfully, kindly, and at appropriate intervals. Last year, Dubin relentlessly chased an assignment she wanted but was thwarted by a freelance budget freeze. “I followed up every week or two. Eventually, the freelance budget freeze lifted, and I won the role thanks to my tenacity.”



“I think the number one thing that helped me during the pandemic was connecting with other freelancers, who, like me, pitch ideas to editors.”

LISA RABASCA ROEPE





“I don’t think any one [strategy] is the magic bullet. I think it needs to be a blend of all three,” said Navarra. “It may not be perfectly equal in all categories, but the strategies work best used together.”

KATIE NAVARRA

It was connecting with other writers that helped Roepe keep her mojo when it came to bringing in new work. “I think the number one thing that helped me during the pandemic was connecting with other freelancers, who, like me, pitch ideas to editors,” said Roepe.

Having others to commiserate with at the beginning of the pandemic when work was hard to find, and then as things started to open up, helped Roepe. Last fall, she didn’t enjoy what she was writing and felt like she was “just writing anything to get paid.”

Then she talked to three other freelancers. “They encouraged me to focus on my core area of expertise—women and diversity in the workforce—and once I allowed myself to focus on that again (and not worry about getting paid), I landed a number of assignments and started to love freelancing again,” said Roepe.

Potential clients are definitely seeking writers with a focused niche, notes Neely. In a Content Marketing Institute survey last year, 69% of B2B marketers said that their top challenge when seeking to outsource content marketing help was “finding partners [aka writers] with adequate topic expertise.” It was actually tougher for them to find writers with content expertise than to manage budget issues (51%) or to find people who could understand or empathize with their audience (43%).

## *Networking & Pitching on Point*

Maintaining your network and existing connections were also key for writers. Roepe checked in with past clients to see what types of pitches they were looking for and whether they still had a freelance budget. This was particularly important at the height of the pandemic when budgets were being cut. After all, there was no point in pitching an editor who had no money to pay.

Pitching on point still matters—even if you can’t network in person. “Understanding the magazine and its audience is really the key to getting in the door,” said Elena Loveland, an ASJA member who also works as a magazine editor and hires freelancers.



“Like many associations, I have a small budget for freelance writers. I typically hire writers that I have longstanding relationships with and have published clips in the same sector as the magazine I edit covers,” said Loveland.

But she notes that a spot-on query can open doors. Loveland received a query from a writer with no background in the sector that was so well thought out she knew the writer would understand the audience and was worth trying out. That writer remains a “go-to” writer on her roster.

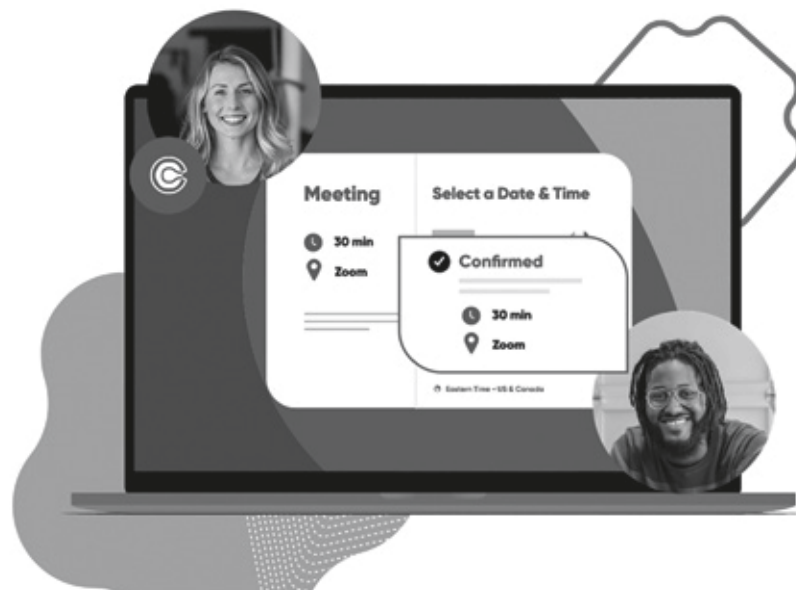
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Ami Neiberger-Miller is an ASJA member and the founder of Steppingstone LLC. She has worked as a PR professional on stories covering Gold Star families, missing and exploited children, addiction, and domestic violence.

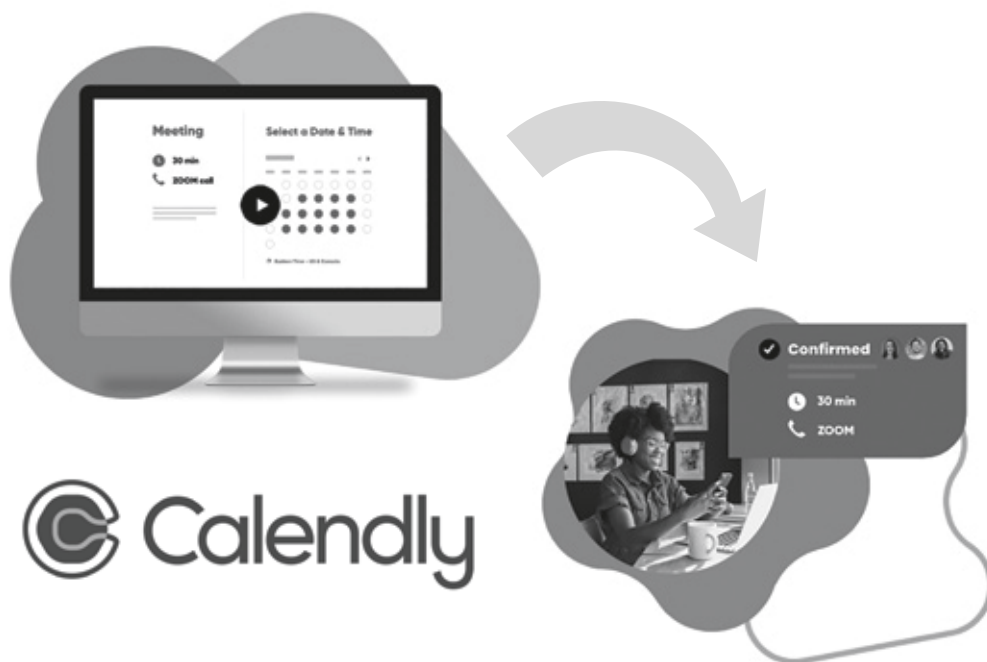


## Tools of the Trade



# CALENDLY

Once or twice a year I post a love note to Calendly on Facebook. I do it because Calendly makes my life easier. It saves me time in avoiding back-and-forth client and source emails to arrange interview or chat times. Another perk? No more time zone math. For the uninitiated, Calendly is a scheduling tool. I set up my availability on Calendly and send out a personalized link. Users then book a time convenient for them.



DEBORAH ABRAMS  
KAPLAN

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### *Freelance Writer*

Deborah Abrams Kaplan writes about supply chain management, medical/health topics and personal finance in both journalism and content marketing settings. She's been an ASJA member for more than a baker's dozen years, and continues to set new goals after seeing ASJA members accomplish theirs. See her work at [kaplanink.com](http://kaplanink.com) or follow her on Twitter @kaplanink.



Here's a typical email exchange without Calendly:

**Me:** *Let's set up a time to talk. I'm free on these specific days at these times ET.*

**Them:** *None of those work for me, What about this other date at noon?*

**Me:** *I'm free at that time in ET. What time zone are you referring to?*

**Them:** *Pacific. I can't do it at noon ET.*

It goes on and on.

With Calendly, I send out my email and link and they pick a time. I use 20-minute time slots (with a secret 10 minute buffer), but you can choose what works for you. After booking, they can easily create a Google, Office 365, Outlook, or iCloud calendar invite on the Calendly page.

In a given week I may send a dozen emails for interviews. When editors want to chat, I send them a link. With Calendly, I rarely get caught in email scheduling hell. I'm happier, more efficient, and my inbox is slightly less full. If the time shows up on Calendly, it's available to book. Calendly also has a page showing my appointments by date and time, with the source's contact information. It appears in my Outlook calendar, and I get an email when someone books a slot.

Admittedly, even after using Calendly for several years, it still feels weird asking people to grab a time. It's like saying "talk to my digital secretary." But feedback from sources and editors is overwhelmingly positive. After using my link, one of my editors got her own Calendly account and puts the link in her signature block. I've had other sources proactively tell me how easy it is to use, and they appreciate it connecting to their calendar.

Granted, not everyone loves receiving a scheduling link. Some corporate security systems don't let employees click on links. But about 90% of the people use the link when I send it. I do include a note in my email telling them they don't have to, though.



Here's how I usually write my emails:

*Dear Source: I'm a journalist writing a story for [Publication] about [Topic.] I'd like to talk to you because [Reason.] I am requesting 20 minutes by phone/ Zoom between now and [Date.] I use this handy scheduling link: <https://calendly.com/debbiekaplan/20min>. If you prefer to schedule by email or need a time outside of my listed availability, let me know what works for you and we'll make it happen."*

And then 10 minutes later, they book a time.

Calendly offers free and paid versions. The free version has enough functionality for my needs. It may take a little time to set it up and get used to it, but you may then find you can't work without it.



There are different pricing packages available. The Basic package is free. Premium has advanced customization. Pro and Enterprise options are available for teams.

Learn more at <https://calendly.com>





# Kristine Hansen

ASJA MEMBER &  
VOLUNTEER SINCE: 2005



## WRITING SPECIALTY/FOCUS:

*Lifestyle topics that include travel, food/drink, art/architecture, and real estate*

## PUBLICATIONS/OUTLETS WHERE PUBLISHED:

ArchitecturalDigest.com, Fodors.com, MarthaStewart.com, Realtor.com and *TIME* Magazine.

### ► *How was the virtual conference different to plan than the in-person event?*

There was a wider net to cast when inviting panelists. One panelist was in Belize attending another writing conference! And our book-track keynote speaker spoke to us from New Mexico, where she lives with chickens! We had many genders, sexual orientations, and ethnic backgrounds represented, as well as people with disabilities, all eager to share their careers and experiences and advise on how we might bring their voices into our coverage.

### ► *How much time did it take?*

Most weeks, about 10 to 15 hours. Much of the work is communicating with track chairs, the Tele Connections team, the publicity team, and Kellen, and addressing attendee questions. It takes a village to pull off a conference!

### ► *If members are thinking of co-chairing the conference in the future, what are the skills they need to have?*

Clearly communicating roles to volunteers and forecasting how long a task takes—or how long for someone to get back to you with answers—is key. You can never reach out to someone too early. Most appreciate a heads-up no matter how far in advance. And getting something done before a deadline always feels good.

### ► *What is the most rewarding part of chairing the conference?*

I met members I'd not corresponded with before. The power of connecting—especially during a pandemic—is huge. Sometimes it was an attendee noticing in my email signature that I published a book about Wisconsin cheese, and sharing their favorite cheese or connection to my state.

### ► *What are the hardest parts?*

Working as part of a team while working remotely, we had different time constraints and schedules. This was true for outreach to editors, agents, keynote speakers, and panelists, too. We're no longer in our 9-to-5 offices. Giving people deadlines (I need them, too!) worked wonders.

### ► *What do you wish members knew about chairing the conference?*

If you are looking at the agenda and thinking "Wow, this is weak" or you'd like to see a session about a particular topic, don't assume we didn't try to plan it. People do say "no," and we have to respect that. We work with what (and who) is available to us.

### ► *How long have you volunteered for ASJA?*

I deepened my role as an ASJA member when I chaired Virtual Client Connections a few years ago, with Jennifer Goforth Gregory mentoring me all the way. Last year I joined the board.

### ► *Why do you volunteer for ASJA?*

Writing in a home office is very solitary. I am an extrovert and like to be working toward a common goal with a small group. Being active as an ASJA volunteer suits me.

### ► *How do you fit volunteering in with your work commitments?*

I write a to-do list every morning, separating ASJA tasks from my work tasks, ensuring I tackle both categories. I'm an excellent multi-tasker. It's like if there are not enough balls in the air I become stagnant. I need a little electricity.

### ► *What are the benefits of volunteering?*

Connections with editors and agents, as well as other writers, are invaluable. You start to see them as real people, just like you, and better understand their day-to-day work tasks and how you might best help them.

### ► *What do you like to do when you're not writing?*

To relax I enjoy knitting, swimming outdoors, writing fiction, spending time with my two Golden retrievers and husband, and planning my next trip.

## BOOST YOUR BUSINESS

# Leverage Your ASJA Membership to Get in Front of Top Editors!

### ➤ *Often Forgotten Membership Benefits*

ASJA'S Client Networking programs are a great way to boost your business, expand your network and get your story ideas sold. Here's what we offer Professional Members:

#### ➤ **Client Connections**

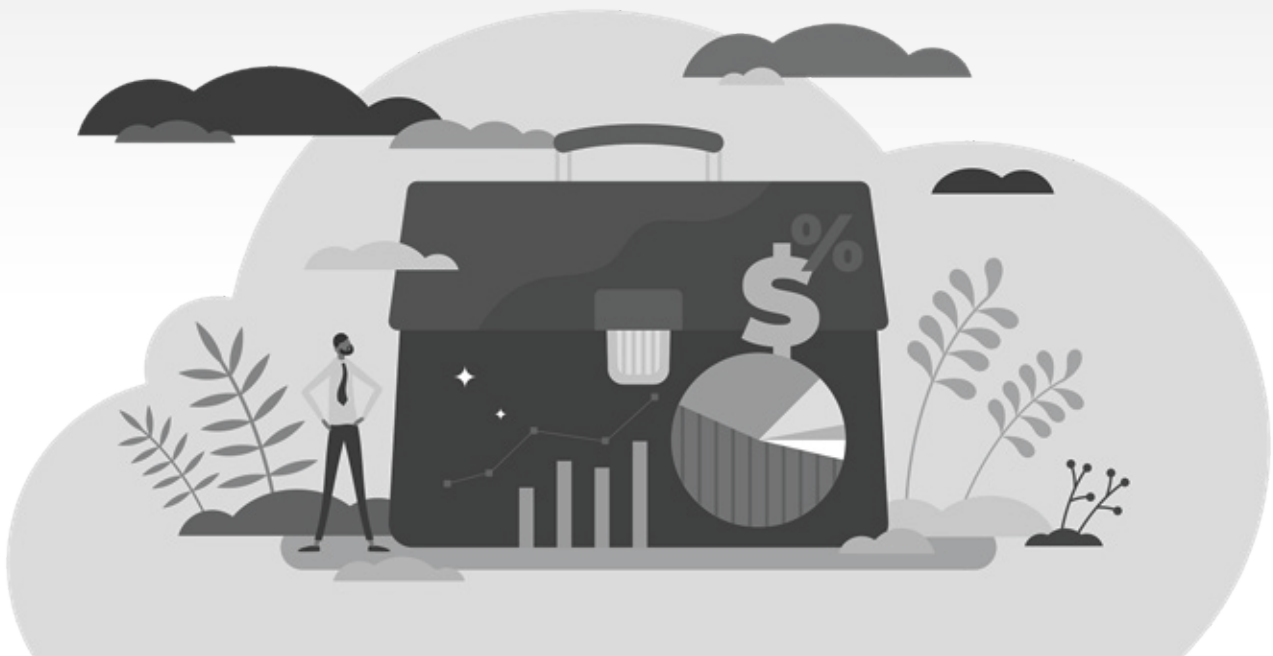
This flagship "speed-dating" event takes place at ASJA's national conference and regional conferences across the country. You get nine minutes of valuable face time with editors, literary agents or content marketing managers. Past participants include: *Scientific American*, *PBS Next Avenue*, *BBC Travel*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Skyword*, and more.

#### ➤ **Virtual Client Connections**

These are the Zoom meetings everyone can't wait to have! Three times each year, you can virtually meet with top clients for 10 minutes of pitching time, all from the comfort of your home office. Past participants include: *This Old House*, *AARP*, *Costco Connection*, *Johns Hopkins Magazine*, and more.

#### ➤ **Virtual Pitch Slam**

Get two minutes to pitch your story idea plus receive follow-up from an A-list editor during this one-hour interactive phone call. Past participants include: *Discovery*, *American Way*, *Sierra*, *National Geographic Traveler*, and more.



➤ **Check ASJA website's 'Benefits' page for upcoming events!** ◀

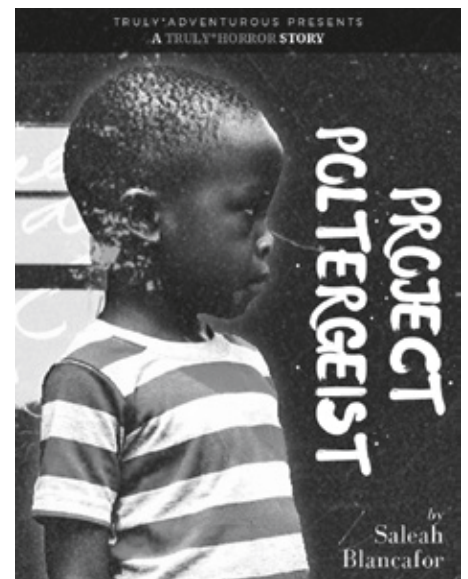


# Market Report | TRULY\* ADVENTUROUS

*Truly\*Adventurous*, an online only publication, was not on my radar screen until this year's ASJA Conference. Greg Nichols was a panelist on the *Turning Your Book Into Film* session, and I was immediately intrigued by their unique business model and commitment to long-form storytelling. That's a rarity these days.



ROD MOORE

*Freelance Writer*

*"We thought there were a lot of stories that were getting left behind. We thought these stories were worth telling in their own right, for the human experience and that there are important stories of people in cultures and places that hadn't been given their due."*

GREG NICHOLS

*Truly\* Adventurous* looks for pitches for long-form, character-driven nonfiction work. Since long-form nonfiction means a lot of different things to different people, at *Truly\* Adventurous* it's about characters that drive rollicking plots with plenty of twists and turns. Their stories have a beginning, middle and end with rising and falling tensions throughout.

Nichols says the idea for *Truly\* Adventurous* was born out his own frustration with freelance writing. He and Matthew Pearl co-founded the media platform in 2018. "We wanted to pursue this idea that we're going to write narratives with this kind of emerging business opportunity of the derivative rights space for journalists. We just happened to hit at a really exciting time in the Hollywood development ecosystem," he says.

They've had a 75% success rate with selling derivative rights, which are split 50-50 with writers. Some of the top studios and platforms have developed stories by *Truly\* Adventurous*, including Amazon Studios, Netflix and more.

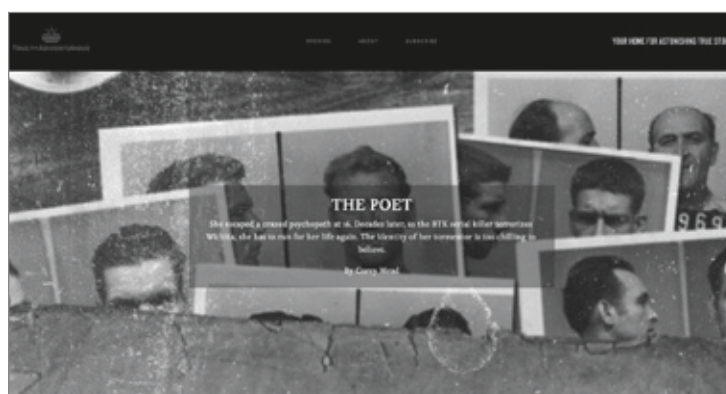
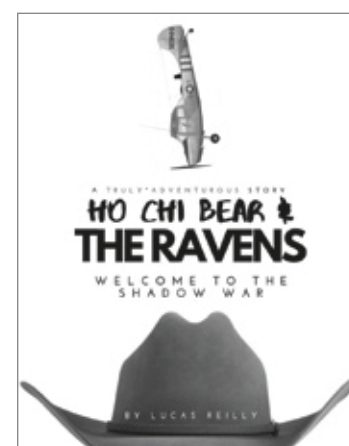
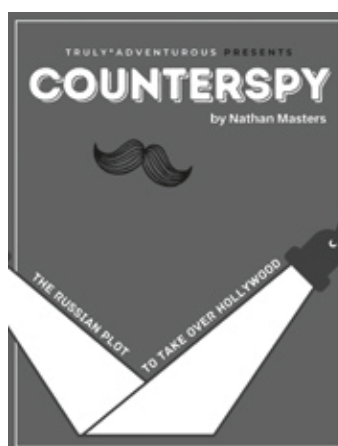
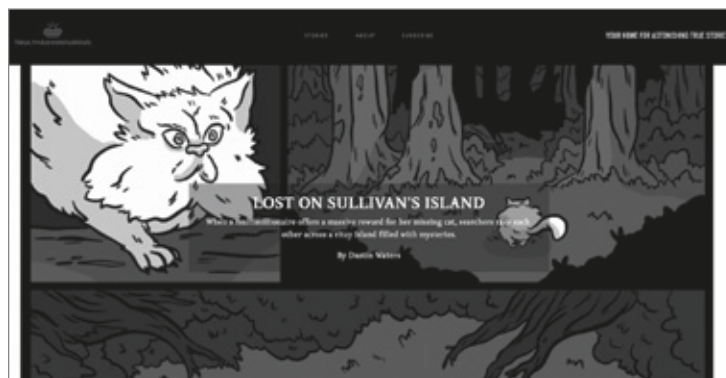
"We thought there were a lot of stories that were getting left behind," Nichols says. "We thought these stories were worth telling in their own right, for the human experience and that there are important stories of people in cultures and places that hadn't been given their due."

"We're time period agnostic," adds Nichols, "so we don't specifically look for history, but we're not afraid of it. I would say the 1970s and 1990s are a really fun period for us. There are great stories from the nostalgic past that are really ripe for a deep dive."

*Truly\* Adventurous* also looks for pitches that are historical or current and span topics including crime, adventure, sports and more. They do not assign profiles, trend pieces, opinion pieces or reviews. One of their recent pieces was about an executive who started robbing banks.

Unlike traditional feature story pitches, *Truly\* Adventurous* accepts informal pitches to get a conversation started and gauge their interest. "We find that our niche of the kind of storytelling we do is so unusual in the magazine space that it's often better for writers to send more of an informal, 'Hey, I've got a story about this. Here's kind of the skeleton of it that I see. What do you think?'" Nichols says. Responses to pitches typically come within 10 days.

*Truly\* Adventurous* is a collaborative editorial staff. Nichols will occasionally assign new stories once he has established a relationship with a writer.



» Rod Moore is a long-time member of ASJA who has been writing professionally for nearly 30 years. He is a ghostwriter and content marketing writer who specializes in healthcare, business, and technology. The author of *Design Secrets: Layout* (Rockport), Moore is working on his first children's book, and dreams of writing and producing a documentary one day. Learn more at [www.rodnejmoore.com](http://www.rodnejmoore.com).

## TRULY\* ADVENTUROUS AT A GLANCE



**Pay:** Varies for reported pieces, depending on the writer's experience. Typical pay is \$1,000 for 4,000 to 6,000 words.

**Fees:** Competitive with digital publications

**Frequency:** Publish on a 3-4 week cycle

**Payment Terms:** On acceptance

**Kill fees:** Negotiated

**Pitches:** Send to [pitches@trulyadventure.us](mailto:pitches@trulyadventure.us)

**Website:** [www.trulyadventure.us](http://www.trulyadventure.us)





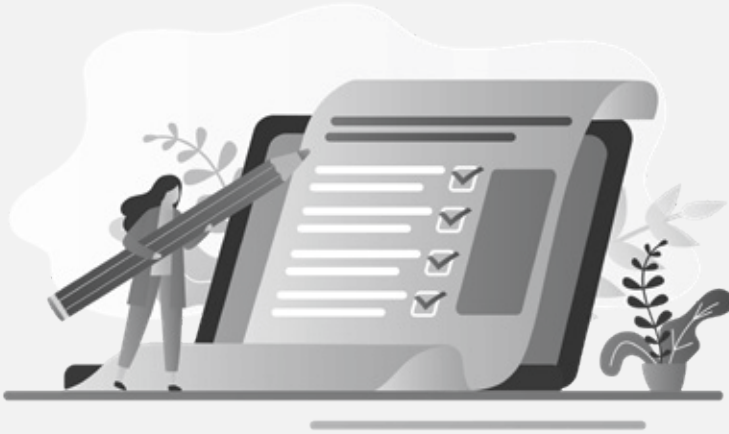
ELISA SHOENBERGER

*Freelance Writer*

# Six Things I Wish Sources Knew

I became a journalist, in part, because I love talking to people about what they do and their passions. But as a freelance journalist, I have learned that not all sources know about the standard practices of the industry. So, I have put together the top six points I wish sources knew.





*Like other professions, freelance journalists have standard operating procedures, and we do our best to report our stories accurately and effectively. Please keep these points in mind when you are collecting information for your next article.*

## 1 REVIEWING QUOTATIONS IS USUALLY NOT PERMITTED BY PUBLICATIONS.

This might be the most common question I get from people in all professions. While there are exceptions, most publications do not allow sources to review their quotations or paraphrases. Why do they ask this question? Many people worry that their words may be misinterpreted—or worse, misused—especially when talking about technical concepts in the law or science. There are also sources who would like to control the story instead of the one you want to tell. It is a tricky balancing act since it is our job to get the facts right; it is critical that we as journalists do our homework and ask clarifying questions.

## 2 FREELANCERS DO NOT WRITE HEADLINES, CONTROL WHAT GOES ON THE FRONT PAGE, OR SET THE PRINT DATE.

These are all decided by the editor and/or publisher of the publication. Writing headlines requires a specific skill set. As the writer, I give up control over the headline. I have written some articles that end up with “clickbaity” headlines. Occasionally, editors will tell me the print date beforehand, but I have learned to take it with a grain of salt. There have been cases in which publication dates come and go. All I can do is let my sources know that I will send them a copy of the article when it goes live.

## 3 NOT EVERY SOURCE I TALK TO WILL END UP IN THE ARTICLE.

Sources often get cut from the article because of word count limitations, especially for print. This also happens if the information collected during the interview ends up not being a good fit. This is disappointing, but a reality in our work. Sometimes sources are there to simply help writers better understand the topic and even point to additional sources and documents to include in the piece.

## 4 IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO TALK TO ME, JUST SAY “NO.”

Please do not agree to be interviewed and then not respond to emails. It is best to be direct and say “no” so the writer can move on to find other relevant sources.

## 5 PHONE OR IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS ARE GENERALLY PREFERRED OVER EMAIL.

While email is easier and faster, the best interviews are live, whether in person or on the phone. It is also more work for the source to type out their answers versus answering questions verbally.

## 6 IF YOU ARE INTERVIEWED, PREPARE TO BE QUOTED IN AN ARTICLE.

This might seem obvious, but sometimes sources may not realize that the words they are saying will actually end up in an article. It is helpful to remind them of this. If sources do not want to be named, they must be explicit about this. Only some publications permit anonymous sources.

These are the key aspects that repeatedly come up when talking with sources. Like other professions, freelance journalists have standard operating procedures, and we do our best to report our stories accurately and effectively. Please keep these points in mind when you are collecting information for your next article.

»» Elisa Shoenberger is a freelance writer and journalist. She has written for the *Boston Globe*, *Huffington Post*, *Business Insider*, and others. She writes regularly for *Book Riot*, *FF2*, *Loop North News*, and *Sixty Inches from Center*. She is the co-editor and co-founder of *The Antelope: A Journal of Oral History and Mayhem*. In her spare time, she plays alto saxophone.

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