



Words for webs

Yes, the internet *does* offer opportunities for the traditional 'author'.

Moya Baldry interviewed internet writing expert Yvette Nielson

Once a domain for programmers and designers, the Internet is showing signs that the skills of the traditional 'author'¹ have been embraced.

Yvette Nielsen, a Brisbane-based freelance writer who works on commercial, government and community websites, has noticed an explosion in the number of jobs for 'writers' being posted on job banks² over the last six months.

'The job bank sites give lists of writing work, from non-fiction promotional copy for websites and CD roms, to editing, proofreading, on-line research, reviews, user-friendly technical documentaion of new software, preparing distance learning material, and journalism,' Nielsen said.

'The amount of work for writers has exploded, and although the money is better than it was, it's less than what graphic designers and programmers charge which is in excess of \$100 per hour, with some websites costing over \$100,000 to build.'

Money is an important indicator of respect for professional skills. For years, writers have been asked to 'look over this text' by web-builders for free. This free service started when writers were unfamiliar with the medium and there was a heavy visual emphasis for website design.

Should writers then shout 'conspiracy' at programmers and designers who've used coding and techno jargon to scare others away and claim control of the new, niche market?

Nielson said the answer is yes and no. 'Web-builders did use the Internet for money-making purposes only, but others were just so excited about the

potential of the Internet and its capacity for new technology that they overlooked the fact that it arose from a need for an alternate method of communication and information transfer,' she said.

'We were all pushed into believing that the nature of the Internet is technology. But millions of people surf the net with the images turned off and have to print information to be able to read it. This has raised the question of what the Internet is supposed to be delivering. The answer is information, and that means text.'

'Text that is well-structured, concise, engaging, and informative. Text that fits in less space than a journalist gets and sits in a non-linear format. And text that makes sense. That all needs a writer.'

'...No amount of flaming logos will keep someone on your website if the text is boring or the site is hard to navigate...'

'Writers need to understand the possibilities and constraints of the medium. That means a lot of random surfing of sites to see what works and how information is best presented.'

'Writers need to be involved in any on-line or website project from the beginning. Structuring and presenting information clearly is what writers do best and it's the content that should dictate how the website is set up to facilitate the user's access of the material.'

'No amount of flaming logos³ will keep someone on your website if the text is boring or the site is hard to navigate. Frustration rate can be very high amongst web-users, so a great site is returned to, especially if the information is updated, and that of

course leads to maintenance work for programmers, designers, and writers.'

1 On the Internet or other on-line projects, the term 'author' is used to describe the programmer. The author of the text can be called the content creator, information producer, and interactive designer.

2 In your search engine search for 'job banks', which list work opportunities for on- and off-line projects.

3 'Flaming logos' are animated graphic devices used on web sites

■ WORDS FOR WEBS

Yvette Nielsen presents her workshop on **Sat 24 October, 10am-4pm**, at QWC. Cost \$95 members, \$120 non-members :

- Basic scriptwriting and journalism skills and how to adapt them for this medium
- Writing in standard chunks, one idea per paragraph, the journalist's inverted triangle style, conversational tone, and present tense
- Structuring the content in three-dimensional terms
- How people read online. For example, people read 25 to 40 per cent more slowly and as if they were reading a map
- What else you need to know if you want to work on CD-Roms or highly advanced websites
- What info to include: this does not include mission statements or brochureware (brochures dumped on the website—easy but ineffective)
- How to work in a creative, collaborative team with the designer, programmer and writer at the three corners of a project triangle
- Behind the scenes: how to list sites with search engines
- Work opportunities for writers and the payment options

Workshop booking form on back of QWC News

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