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A Simple Contest with a Strong Message for All Writers: Wake Up Your Writing Spirit

By Shelley Wake

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Shelley Wake

The Blogfest 2005 Writing Contest has only been running for two weeks and already the results are overwhelming. And not because we're getting far more entries than we expected. It's because along with entries, we're also getting heartfelt messages from writers all over the world. I've run a few contests before and received quite a few entries, but I've never been personally emailed and thanked by so many writers.

What's the difference with this contest? I think the main reason is that the idea actually came from writers. Even though the writers at our company work in publishing, they find it a little sad that there's so much focus on writing what can sell instead of writing what truly matters to you. They wanted a contest that would allow people to write whatever they wanted to write.

From that idea came Blogfest, a contest designed to encourage all writers to get the project of their dreams done. Unlike most contests, we decided not to offer publication and not to pay the prize for a completed work. Instead, we decided to offer the prizes based on how much the writing project means to the writer. This is one contest that isn't about whether or not your work can sell or about what your writing will mean to someone else. It's about what it means to you.

To enter, we asked writers to tell us about the one thing they've always wanted to write and to tell us what it would mean to them to write it. Now, after only two weeks, we have an inbox full of emails from people. Entries so far have included grandparents wanting to write their life story for their grandchildren, aspiring novelists, professional writers looking for the chance to write something for themselves and not for money, and a young woman wanting to capture and preserve her mother's family recipes.

These people have entered and then sent us an extra email just to thank us for the opportunity. They've told us how just writing about the project has made them so excited and full of joy. They have enthusiasm and feel delight just for thinking about finally writing. And we've started reading the entries

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and the joy is there too. As a publisher, I'm used to reading submissions and contest entries. It's often a joy but there's rarely as much life as there is in these submissions. Reading them, I can feel that people have that spark of excitement that is only motivated by something much greater than money or even publication. It's the joy of doing what your heart's always wanted to do.

There is more to writing than publication and money and this competition is bringing out the real spirit of writing.

My message to all writers is to think about what matters to them. Think about that one thing you've always dreamed of writing. I challenge you to write down what completing that project would mean to you. If you feel that spark, I challenge you to commit to your project and get it written. Not because you can make money from it, but because it means something to you.

This contest has made me see more clearly than ever that there is far more to writing than making money. There will only be a few winners to Blogfest, and choosing them is going to be the toughest job we do all year. But I hope this idea can reach further than that. I hope all writers will listen to their hearts and complete their projects. I hope that just thinking about actually doing it will wake up that writing spirit that is in so many people.

Shelley Wake is one of the organizers of Blogfest 2005 and the manager and editor of Writing Stuff - the site that offers everything a freelance writer needs to succeed.<http://www.writingstuff.com>

Run Profitable Contests Using Autoresponders

By Shery Ma Belle Arrieta–Russ

Running a contest for your e–zine subscribers or web site visitors is one way you can generate interest and give more exposure for products or services you want to promote.

A contest could be as simple as spotting a word or a set of words within an e–zine's issue or searching for a graphic on a site. A contest can run for one issue, or it can last for a month or more.

If you plan to run a contest, make sure you have a "contest management response system" in place.

This could be as simple as an automated e–mail receipt to let your participants know their entry has been received.

Run a contest that asks your participants to send their responses to specific e–mail addresses. Then create an automated receipt confirmation for each account.

Include a link to your products, affiliate links, or services in your confirmation receipt.

Every time someone enters your contest and sends her entry, she receives a confirmation message. Thus, you've just exposed your products to your contestant.

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Encourage multiple entries and your contest participants get exposed to your promotional texts multiple times.

Ok, what about contest prizes?

If you publish an e-zine and you sell advertising space, you can give away free ad space to the winners.

If you have your own product, or a product you have resell rights to, you can give away free copies of it to your winners.

If you have a service, why not put that up as a prize?

In any case, though, let your prospective contestants be interested in the prizes. Yes — put the complete prize descriptions, along with the contest mechanics, on autoresponder too.

And then include links where they can purchase the prizes. Hey, some people might not want to wait to win your contest! So it's good to cover all bases.

Run a contest that lets autoresponders handle entries and confirmation receipts and you'll have a promotional tool that can bring in profits for you!

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