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How to Catch the Writing Bug

By Stephen Bucaro

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If you earn income as a writer, or use writing as a marketing tool, you know how difficult it can be at times to write. I started writing for my website and newsletter a few years ago. Sometimes it would be two or three weeks between articles. Sometimes writing would be torture. Then one day I caught the writing bug.

Now I write two or three articles each day. I don't have to struggle for topic ideas. I have thousands of good ideas to choose from. Instead, now I struggle to limit the scope of areas that I will write about. What happened to cause this change? I caught the writing bug.

The writing bug is contagious, and by reading this article, you too will catch the writing bug!

How to Choose a Topic

The most difficult part of the writing process is choosing a good topic. A good topic is one that other people want to read about and one that is interesting enough for you to write about. Here's how to create a notebook full of great topic ideas.

– Use a three-ring notebook as an idea file.

Your idea notebook should have two parts. The first part is sheets where you jot down ideas whenever they pop into your head. The second part is tabbed dividers where you keep reference material and partially written articles.

Where do ideas come from? Everywhere! Ideas can come from TV news or any TV show. They can come from a book, newspaper, or magazine. They can come from the web. Ideas can come from a conversation with a friend. All of these sources are sending information and ideas to you.

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After you learn how to catch ideas, your idea notebook will be bulging with great ideas and research information for article and book topics. You don't need to plagiarize or copy other peoples' work. Your article should be nothing like the material that you get an idea from because you have the "writer's attitude". Below are some thoughts from a person with the writer's attitude. I can explain the topic better. I know more about the topic. I disagree with this source. I can approach that topic from another angle. I can elaborate more on that topic. I can write a more concise article. I can break the information up into more readable short articles. I can write a more comprehensive article. I can write a more up-to-date article. I can rewrite that topic and include examples.

When an idea hits you, write it down in the first part of your idea notebook. If the idea comes from an article, tear the article out, punch holes in it, and save it behind a tab in the second part of your idea notebook.

Now when you need an idea, just flip through your idea notebook. Eventually your idea notebook will contain thousands of great ideas to choose from.

– One surprising source of topic ideas is material that you wrote previously. You can apply the writer's attitude to your own articles.

How to Write the Article

The second most difficult part of the writing process is actually writing the article.

First, make an outline. If you're going to write the entire article in one sitting, the outline doesn't have to be in writing, you can keep it in your head. If you're writing a large article or a book, create a written outline.

– Sometimes when an idea pops into my head, I can visualize the final article. I want to get it on paper before the vision goes away, so I drop what I'm doing and write the article immediately. This is when writing comes extremely easy. I call this "flow".

Divide large projects into parts and write one part at a time. Don't publish the first part of the article until you have completed all the parts, or at least several of the parts. When working on later parts of a multi-part article, you may find it necessary to make some changes to earlier parts.

Your first draft doesn't have to be comprehensive. Just get the main ideas down. You can go back and flesh it out later.

Your first draft doesn't have to have correct spelling and grammar. Just get words on paper (or on disk). You can go back and correct the spelling and grammar later. The first draft may not be perfect, but having an imperfect first draft is a whole lot better than having a perfect nothing.

Go back later and revise your first draft. Make sure it contains all the information and ideas you wanted to put in the article. But keep in mind that almost any topic is infinite. You have to limit the scope of

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your article based upon the purpose of the article and the practicality of doing the research required for a more comprehensive article.

I feel it's very important to let someone else read your article. You may have written something in a confusing way or a way that requires the reader to have some knowledge or experience they can't be expected to have.

– If your article is for an audience that is expected to already have some understanding of the subject, limit explanations of the basics. You have to limit explanations at some point or the article will be too long and too boring to your target audience.

Go back and correct the spelling and grammar but don't try for perfection. I see spelling and grammar errors in magazines, newspapers, and on TV all the time. If all writers waited until the spelling and grammar was perfect before releasing their work, we wouldn't have anything to read.

I feel it's important to set your article aside until the next day and then read it again. But don't take editing to an extreme. No matter how many times you re-read your article, you can always find something to change. Don't try for perfection. Your goal is to create an article that communicates the information and ideas that you intended. Recognize when the article is good enough and meets the

requirements.

If you are not an expert writer, keep learning by studying a page or two each day of a grammar book such as Painless Grammar by Rebecca Elliot

With your idea notebook, the writer's attitude and the ability to recognize when an article is good enough, you have the tools to be a productive writer. Have You caught the writing bug?

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Bug Tracking Points to Consider

By Seapine Software

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A bug tracking system is central to a successful quality control process. The strategic importance of the purchase becomes clear when you consider the impact the data can have on your enterprise. Here are a few points to consider when selecting your bug tracking solution.

1. Not all bug tracking solutions are alike.

Some bug tracking solutions trap you in a Web-only interface with its limitations and performance issues. TestTrack Pro gives you the choice of a true Windows client and a Web-browser client. Most bug tracking solutions limit you to one server operating system – Windows. TestTrack Pro gives you the additional choices of Linux, Solaris, and Mac OS X. Some bug tracking solutions don't scale well past a dozen users or a few thousand defects. TestTrack Pro scales easily to handle any team size.

When selecting a bug tracking solution, make sure you are getting all of the features you need at a competitive price. TestTrack Pro is the solution—offering the best mix of features, architecture, support, and scalability.

2. Not all bug tracking vendors are alike.

Anybody with a little database experience and a copy of MS Access can build and market a basic bug tracking solution. Designing a feature-complete solution requires years of effort and customer feedback. Seapine Software has been developing and delivering bug tracking solutions since 1995 on multiple operating systems across a wide range of industries. Seapine backs its solution with a variety of services and outstanding customer support. When selecting your bug tracking vendor, ask yourself "What is their track record? Will this company be around to help me next year or even next month?"

When considering your bug tracking vendor, ask "How long does it take to talk to someone in support?" Does the company even offer telephone support or are you limited to email support? Do they answer their email in a timely fashion or does it go into the email black hole?

3. Does your bug tracking solution scale well?

Many solutions are based on MS Access databases or other database technologies that require you to upgrade the database back end as your company grows. TestTrack Pro is based on a fast, industry-standard database engine that easily scales to handle hundreds of users in multiple geographic locations. Make sure you are not going through the process of finding a new bug tracking solution as your company grows.

4. "Open source" does not mean "no cost."

There is a misconception that if something is free, there is no cost and you automatically save by

choosing it as your tool. As the saying goes, "There is no free lunch." What is the catch? Hidden costs!

Hidden costs include such things as the hours needed to compile, setup, customize, and maintain the solution. Many open source solutions require the person administering the solution be familiar with, if not an expert in, scripting and one or more programming languages or meta languages. There are additional costs in upgrading which are further increased if you have modified the source code. For most development teams, the cost of the open source effort quickly exceeds the cost of purchasing and deploying TestTrack Pro.

5. Developing your own solution is not free.

Many database products on the market today can help you build a solution from scratch. The problem is you are performing a custom software development effort that includes all of the costs you currently incur and are able to bill when developing solutions you sell to your customers. Seapine Software has a team of software engineers and quality assurance personnel working full time on improving TestTrack Pro. With an in-house solution, like an open source solution, the cost of developing your own solution quickly exceeds the cost of purchasing and deploying TestTrack Pro.

6. Bug tracking should be easy to install, use, and maintain.

Your bug tracking solution is supposed to save you time. It should not take days or even hours to install a bug tracking solution. The software should also work out of the box with minimal customization. You should be able to customize it as you are using it. And, you should not have to dedicate a person to maintain it.

Make sure the product you select saves you time, improves your process, and allows clear communication of the issues to all team members. Ease-of-use is a REAL benefit of TestTrack Pro. Seapine Software delivers a solution that is easy to install, easy to use, easy to maintain, without compromising features.

Established in 1995, Seapine Software has emerged into a proven leader in providing advanced cross-platform software life-cycle management solutions. Backed by market-leading technical support, a rapidly growing community of customers in over 52 countries, an unmatched combination of flexibility, and speed and ease of use, there isn't a better choice than Seapine.

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