

West Coast EDITOR

A MONTHLY FORUM FOR EAC
MEMBERS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA
TO EXCHANGE IDEAS,
DEVELOP SKILLS, AND
SHARE NEWS ABOUT EDITING

DECEMBER 2002

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EDITORS'
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
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RÉVISEURS

BC BRANCH

EAC-BC Member John Vigna Wins Entrepreneur of the Year Award

On October 15, 2002, EAC-BC member John Vigna was recognized at the 5th Annual Self-Employment Programs of Vancouver Entrepreneur of the Year Awards. Sponsored by Westcoast Community Enterprises and five similar programs in the Lower Mainland, the event honours the finest entrepreneurs in Metro Vancouver's self-employment programs. Competing with eight other finalists in the "service business-to-business" category, John won the Industry Sector Award. He says all of the finalists worked hard and had successful ventures but feels he may have stood out because of his active involvement in the community and in professional associations.

From tree planter to writer, editor, and Entrepreneur of the Year in three short years—how's that for a career progression? Actually, John's interesting working life began even before his tree-planting days. "I was a professional basketball player in Europe for two years, and coached high school basketball there as well," he explains. "In fact, I was in Austria when the Berlin Wall came down in 1990. It was a great time to be in Vienna."

On his return to Canada, John worked for a time as a buyer for various bookstores. During his vacation time, he went tree-planting and found the pay was so good that he ended up working full time at this for five years. Pursuing a long-time interest, he also did some freelance writing, producing magazine articles for consumer publications. Although he had a strong interest in professional writing, he knew he needed more training in order to take this further. John heard about the Print Futures: Professional Writing program at Douglas College from an editor with whom he worked, and began the two-year program in the fall of 1999.

After graduating in the spring of 2001, John spent two months traveling in China, Mongolia, and Russia. Back in Vancouver that summer, he began attending as many networking functions as he could. "I

checked *Business in Vancouver* and the 'What's Happening' section of the *Vancouver Sun*, and went to any event where I thought a writer would stand out," he says. His phone started ringing soon after, and it hasn't stopped much since.

In September, 2001 John registered in an eight-week self-employment program operated by Westcoast Community Enterprises. The program helped him develop and prepare a business plan, then provided start-up training and follow-up support.

"My business really took off in January, 2002 and it's been a blur ever since," John says. In fact, he was too busy this past summer, and had to bring in sub-contractors to help with editing and design work. Several projects ended recently, giving John some much-needed downtime to re-evaluate the focus of his business. "I really need to spend this time thinking about how I want to develop my business," he says. "The problem with getting so busy that you're bringing in sub-contractors is that you end up being a manager, not a writer."

John believes the most valuable thing he does to build and develop his business is to follow an old-fashioned approach to meeting people. "I'm actually terrified of networking. If you're just out there looking for something from people,

they can smell it a mile away,” he says. What others might call networking, John prefers to view as socializing and building personal relationships. “The human side of it is extremely important. Basically, if there’s no human connection, there’s no business connection,” John says. “I enjoy getting to know people, finding out what they’re interested in. If something more comes out of it, fine; if it doesn’t, that’s fine, too.”

Just as important as getting out and meeting people, John says, is for freelance or contract writers and editors to learn all they can about running a business. The sooner they start thinking like business people, the greater the chance their business will thrive.

John’s advice to those who are or want to be freelancers is develop a sound business plan, do your market research to understand exactly who your target market is, and learn the nuances of cash flow, monthly projections, income statements, and balance sheets. Keep your books up to date. Revisit your business plan periodically and see if your marketing plan is on track. Assemble a team of business and professional advisors. And, most of all, remember to schedule time off for yourself. After all, you are in business for yourself and only you will know when you need a break from your busy schedule.

John has obviously found his niche, and he loves the variety of working freelance. “My skills are stretched in every direction,” he says. He also loves teaching and currently teaches courses on editing, online documentation, and report writing at Vancouver Community College (http://continuinged.vcc.ca/courses/bcl_writing.pdf).

John Vigna can be reached at [<john@johnvignaink.ca>](mailto:john@johnvignaink.ca).

Lynn Smith, Book Sales Coordinator

The Gordon Group Comes to Vancouver

“If you had told me thirty years ago that in 2002 Peter Moskos would be a salesman, I would have shot myself.”

This was how Peter Moskos of the Gordon Writing Group introduced himself to an audience of mainly freelance editors on October 19 at an EAC-BC workshop called “Developing a Writing and Editing Business: From Home Office to Big Office, with Many Steps along the Way.” Moskos and business partner Howard Whittaker were in Vancouver to deliver an entertaining and highly informative workshop about the challenges and rewards of running a large editing business.

Explaining his opening statement, Moskos described his beginnings as a teacher and freelance writer. After founding the Gordon Writing Group seven years ago, he moved quickly from writing and editing to managing projects, and finally, to leading a team of project managers. The business has grown from “two desks, two old computers, and a telephone” into one of Ottawa’s foremost writing and editing firms. With its sister company, the Gordon Creative Group, the company creates advertising and marketing documents; writes articles, speeches, and government publications; offers research, evaluation, and Web publishing services; and delivers workshops on plain language training and business development, such as this one.

The day was organized around five scenarios, each dealing with a critical moment in the life of an expanding business. The scenarios were designed to stimulate discussion and look at issues such as costing jobs, working out agreements with partners, changing a business to accommodate an expanding client

list, responding to a Request for Proposal, and examining monthly statements.

Throughout the day, Moskos and Whittaker offered practical business advice. Moskos began by reviewing a fundamental element of life in the professional world: looking professional. Have your business cards and letterhead designed and printed professionally, he advised. Get your portfolio online. Ditch that Yahoo or Hotmail email account. He emphasized that clients buy products and services from people they know, respect, and trust, and he recommended that editors work to build personal and sincere relationships with clients. When bidding on a project, always think in terms of a final product. “Don’t offer an editing service,” he advised. “Offer a book.”

When costing projects, Moskos and Whittaker have three words: specific, specific, specific. Itemize the services you offer, down to the half hour. Beginning writers and editors often fail to take into account the time spent doing what they think of as administrative or miscellaneous tasks, such as making phone calls, writing emails, or conducting research. Because they don’t tell the client that they are performing these services (or because they don’t feel confident enough to charge for them) they often eat these costs, adding up to a significant loss of revenue.

Itemizing services demonstrates to a client exactly how the editor’s time was spent. Moskos and Whittaker recommend including miscellaneous tasks under the heading of project management, which can easily make up 10 to 15 percent or more of the total cost of a project. Other headings may include sub-

stantive editing, copyediting, and proofreading; rush charges for weekend and evening work; inputting text; editing graphics and tables; and revisions, another cost that new editors often eat.

Moskos and Whittaker also addressed the problem of work overload. What will you do as a lone freelancer if three clients call at the same time with large projects and tight deadlines? A client you turn down will rarely call back, so in cases like these, farming out work or creating a working partnership is often the best response. Moskos and Whittaker urged anyone considering a partnership to take care in determining each partner's level of commitment and effort, and to communicate goals and expectations clearly.

Whittaker offered this advice to freelancers who tend to tackle every task themselves: let go! Solo editors often take on every job available, then become obsessive about personally handling every task from start to finish. When there is too much work for you to handle, take the risk and farm it out to a friend. You might just end up developing a profitable new partnership, or at least spending one less Friday night at the computer.

Moskos and Whittaker then dealt with responding to an RFP (Request for Proposal). They led us through the process of developing a winning proposal: identifying deliverables, assembling a team, identifying and anticipating potential problems. Workshop participants got into groups and spent 20 minutes developing a skeletal proposal in response to a complicated four-page RFP. Moskos and Whittaker reviewed the actual proposal the Gordon Group submitted for that RFP.

The final scenario dealt with big business. What happens when business is booming, you give work to subcontractors, and it's time to rent some big office space and get serious? Moskos and Whittaker listed the professionals a

business owner will hire or work with: partners, lawyers, bookkeepers, accountants, marketers, office administrators — and, of course, banks. They covered cash flow, collections, and project management, reviewing monthly statements and identifying potential problem areas.

By the end of the day, several participants were talking to each other about the possibility of moving beyond sole proprietorship and Friday nights at the computer. Taking the step from home office to big office can be intimidating, but a little knowledge and planning go a long way toward making that big step a little easier.

Curtis Foreman, PR Chair

Surrey International Writers Conference

From October 18 to 20, the EAC/ACR display booth took up residence between the Self-Published Authors and the Romance Writers of America on the trade show floor at the tenth annual Surrey International Writers Conference.

Authors, agents, publishers, and editors trickled into the trade show after Friday's keynote address by Donald Maass, president of the Donald Maass Literary Agency in New York. Many authors, both new and experienced, stopped by the EAC-BC booth to find out just what an editor does, before hurrying along to interviews with editors and agents, and heading to the "Blue Pencil Café," where professional writers reviewed the work of hopefuls — young and old. A few familiar EAC-BC faces turned up, including Nancy Flight and Paulette MacQuarrie.

Seminar topics at the confer-

ence varied from writing pitches to sustaining suspense to a workshop on verbs. This was definitely for writers more than for editors.

Quote of the conference: "Oh, so you're just an editor, are you?"

Curtis Foreman, PR Chair

Strategic Connections

Do you remember our Strategic Connections event last year, when we brought together editors, writers, graphic designers, photographers, and other media professionals? The idea is to meet and develop contacts for work referrals or business partnerships—all this in a fabulous setting with a wonderful atmosphere.

The event has been running in Victoria for several years and took place in Vancouver for the first time last February. We're planning to organize similar events in February 2003 and, of course, we are looking for members to volunteer to help with the organization. If you think you would like to participate in the planning of this event, contact, in Vancouver, Ann-Marie Metten at <ametten@telus.net> and, in Victoria, Laurie Darrach at <laurie@muzecreative.com>.

**Next deadline for submissions
to *West Coast Editor*:
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Mailing address **Box 1688
Bentall Centre Post Office,
Vancouver, BC V6C 2P7**

Phone **604-681-7184**

Email **bc@editors.ca**

Web site **www.editors.ca/bc/bc.htm**

Next Meeting

EAC-BC member Derek Miller bills himself as "Writer, Editor, Web Guy, Drummer, Dad." Derek will talk more about making your Web site worthwhile and will answer questions at our next meeting on January 15, 2003. **For details of where we will be meeting, please check** <www.editors.ca/bc> — **EAC-BC is on the move!**

Get Moving on Your Web Site

Building a Web site is worth it. And a successful site for freelance editors is no mystery. I think my site at <www.penmachine.com> is a success because it helps bring me work and enhances my reputation as an editor. If you want that kind of success, do two things: put up a site before you're ready, and make sure you have a plan for what it will become.

It's Never Ready

In my work on Web sites since the Cambrian Era of 1997, one rule has persisted: a site is better than no site. Obvious? Many people I know — including some professional Web designers — lack a site, or have one "under construction," "in re-development," or otherwise not quite ready.

But we're talking about the Web here. It's never ready, and always under construction. Ask yourself, do Yahoo! or Amazon have the same items as yesterday? No. Five years ago, did they have less than they do now? Yes.

Then take that to its extreme: put up a single page that duplicates your business card, using the free Web space from your Internet provider. Now you have a site. You can always add more, or not.

It's Always Growing

Now comes the plan. If you launch your site, plan to expand it (even if you never do). Map some sort of logical structure, even if only in your head, so that when you add things they have a sensible place to go. Once search engines and other sites

find what you have, they expect it to stay there. If you start over or move things around, visitors start getting "page not found" errors, and away they go.

To figure out the best way to go beyond that first page, look at sites online and find some that you like, and talk to someone who knows how Web sites work — if your friends don't, try the EAC/ACR email list.

It Should Be Everywhere

The Web is about links, so show you know what you're talking about by pointing to others who also know what they're talking about. They'll link back. That's what makes your site a reputation machine.

Choose a decent Web address — they're easier to remember than phone numbers. List yours anywhere you can, business cards and letterhead, of course, but also in any advertising and promotion you do. Put it next to (or instead of!) your name credit in a paper publication. Get links from online published work. My company name in the Yellow Pages is <penmachine.com>, because I'd rather people visit my site than phone me.

A Web site can be big or small, and can consume a lot or a little of your time. Not far in the future, however, you'll need one to be taken seriously as an editor. Luckily, one page is all it takes to get started.

Derek K. Miller writes and edits in Vancouver when not being a musician and stay-at-home dad. You can read more stuff at Derek's Web site (of course).

WEST COAST EDITOR

Editors	Lesley Cameron Rosemary Gretton
Layout	Lesley Cameron
Copy Editors	Lesley Cameron Rosemary Gretton Sheila Smith
Proofreaders	Shamina Senaratne David Stacey
Webmasters	Ann-Marie Metten Val Wilson
Branch Coordinator	Jean Lawrence

2002/03 EAC-BC EXECUTIVE

Chair	Faith Gildenhuis fgilden@shaw.ca
Past Chair	Winnifred Assmann wj_assmann@yahoo.ca
Book Sales Coordinator	Lynn Smith lynn_smith@shaw.ca
Communications and Hotline Co-chairs	Ricki Ewings ewingssharp@lightspeed.ca Kathryn Spracklin kaspracklin@yahoo.com
Membership	Heidi Groschler hirdaya1@yahoo.ca
Newsletter Co-chairs	Lesley Cameron lesley@4camerons.com Rosemary Gretton rgretton@telus.net
Professional Development Co-chairs	Susan Safyan ssafyan@telus.net Mark Varley Mark_Varley@bcit.ca
Programs	Robert Chesterman robert@bonum.ca
Public Relations/ Industry Liaison	Curtis Foreman curtis@foreword.ca
Secretary	Ann-Marie Metten ametten@telus.net
Treasurer	Christine Kondo ckondo@shaw.ca