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The Inside Scoop: Self-Publishing a Color, Hardcover Cookbook

Like blogs, self-publishing is on people’s minds. There are so many logical reasons to try it: established food writers wonder if they should sell the next cookbook on their own, through their own blog or website; cooks wish to publish a book of their own family recipes; and cooking teachers are looking for an adjunct money-maker to classes, to name a few.

Each person wants the same outcome, without spending a fortune: a professional looking, hardcover, full-color book, just like the ones on their shelves. Can it be done?

I decided to investigate. After about two months of analyzing the small print, evaluating software and making phone calls to everyone from CEOs to salespeople, I uncovered some fascinating new developments. Read the full story at <http://www.diannej.com/SelfpublishingArticle1.shtml>

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Process: Writing the Longer Feature

I wrote a second long piece recently, this time reporting on trends in Chinese cuisine both in the US and China. After 30 years, I take for granted how to build information into a story over several days. But maybe you don’t.

It’s not so bad if you break it down into steps. Once I finish my interviews and research and get past the procrastination, I get into a groove based on four stages of additional research, editing and writing:

Stage 1: Creating a body of work. Staring at a blank page is a downer. I need text on the screen, anything just to get going. So I gather all my paper research materials in a pile on my desk, including notes, hand-written interviews, brochures, cards, and publications.

I read through each piece and enter parts I think might be relevant into a new Word file. For a direct quote, I put quote marks around the sentence, adding the

speaker's name and title. But mostly, I paraphrase. I know I'll rewrite it all later.

After a while, categories emerge. I write holding titles for each subject, such as "Food in China." There's no point being clever, because the titles were temporary. For variety, I move bits and out of the categories, such as trends on Chinese food in America versus trends on Chinese food in Asia.

Next I get on the web to investigate relevant websites, and to search for missing information to flesh out the story. I add the relevant facts.

Stage 2: Giving it shape. Now a body of work exists. I'm not saying it's a coherent piece. It's full of sentence fragments, missing info and half-discussed concepts, with no lead and no conclusion.

I go through the Word file by category, reducing extraneous information, moving parts around, creating new categories and researching whatever I missed. Whenever I delete text, I paste it at the bottom of the article. (I hardly ever put it back in, but it's there if I need it. That way I don't have to keep making separate versions.) This stage takes several passes.

Then I look for cohesiveness, whether the topics flow into one another, whether the points are complete and make sense, and whether there are holes. Towards the end I fix run-on sentences and tighten the text. I change mundane formatting like extra spaces between paragraphs and words.

Stage 3: Time to finesse. Now I work on giving the piece a consistent tone and voice, tightening the sentences, killing a few darlings (the stuff that doesn't work but I loved it too much to delete), making general words specific, making tenses consistent, and fact-checking names, quotes, spellings and definitions. I make the subheads more exciting and read each section to ensure it guarantees what the subhead promises. I rewrite the first paragraph of each section to ensure it's an introduction with a segue. Then I check the first sentence of each paragraph see if it reads as the introduction of the paragraph's content.

After a few passes, I have enough sense of what the story was about and how it unfolds to write a lead (opening), a nut graf (a paragraph that tells readers what they'll find if they keep reading), and a conclusion. Some people write the lead first, but I'm a ponderer. I don't always know what the lead is when I start.

Stage 4: Reality check. After a spell and grammar check, I send the piece out to two trusted people to ask for their feedback. I get their responses, make adjustments, print out the article, proofread it one more time, and send it off.

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My Cookbook Saga: Wrapping it Up

As you know from reading these newsletters, I'm working on a cookbook, *Grilled Pizza and Piadina*, with my collaborator, Chef Craig Priebe. Last month we wrapped it up. The editor sent out the second round of spreads (called F&G's, for

folded and gathered sheets), for one last look. My job was to:

1. See if the editor made all the changes I wanted. Of course she did not, but she made almost all and showed excellent judgment when she disagreed or ignored me.

2. Find all remaining mistakes (no pressure there!). I thought I had used the same language for the same tasks, such as how to blacken shrimp and crawfish. I hadn't. Plus I found one or two typos and other minor things to fix.

3. Ensure the photos matched the copy. If you read my last newsletter, you'll recall my challenge of adjusting the recipes after the photo shoot. I had missed two photos.

In the first case, one piadina photo clearly shows three tomato slices. But all piadina recipes calling for tomatoes have two slices per sandwich. Do I change all the recipes to three slices of tomato for consistency; ignore the discrepancy as "artistic license"; or change only that recipe to three slices? This kind of thing can make you crazy. I chose the latter.

In the second case, on the last day to make changes, I showed the dessert spreads to Greg Patent, a baker and long-time cookbook author. He looked at the photo of my collaborator's most famous grilled pizza, the S'more, read the method, and asked how the marshmallows got browned on top. Duh! At the photo shoot, they added a step by putting the pizza under the broiler.

4. Assess all elements of the jacket copy: Design, colors, photo choices, and text. Craig's headshot was in color, mine was in black and white, so the art director made them both black and white. It's a subtle move but the right one. I thought I could pep up the inside jacket copy and rewrote it. Fortunately, the head of marketing liked it better than the original.

5. Get endorsements, or blurbs, for the back cover. We didn't have much of a window. A few people had already agreed to give us blurbs. One was traveling and couldn't see the pages that were sent to his home. Another got back from a trip two days past deadline and thought he was too late. He graciously agreed to write a few sentences over the weekend. Phew.

The ultimate person to give us a blurb, Craig thought, would be restaurateur Wolfgang Puck, the inventor of gourmet pizzas. Someone more important than either than us wrote a letter. That person plus another, plus Craig, made phone calls. Two days before press and long after our deadline, Craig got the quote. Everyone was ecstatic and it got onto the jacket.

The next thing I'll see is the actual book, in a few months.

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News from Clients and Alumni

Television personality Sarah Moulton named **Jackie Mallorca's** *The Wheat-Free Cook* one of the 10 best cookbooks of the year on Good Morning America.

Tracey Ceurvels-O'Grady sold two feature articles to *Relish* magazine.

Alison Anton wrote her first published piece for a national magazine, *Alternative Medicine*, on fish. It will appear in March 2008.

Faith Kramer contributed several reference items, including those on diners, cooking schools, and food on the Internet for *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industries*, edited by Gary Allen and Ken Albala and just published by Greenwood Press. See <http://www.greenwood.com/catalog/GR3725.aspx>.

Simona Carini and **Val Rogers** continue to write for *Edible East Bay*, <http://www.edibleeastbay.com/>. Simona is also published regularly in the *North Coast Journal*.

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Resources You Can Use

-- Which **cookbooks** did the *New York Times* want for Christmas? See <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/books/review/Cooking-t.html>
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/books/review/Cooking-t.html>>

-- Still deciding whether to start your own **food blog**? Regina Shrambling of the *Los Angeles Times* says if she can do it, so can you.
<http://www.latimes.com/features/food/la-fo-dish31oct31,1,7588421.story?coll=la-headlines-food&ctrack=2&cset=true>
<<http://www.latimes.com/features/food/la-fo-dish31oct31,1,7588421.story?coll=la-headlines-food&ctrack=2&cset=true>>

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Just for Fun

-- Say what? Merryl Streep as **Julia Child**? By now you've heard the story of the former secretary who wrote a blog about cooking the recipes of Julia Child from *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. She got a book contract and a movie deal. The movie is based on the book, *Julie and Julia*, and will star Streep as Julia Child, directed by Nora Ephron.

That's going to be some kind of transformation. As a friend from Texas says, "I just can't feature it."

-- When molecular gastronomist **Grant Achatz**, chef-owner of Alinea, decides to do a cookbook, he's not going to go about it the same boring way the rest of us

do. Okay, he's not going to condense the text into powder, make it into a foam, or string it from metal wires and serve it to guests. But he is doing it his way.

Typically, publishers would fall all over themselves to purchase a cookbook by a chef of his stature. They'd probably pay up to a \$1 million advance, plus the usual percentage of royalties. And they would, according to Achatz, "impose their vision and their way of thinking" upon him, as he told Ed Levine in a Yahoo blog, <http://food.yahoo.com/blog/edlevineeats/11008/a-new-way-of-publishing-cookbooks> <<http://food.yahoo.com/blog/edlevineeats/11008/a-new-way-of-publishing-cookbooks>> .

Achatz's solution is to take no money in exchange for total control. He'll give a CD of his finished cookbook to Ten Speed Press, which will print it. Ten Speed will give Achatz a higher percentage of sales on each book sold, but will not have to pay for an editor, photography, copy editing or proofreading.

Ever heard of a cookbook with a video ad, like a movie trailer? Achatz has one. Watch it at <http://www.alineabook.com/>

-- Always wanted to be a restaurant viewer? When the **Michelin guide** for the San Francisco Bay Area debuted, I went to a press conference to find out about what was my idea of a dream job, until I heard the description.

Michelin gets 3500 applications for each inspector position. Applications are reviewed for passion for detail and passion for food. Applicants who pass have lunch with a Michelin reviewer and write a report on the meal.

If they pass that round, they're hired. They go on an all-expense paid training trip to Europe for about six months, and then return to the US to start work. There are 10 inspectors on the West Coast and 10 on the East Coast. Inspectors eat lunch and dinner twice a day, six times a week, and write a 1.5-page report on each restaurant. This goes on from September to March. Every three weeks, inspectors meet to discuss their selections.

European staff members approve all US choices by visiting the restaurants. The following year, inspectors go back to each restaurant, up to ten times, to see if its status has changed.

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Classes and Appearances

-- For Spring 2008, I'm still hammering out the details to teach a **two-day class** for the Writing Salon in Berkeley, CA.

-- I may be teaching an **online food writing class** around the same time.

Watch my website or wait for my next newsletter to get the details.

-- The **Symposium for Professional Food Writers** takes place March 30-April 3, 2008. I went to this conference when I decided to get back into food writing and will never forget it. I'll be speaking there in 2009. For details, see <http://www.greenbrier.com/site/foodwriters.aspx>

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Please forward this email to anyone you think might be interested. To change your email address or unsubscribe, please email me: dj@diannej.com

I will not rent, trade or sell my email list to anyone for any reason.

Happy New Year,
Dianne

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