So, About That Publishing Thing

written by Holly
February 1, 2008
By Holly Lisle

As I mentioned in the Writing Updates a short while back, I figured out how to do the publishing thing. Now, not five or ten years from now.

But knowing **how** to do it and knowing **if** I should do it are two different things.

Here's the thing. I came up with a wonderful business model that would create a great magazine and publish people's books as a natural part of that, that would pay authors a huge percentage of what the magazine would make, and that would be doable within the year, even with finding an editor and writers for the stories.

But it all comes down to this:

Is there any demand for it?

It's still selling fiction on the internet, albeit with printed novels taken from each issue eventually available, and I've seen that, at least with current models (unless you're doing porn, which is out of the question), selling fiction on the Internet is about as effective and fun as nailing your hand to a wall.

Look, here's model. You find the holes—the things that wouldn't work, the things that suck, the things that would break. And figure out, at the same time, if this is genuinely something you would sign up for, **not as an author**, because I know right now if I open this up, we'll have authors coming

out our ears. But as a subscriber, because without a big boatload of subscribers, we can't pay the authors, and the whole thing dies.

Start With the Product

The magazine. No title yet. The one I've come up with is pretty dorky. So…

Ol' No-Title would feature:

- Science Fiction (two each issue), Fantasy (two each issue), and Surprise Me (one each issue)
- Story-driven content—if the story could be a poster child for Suckitudinous Fiction, it's out. (No, we aren't trying to win a Pulitzer. We're trying to write gut-grabbing adventures.)
- 100% Serials
- A strong focus on original, well-detailed worlds and compelling characters
- A sense of fun.
- Bi-monthly publication (once every two months, not twice a month)
- CLIFFHANGERS

That's the magazine.

Then Look At The Business Model

- Every issue except the first one would start one series and end one series. Each series would feature 5 10,000-word(ish) installments, and the actual books being

serialized would run 50,000 words. Very short novels, in other words—not the kind that would sell to a traditional publisher, but the kind that would be profitable for authors to produce on Lulu in a sell-direct fashion, and that would be fun and affordable for readers to buy.

- Subs would be $6 per issue bought one at a time, $5.25 per issue bought every six months, and $4.50 per issue bought annually. The sub would cover the ezine site costs, publishing, editing, and paying authors. More on how people get paid in a minute.

- Readers (ahem, that would be you) would have a strong incentive to buy back issues if you joined late to fill in on stories you joined in the middle, and to keep buying issues to find out what happens next in each series you're following. **Yes, I am flagrantly attempting to create book crack, and to get y'all hooked hard.** I'm not even ashamed of myself.

- Readers (you again) would have a pay-per-vote button that would cost a dollar a pop, and 100% of your vote money would go directly to any writer whose story you liked, to reward him or her and encourage the future production of more stories with the same character, the same world, or whatever. With your vote, you would get to send a note to the author with what you loved and what you want more of. (Authors, you see? Instant direct feedback from people who really want more of what you're doing, plus funds to help you do it.)

- Payment would go like this. Publisher—me. 20% of each issue. Editor—don't have one yet, if we do this, will be open for applications. 15% of each issue. Writers. 13% of each issue. Yes. That adds up to 100%.

That might not seem so exciting. But consider—all the back issues will remain on sale, and while people who come in late will have a one-time opportunity to buy all back issues for a reduced price (for which all writers will get paid), if they pass up on that offer, they then will be buying them piecemeal at $6 a pop (for which all writers involved in the relevent issues will get paid).

Here's the real beauty part. If you're a writer who wrote the best 50,000-word serial ever, as voted by readers (who have also tipped you the better part of a buck to urge you on) and that vote is visible to everyone, and readers read a later story by you, or the last half of your first story, many will, I think, go back and buy the earlier issues just to get your story. You benefit. But so does every other writer who is in that issue. And maybe the readers will get hooked on those other stories, and go back to get them, too. And any time any issue sells, no matter how old, the writers in that issue All. Get. Paid.

I already have the better part of the software to do this. Margaret Fisk built the shop backend for me, and it will handle recurring multiple payments to multiple authors. I would have to figure out how to tie it into PayPal subscriptions (Okay. No. **I** wouldn't. I would have to see if I could get her to do it. But to defer to passive voice here for a moment, that would have to be done.)

- The same month the serial was completed, the author could bring out a Lulu version of the book, and I'd take the blurb and Lulu button and add it to the author's page. The author would retain full rights to the print version—the magazine would just send customers his way.

(The author would have to agree NOT to bring the book out before that, to maintain the magazine's exclusivity.)

And Here Are The Problems

So here's how payment breaks down for writers. If we could get 100 subscribers at the lowest rate (annual), the writers would make $58 per issue ($4.50×100=$450x.13=$58.50). For a five issue-story, that's $292.50 (not including reader votes, which can't be guessed). **That is really, really not great, and the problem is, I don't even know if 100 subscribers would be an obtainable number.**

As numbers of subscriptions go up, of course, authors do better. A lot better. At 200 subs (annual—always figure the least you can make and you'll never be disappointed), the author will make $117 per issue, or $585 for the five-part series. At 500 subs… well… that's $292.50 per issue, or $1462.50 for the whole novella. **Which is not that bad. And doesn't figure any subs at a higher price, or reader votes, or any Lulu sales.**

Subs would cost:

Newsstand—$6 per issue
Twice a year—$5.5 per issue—$15.75 per sub(you save $2.25)
Annually—$4.50 per issue—$27 (you save $9)

This is a cool model. But right now it's just a model, because it probably wouldn't be worth doing for 100 subscribers, and how many people would be willing to subscribe?

Where am I overlooking problems, and what do you think about what I have already? Please be honest—I don't want to spend a ton of energy getting this started only to discover that everyone wants to submit stories, but nobody wants to read

them.

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