Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal. — Thomas Stearns Eliot, 1888-1965

What you hold in your hands is a window of a sorts, the kind of window with which you watch a particular world go by. This book is about the burgeoning business of making money — and perhaps a living — as a content provider on the World Wide Web. That particular world hasn’t had much exposure since its birth largely because even the Big Companies are new to the game. Making money from putting up digital work was, for quite some time, unthinkable to many, and hard to accept for the rest. But everything matures, if it lives long enough, and despite the bottom dropping out during the Dot Bomb years ago, the independent creator on the Web has prevailed and remained. Getting to this point was certainly not bloodless; thankfully it was also highly educational.

This book is about so many things regarding the online content business that it might be easier for me to list what it isn’t:

* It’s not a manual that explains how to use Photoshop, InDesign, or your favourite blogging tool.
* It doesn’t tell you how to create podcasts.
* It doesn’t explain how to lay down a backbeat track for your latest techno composition.
* It doesn’t cover the use of Dreamweaver, nor does it tell you what makes for good Web design and what doesn’t.

In other words, it doesn’t tell you how to make digital content. That skill, talent, and drive I assume you already have, or you probably wouldn’t be reading this book.

This book also doesn’t explain the technical aspects of delivering content on the Web. Explanations of HTTP requests and TCP/IP belong in books about networking. Also, I assume that you know how to use a Web browser, an FTP client, or whatever it is that you need to get your content out to the Net At Large. If you have no idea how to do this, I recommend you talk to a friend who does (or perhaps a friend’s child), because this is outside the scope of the book.

If you’re looking to run your own business, there is some fundamental knowledge you need to have regardless of the nature of that business. I assume you know how to obtain a business license, keep records of accounts using generally accepted accounting principles, incorporate a business, and all of the other “administrivia” that comes with starting up a small concern. Much of these requirements vary from locale to locale, so covering them here would be pointless.
What I present to you in this book is business perspective. After being in this particular game for close to a decade, I’ve had (and unfortunately took) the opportunity to make every pertinent mistake imaginable. But I’ve learned from those mistakes and hope that I can help you sidestep them in your own quest to be paid for the content you create and share with others. I’ve been a full-time independent creator since 1997, and, as such, most of what I’ve written in this book will be from the vantage point of someone who relies on the Web to put food on the table. This isn’t to say that this book isn’t meant for those of you who are only looking for a little beer money. Most of everything I teach in this book can be applied directly to a part-time content effort with no modification at all. On occasion you’ll need to scale down what I suggest, and those incidences (and how you need to adjust them) will be clear to you.

The Internet (and the Web in particular) has brought opportunity to the independent creator like no other invention prior. Our ability to publish our work and reach a potential audience of millions has changed the landscape of content provision markedly and permanently. But, with this opportunity comes a responsibility that we each learn how to be not only good creators, but good businesses as well. It has long been the tradition that when a creator signed on with a big distributor (record label, syndicate, and so on), the creator would just create and the distributor (effectively the commercial partner) would deal with the business of business. This tradition has, sadly, kept most of the creator pool exactly where the distributors want them: in the dark when it comes to business dealings. With the advent of the Web and the rise of the independent creator, it behooves us to take all of our interests in our own hands — because if we don’t, others will supersede our interests with their own.

That you’re reading this book already speaks volumes about your desire to become a financially responsible and successful creator, and that you’re-compelled to take the rudder instead of letting someone else do it for you. For this, I congratulate you. When you’ve finished the book, you’ll be armed with the knowledge you need to set up the pieces you need to get the money flowing toward you in exchange for your hard work. If you’re someone who’d like to make a living as a creator, you’ll also know what you need to do to get there.

I feel very fortunate that I’ve been able to work my way through the last several years as a cartoonist, without being shackled to a traditional syndication contract. It means that I can do what I love every day, and interact with the interesting people who come to see what I have to say as a creator. It also means that there is clearly room for independent content providers who don’t play the game by the rules that most of the Big Guys want us to play by.

The content landscape has changed a great deal in the last ten years, in ways that demand our attention. If opportunities are just waiting to be plucked, what’s stopping us from doing so? I have always believed that a vista filled with independents gives all of us more strength and variety, choices that aren’t limited to what the large syndicates of whatever stripe present to us as
consumers. For that reason, to me, nothing would be more satisfying than to see hundreds if not thousands of new faces on the Web, plying their talent and earning a living, all on their own and without the say-so of a Daddy Warbucks.

Start reading and go get ‘em!

J.D. “Illiad” Frazer

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