

Independent PERSPECTIVE

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Susan Witter Receives Distinguished SIG Service Award

by Linda Gallagher
CICSIG Co-Manager

The Distinguished SIG Service Award is designed to recognize exemplary dedication to the SIG and its activities. The program was inaugurated in 2002, with the first awards given in 2002.

About Susan Witter's work for the CIC SIG:

Susan started her work on the CIC SIG newsletter, *Independent Perspective*, in early 1991 (Spring 1991 is-

sue) as the Layout Editor and Designer. She continued in that capacity until she became the Editor in mid-1992 (Fall 1992 issue). Under her leadership, the newsletter came out each quarter without fail, regardless of how late contributors sent her their articles. Susan continued to serve unflinchingly as Editor and Managing Editor through the Winter 1997 issue. She brought the newsletter from a 6-page format through an evolution to

a 12-page format, with each issue chocked full of informative articles that continue to offer value to SIG members from our archives.

The award citation:

For sustained and exceptional leadership of and contributions to the newsletter of the Consulting and Independent Contracting SIG

Karen Steele Receives Distinguished SIG Service Award

by Thomas Barker
CICSIG Co-Manager

Karen Steele was Manager of the Consulting and Independent Contracting SIG from 1994 to 1998. During her tenure in this position the membership grew to over 2000 strong and made the transition to the digital age. Karen sponsored CICSIG progressions at the annual conference

and developed the newsletter into a "must read" for all independent contractors. She began the membership "rates survey" that has now become the standard for the society. She has gone on to other important duties in STC, but her contributions to the consultants and independent contractors membership remains.

The award citation: For enthusiastic and wise guidance as manager of the Consulting and Independent Contracting SIG, and for yearly contributions on panels and progressions at the STCs annual conference, and for editing and contributing to the SIG's online book on Consulting and Independent Contracting.



So Whaddya Do When You Get Sick?

by Robin Jackson
CICSIG Editor

Many independent contractors plan the launch of their business extensively. They spend time with a mentor, attend a Small Business Administration seminar, or read small business how-to books.

Before starting Ghostwriters, I did a lot of reading on small business, and received mentoring from friends who had their own businesses in other fields. I was ready for many of the pitfalls. I knew I would need both a desktop and laptop computer. I knew I wanted my business to be a corporation. I knew I would need IT support for my computers, so my business bought a walkie-talkie phone for my husband, in exchange for his services as a support analyst. I thought I had covered all my bases. I had been educated on how to value my services, and how to inspire potential clients to value my services. I heard it over and over, "You are your company's product!" But until last Fall, it never occurred to me that my corporation could ever run out of

"product". That's what this article is about.

I had just signed a contract for a new client. I was really excited about the project, because it was a great match for my skill set, and the opportunity to add value was huge. My client was an SMB, or small-to-medium business that had been in business for just over five years. Their volume in the local and regional market had been exponential over the years. They knew their client's needs, and they knew how to meet those needs. Both principals had previously held management positions at larger companies in the same industry. The company was solid in idea and execution. If they wanted to grow to the national market, they needed some professional marketing services. That's where I came in. I was totally absorbed in designing their corporate identity logo and writing a brochure when I began to feel unwell.

I didn't pay much attention at first. I rested more after my workday, and cut back on weekend activities. When I began to feel worse, I did some doctor visits after I left

my client's office.

Of course, the doctor visits only produced more visits for "tests" and unpleasant lab procedures. All of these things took time, and time was all I had to sell.

Not only was I conscious of my need to generate billable hours, I was highly motivated by a desire to see my client's message reach their audience. My client was attending an upcoming tradeshow and they had to have a booth and collateral in 14 days. I didn't have time to be sick! I didn't even have time to drive to the medical center!

By the time the results of some of those unpleasant lab procedures had come back, I was told I had to have surgery. Not emergency surgery, but necessary surgery—and soon.

Everything I had read in business books about balancing the urgent and the important came back to haunt me. It's no longer safe and just theoretical when it's your own health that is important and increasingly urgent.

Three project management factors kept me from bringing in a subcontractor and bowing out immediately.

First, when I bid on the project, I did not budget for a subcontractor. Second, while negotiating the contract, I was at a point in the fiscal year that I needed to rack up some more business miles on my company-paid car. I was willing to drive an hour one way to my client's office 4 to 5 days a week. Many other independents would not be willing to do that.

Most importantly, my clients had just decided to "bite the bullet" and bring in professional marketing help. They had bonded with me, and educated me about their business model, industry and company. They didn't want to do that again. They certainly didn't want to pay for someone else's time to do it again.

The solution? My client and I identified which deliverables were launch critical and which deliverables could wait until after my surgery. I reduced my daily hours to a level that was physically easier to handle, and worked through the pain. Would I do it again? I sure wouldn't want to.

Have you faced a similar situation? How did you manage it? Please send your scenarios to rjackson@ghostwriters-inc.com

My Corner Office

by Nancy A. Zacks
The Precise Word, LLC

I have been working as a medical, technical and science writer for 20 years. I've had many interesting assignments; from documenting the first word processor to writing about signs of cancer in Pap smears. My office locations have been equally diverse. In the early 1980s, I wrote about arthritis in a converted warehouse in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In the mid 80's I documented those same word processors at the Wang Towers, twin boxes that sat proudly on the Lowell Connector in the twilight of the mini-computer era. Before my move to the Towers with a view, I was housed with approximately 199 other members of the Technical Publications department in what could be best described as a concrete shoebox. No windows. Few doors. Long, low and dark. In the late 80s, it was a little desk on the manufacturing floor in a startup medical device company. Then, a step up; a comparatively private desk in a hallway near the laser printer!

I had views of parking lots, hillsides, major intersections (including

traffic accidents) and dumpsters. There were buildings without air-conditioning in the summer and without heat in the winter. There were warehouses, mazes, glass rooms, cubicles, and one-room design studios. There were other technical writers: George, Dave, Margaret, John, Peter and quite a few Michaels. All of us tapping happily, and not so happily away in our corporate cubicles.

Now, I'm in the corner office - the Northeast corner of my neat little house in Providence Rhode Island. After 15 years of corporate cubicles and just one year of freelancing, I have the essentials: a large desk, a fast computer, printer, a filing system, a mail system, bookcases and a Yellow Labrador Retriever who welcomes me when I return from lunch.

The Stuff

When starting with limited funds, setting up a home office is a series of large and small decisions. These can be as complex as redesigning your home to accommodate your office, to simply adding a fax machine to your already existing equip-

ment. You need the basics (a good rule of thumb is to think about the equipment you had at your favorite job) as well as a good understanding of how you work. Everyone is different. If you have to buy stuff, there are all kinds of ways to find it inexpensively. Warehouse furniture sales, consignment shops, and slightly damaged furniture items are all options if you want to save money.

My Office

For any office, it's a good idea to set aside different areas for different tasks. My office is only about 10 x 12 feet, but I have places for everything. I have a mail area, where I open and sort mail, a phone area, where I make calls and keep my Rolodex, a filing area where I can get rid of stuff either into a file or into the recycling pile.

I've got my monitor mounted on a stand that I can push away if I need the desk space for "pencil thinking." One bookcase has my printed portfolio material. My other bookcases contain reference materials.

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-So Whaddya Do...

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-My Corner Office

My Corner Office (continued from page 3)

I have a cordless phone that has two lines: one for a business number. Since I don't have a separate business line, the phone also has Caller ID so I can ignore telemarketers who call during the day.

For me, a radio is essential. Music is the best kind of office mate, friendly but unobtrusive. I've got plants, my favorite CW Anderson prints of Thoroughbred horses, my dog, and her water bowl. The plastic "Sterlite" drawers that hold my papers come in all sizes. These are inexpensive and great for separating personal and business papers. I use separate In baskets for personal and business mail.

The Chair

If you work as a writer you are most likely going to be sitting in a chair. If you can afford it, spare no expense for this very important bone-supporting device. My home office was equipped with an inexpensive model from Office Depot. I can ride a horse longer than I could sit in that chair! It had to go. I researched ergonomic chairs and found a chair made by Human-Scale called Freedom

www.humanscale.com.

This is an expensive chair, but it paid for itself the first month I worked for myself. It adjusts to your movements as you read, type, and move around your office. You can get a headrest that lets you recline and type at the same time. The Humanscale keyboard that goes with it adjusts to any height or angle. Right now I am typing in that position because I just spent the previous 8 hours sitting up typing and it's 10:00 pm.

The Desk

The desk should be tall enough to fit a keyboard tray since it's essential that your arms maintain a good angle while you type. I like enough clearance so I can sit in my chair cross-legged if I want to. The desk is a very personal thing, but I like mine large with a lot of leg room. I use Sterlite file cabinets so I can move them around. I keep my active clients folders right next to me on my left side (I'm left-handed). My portable G4 is perched on a wooden cube that holds my most important reference books.

On My Bookshelf...

Speaking of books, here are a few that I've found very helpful in my

first year of business.

Working from Home – Paul and Sarah Edwards – a very comprehensive guide to all of the aspects of working at home.

Getting Business to Come to You – Paul and Sarah Edwards and Laura Clappitt Douglass – An in-depth discussion other aspects of marketing and generating business.

Starting a Limited Liability Company – Martin Shenkman, Samuel Weiner and Ivan Taback—a good summary of the aspects of LLCs.

How to Become a Successful Consultant in Your Own Field—Hubert Bermont.

The Contract and Fee Setting guide for Consultants and Professionals—Howard L. Shenson.

(continued on page 5)

If you work as a writer you are most likely going to be sitting in a chair. If you can afford it, spare no expense for this very important bone-supporting device.



My Corner Office (continued from page 4)

You, Inc.

If you work for yourself, no matter how busy you get, you will notice that there is not much conversation in your office. My dog snores and tells me when it's time to visit the backyard. However, if you are accustomed to the noise and social chit chat in an office, things will seem very quiet. Depending on how you handle it, this can either drive you crazy or become a wonderful productive advantage. I've experienced both. When I get the urge to talk with someone (other than the dog) I email a friend who I know is sitting in one of those cubicles or shoeboxes. We exchange a few observations or discuss the reason why our FrameMaker book isn't updating correctly. This usually scratches the social itch and I get back to work. When I first started working on my own, and finally became very busy, I learned to always go outside of the office, no matter how busy. Go-

ing to the bank, mailing a letter, walking the dog, buying the Providence Business News, reminds me that there is a world outside that is at least as important as what I am doing in my little office. I read somewhere that the people who give up working for themselves do so because they miss their colleagues. As long as I am careful to notice when I need to talk to someone, it's not a problem. However, that takes practice. It helps to think of my office as the launching pad for my business, rather than a little corner of my house.

Home Vs. Work

I like my work and I like my home. Since I don't have kids or a spouse, I find it easy to keep the two separate. Some people do not. If this is you, you should think about getting a separate office if possible. When I "go to work" I take my coffee and work. I stop for lunch, then return to my desk, the same

way I did when I took my lunch breaks for the last 15 years. When I am busy, this works fine.

Although motivation involves many other factors, a nice office helps me stay motivated. I like to come here. I feel like working (usually) when I sit in my very comfortable Freedom chair. When dealing with dry spells or the inevitable little problems that crop up: late payments, computer problems, and power outages, it's nice to have the foundation of a well-equipped office.

For every thing I had in my former life as an employee, it's possible (with a little creativity) to come up with the equivalent of just about everything: health insurance, savings plans, work, colleagues, and an office. My office has all of the things an office needs AND the comforts of home.

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SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We encourage you to send comments, suggestions, and opinions regarding *The Independent Perspective* or the CIC SIG to the editor at rjackson@ghostwriters-inc.com.

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SUBMISSION

Articles and news items should be submitted to the editor by the first of the month prior to the month of publication. Please submit files in either text (RTF) or Word format to Robin Jackson at rjackson@ghostwriters-inc.com.