

from the editor

Who do you know in Calcutta?

Without a doubt, online networking has been the buzzword for the past month. A friend sent the **Freebird** staff an invitation to join LinkedIn, one of the more well-known online networking sites. From the moment we made our first connection, we've heard echoes of the "small world effect", quite literally, from around the world. Unless you've personally tapped into online networking, it is hard to imagine the enormity of the network you can create in a matter of days. The opportunity is spectacular whether you are looking for a job, prospecting for clients or searching for venture partners. Frauke Nonnenmacher tells us about the "small world effect" in real time. Krishna Avva gives us the inside scoop on a copywriting niche where you will have little competition. Once you complete your web page, you'll want to make sure Search Engines will find you. Brian Farrell shows you the necessary steps. Over the holidays Jean Ridlon adventured to Amazonia and has a first hand report for the *Travel Journal*. California graphic designer Justin Walton gives us a look at his talents. Lyn Blair has advice for freelancers traveling the Rocky Road. Don't get lured into suffering on your way to achieving success.

We invite you to spend some time looking around Freebird's web site. Changes are made monthly. The *Recommended Reading* page not only has links to purchase some of the most highly recommended books on copywriting, graphic design and travel freelancers, you'll find ebooks too. **Freebird's Favorite Links** page is a gold mine. All **Tool Box** items from back issues of **Freebird** are on the *Favorite Links* page. When you need a tool quickly, just jump to *Favorite Links*. New links are added frequently. One of the most recent additions is *Survey Monkey*. If you are ready to test a client's or your own product or service, don't monkey around. Swing over to **Freebird's Favorite Links**.

Maria Thompson

The (Sometimes) Rocky Road to Success

Chapter 11 - You Have a Choice - Take the Easy Road

By Lyn Blair

Take the advice of a genius who wasn't allergic to hard work and knew how to persist.

Thomas Edison once said, "*I never failed once. It just happened to be a 2000-step process.*"

Your evaluator's kind words in the critique of your copywriting piece, travel letter or graphic design may not assuage the sinking feeling in your stomach. Nor may his or her encouragement lessen the disappointment in discovering you have a *lot to learn*.

You may bask in your feelings of inadequacy for minutes, hours or days. There are those who never recover. Suffering is their specialty.

On June 14th and 25th 2004 Michael Masterson wrote a two part series in *Early to Rise* (#1156 and #1157) called "Gini's Challenge: Embrace Your So-Called 'Incompetence' and Force Yourself to Succeed Anyway." If you haven't read it I suggest you do so. His article strikes to the core of every beginning freelancer's struggle. He explains, "Most important endeavors begin in ignorance and succeed through pain. If you don't have the persistence to endure the pain, you won't get to enjoy the success."

The Choice Is Yours

It seems there are two roads to success—one is easy and one is hard. The hard road is laden with suffering, making the journey difficult. The easy road is smooth going. Ignore the pain and focus on success.

Everyone experiences pain on the way to success. However, not everyone suffers. Some don't even see the effort they put into succeeding...as painful.

Have you ever met a person who breezes through life, no matter what the circumstances are? People like this are rare, but do exist.

Two sisters I knew, while both high achievers, were a study in opposites. One took the hard road and indulged in suffering. When first learning to walk, she by-passed walking and started out running. Always demanding instant perfection, even as a baby, she reached for the top of the scale before having mastered the bottom. She would fall, well up with tears of frustration, cry... and protest her failures. The pain of learning how to walk became exaggeratedly evident. But persistent she was and four days after tackling "learning how to walk" she was running around.

The other sister took the easy road. Achieving her first step, she landed on her fanny and giggled. Moving through her learning process at a perfect gradient of difficulty, she never took on more than she could easily handle. Pain of falling never fazed her. In fact pain or difficulty never crossed her mind. She steadily pushed through efforts to walk, making it look easy, estimating the necessary effort to accomplish walking and doing it.

Learn To Estimate Your Efforts

You take on an enormous project and allow too little time to meet the deadline. You tackle an advanced graphic design class without having the beginning course firmly under your belt. Your client finds your sales letter disappointing, not what he was expecting. All because you failed to ask enough questions in determining what he wanted.

Painfully frustrated...embarrassed...and discouraged. That's how you may feel when venturing into unknown territory. It takes courage to discover that your skill sorely lacks expertise but at least you've got the moxie to be pioneering your way.

Time and experience will help you adjust your efforts. Whether the pain of "not getting it right" lasts seconds, minutes, days, weeks, months or years—the amount of time you choose to suffer—lies in your hands. You can decide the effort was so unbearable that you'll never go through it again. Or you can realize it's just effort—wrongly estimated—and part of learning. You can even laugh about it and turn the ridiculousness of your foible into a funny anecdote.

If you find yourself entertaining the idea of suffering, don't worry...it happens. I caught myself the other day telling a business partner it would take six months to a year to turn a new freelancing venture into a viable business. I flashed him a doleful look of "woe is me."

He responded, "Six months to a year isn't very long."

Pain and suffering...shot down with one sentence.

Just get in there and keep plugging. Quit feeling sorry for yourself if it takes hard work to reach your goal. Quit focusing on your incompetence. Instead concentrate on improving. Concentrate on the competence you dream of achieving.

No matter how tempting - don't get lured into suffering. Is there anything that can make this freelancing challenge more palatable, more pleasurable? Yes, your vision—the vision of sweet success.

About the Author: Lyn Blair is a Los Angeles based copywriter and graphic designer. She writes articles for *Freebird* ezine and is Assistant Editor. Her articles can also be found at *Go Articles.com*, *IdeaMarketers.com* and *Connectionteam.com*.
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White Papers-A Copywriting Niche with Little Competition

By Krishna Avva

In last month's Freebird Issue 10, Sandy Probst's article, "Dear Junk Mail Hater" discussed the variety of marketing communications a copywriter produces, other than "junk mail." If you have a strong understanding of a technology or a specific industry, consider writing white papers. This largely undiscovered niche could be a full-time enterprise or an additional copywriting service you can provide.

One point of distinction used in this article: "client" is your client and "customer" is the client's customer.

What is a white paper?

Jason Ciment says in his article ""Star Light, Star Bright, How You Shine So Paper White":

When a prospect picks up a white paper, she is, in effect, saying two things:

- *"How will your product or service solve my needs right now?"*
- *"Teach me what I need to know to make a good decision."*

White papers need to present your company favorably and reinforce why your organization should be selected over your competition. Since the goal is to ultimately influence a prospective customer into becoming an actual customer, you need high-impact white papers that can be easily understood by your audience and clearly demonstrate how your solution can solve the person's critical needs.

White papers are not limited to technology related topics. Many white papers explain positions in various industries, such as Insurance, Financial Planning, Pharmaceutical Usage, etc.

How does a white paper as a form of marketing collateral fit in with a typical copywriter? Quite well. The average writer of white papers represents a focused technical person, trained almost exclusively in technology, who may have taken an obligatory college technical writing class or never had any formal writing training. Opportunities for writing white papers are limitless for anyone with a fundamental ability to understand technology or industry. Unlike the average technical writer, an experienced copywriter has skills to translate technology into words any customer can understand.

Basic Skills Needed

The basic skills needed to write white papers are the ability to ask the same questions a prospective customer is likely to ask and blend the answers into a well-crafted paper. You don't need a college degree in the industry, but a strong familiarity with the buzzwords and basic concepts are a must.

A technical writer produces functional white papers, but a copywriter brings out the compelling aspects and advances the customer through the lead generation process. An effective white paper answers all the customers' questions and allows him to make informed decisions. A well-crafted white paper brings out company XYZ's product benefits of lowering the customer's costs as well as making the air surrounding the customer's factory smell like jasmine as opposed to a competitor whose product smells like old socks.

Effective White Papers Save Clients Money

An effective white paper saves the client money by reducing calls to the customer support desk or sales team for questions on how products and services work. For example, a company provides a less than stellar white paper to hand out at a trade show. A hundred potential customers pick up the paper to read later because the marketing folks working the booth are too busy to speak with everyone individually. Eighty percent of the customers toss the paper because the formulaic title

tells them nothing. The remaining 20% spend frustrating time calling the company with questions that could have been easily answered in the white paper. So, 80% of the potential customers are gone immediately and 20% are annoyed by inconvenience. Based on lost potential sales, the value of a good white paper justifies itself.

Estimating the work

Estimating work varies per project as in any typical copywriting piece. The exception is talking more with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to make sure you reflect content accurately. Be certain to cover added meetings in your time and effort estimate:

- Get all available collateral on the topic from the company and/or experts.
- Build time into your schedule for SMEs to get back to you. Technical people are notorious for not respecting non-techies. Persistence pays.
- Is it a new product? If yes, build in a lot of time for revisions as the client decides how it works. Existing products are more stable and the changes should be minimal.
- Understand expectations on meetings/conference calls. Extra meetings and calls to get your material will add to the project time.
- Will you "test" the document to prove the described concept works? It's a personal preference, but unless you have quality control experience, a copywriter will likely recommend the client perform the testing and validation.
- Build in the cost of rewrites, if needed.
- Build in the cost of any document reviews or specify only X reviews with X changes based on those reviews. Charge extra for any major changes.
- Determine if charts, tables or pictures are needed (hint: probably). Who provides or generates these? You? Build that effort into the estimate.

Estimating the bid

Now, the important question, how much can you make writing white papers? Two methods to calculate your price are Hourly and Flat Fee. There are pros and cons for each method. Weigh the pros and cons before deciding which method to use. Never estimate or bid white paper projects by the word. With charts, tables and pictures thrown in, the word count becomes meaningless.

Hourly

Make sure the proposal clearly states what activities are included as billable hours. An example, travel time to the client site is normally not billable. Another example, research time typically can't be charged. Bump up your rate to compensate for these. The industry sometimes considers white paper creation the same as technical writing, so rates are equivalent to technical writers, averaging \$30-75/hour, depending on your experience level in the industry.

Pros –If a lot of meetings or phone calls are required, you are compensated for the time involved. If a lot of unknown factors exist, you're not stuck with a low bid. Payment spreads out more on a continuous basis. An incomplete estimate will not hurt you.

Cons – Client may require you onsite, so they can keep an eye on you. There may be an expectation to work more quickly. The rate may be lower than you want because the client compares you to a technical writer. As you become more proficient in the company/industry, writing white papers will take you fewer hours, so you don't gain the benefits and efficiencies of experience in your rate, unless you negotiate a higher rate.

Flat Fee

A flat fee is the more prevalent method of bidding on white paper projects. White papers vary from 10-18 pages. For your estimate preparation, get a reasonable idea how many charts/tables and pictures are needed and who creates them. Also estimate the number of meetings or phone calls needed to collect all your material. Based on the number of pages it takes for you to lay out the content, the rate ranges from \$100 - \$500/page. Give a total price without your estimate breakout, so you have flexibility to adjust the bid as needed.

Pros – Flat fees are preferable for recurring engagements, so you get a different price for each piece. Require some payment upfront. Clearly spell out expectations and scheduled deliverables.

Cons – If the effort required to complete the project greatly exceeds the estimate, you still bear the responsibility to finish the job with professionalism and integrity. If you don't define the agreement clearly, the customer may keep asking for changes.

Useful links

www.whitepapersource.com/forum/index.php - great forum for questions on the White Paper business, from both experienced pros and new writers

knowledgestorm.com - a good repository of white papers in several industries

www.bitpipe.com - A good collection of IT White Papers, Case Studies, webcasts and product literature

www.stelzner.com/copy-whitepapers.html - Great newsletter and you can download a white paper on white papers.

www.clickz.com/experts/archives/aff_mkt/aff_mkt/article.php/1347861 - Excellent article by Jason Ciment, "Star Light, Star Bright, How You Shine So Paper White." He also gives some good tips on how to structure the white paper.

If you claim expertise in a particular industry, white papers represent a very lucrative area for copywriters. Technologists write most white papers with no understanding of simple, compelling copy. With your copywriting skills, you have the ability to make the documents a must-read and can establish yourself in a very strong and long-term niche.

About the Author

Krishna Avva - The Biz Storyteller. *Make your business documents a must-read!*

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Is Your Web Site Search Engine Friendly?

By Brian J. Farrell

In Issue #8 we covered the basics to get started ("Begin Your Online Marketing – Step By Step) and in issue #9 we discussed linking strategies ("Online Marketing – Linking Strategies"). Now that your website is up and running, your next step is preparing for Search Engine Optimization (SEO). When viewers search on Google, MSN, and Yahoo (or just about any search engine), proper SEO determines where your website ranks in the list of search results. Instead of finding your site listed at the bottom, near the end of the search results pages, you want your ranking to be optimum, closer to the top of the list—hence, optimization.

Search engine optimization (SEO), much like copywriting, is more art than science. Follow these best practices when preparing your website and you'll achieve higher rankings on search results. Why do this? You'll get free, high quality website traffic.

Start By Researching Keywords and Key Phrases

Identify keywords and key phrases relevant to your niche. Multiple term key phrases are better, since competition for single keywords can get very high. For example, instead of “copywriter” choose “direct response copywriter”. Use Overture’s Keyword Selector Tool (<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>) to uncover variations on your main keyword. Weave these keywords and key phrases into your web copy conversationally.

Are Your Web Pages Search Engine Friendly?

Make your web pages search engine friendly. Use title tags, Meta tags (description and keywords), headings (H1, H2, H3) and ALT tags for images. Here is a helpful [Meta Tag Generator](#), which gives detailed explanations of what Meta tags are and how you can create effective Meta tags.

How to Structure Your HTML Code

Syntax for Head elements (in between the <head> and </head> tags):

- <title>Your page title</title> - Include descriptive keywords and your company name. Keep your title to 60 characters or less, so search engines can list the entire title, not a broken fragment. Your page title is all most search engine users see and is the most important page tag. Include important keywords and remove filler words (and, the, or, etc.). A good title tag: <title>Direct response copywriter writes sales and marketing messages</title>. Avoid titles that don’t sell for you, such as <title>Welcome to my website</title>.
- <meta name=“description” content=“your unique selling position here”> - about 140 characters in length.
- <meta name=“keywords” content=“your keywords and key-phrases, separated by a comma”> - Your meta key words should number about 250 characters or less, including spaces and punctuation. Note: although not currently used by Google, META keywords are still important to other search engines and directories, such as Yahoo! Search.

Use your best keyword or key-phrase in the heading of your copy— preferably within one of the three heading tags. <h1>Biggest heading style</h1>

- <h2>Large heading style</h2>
- <h3>Medium sized heading style</h3>

Also use the best keyword or key-phrase in the first paragraph of your copy. Syntax for Body elements go in between the <body> and </body> tags.

When choosing alternate words for graphic images that won’t show up on some browsers choose from your keywords or key phrases as well.

- - Use keyword and key-phrase rich descriptions.

Avoid These Common Mistakes

Many inexperienced search engine marketers make the following common mistakes:

- Repeating the same words over and over again – it just doesn’t work and you run the risk of being banned by the search engines.
- Submitting your URL to the search engines everyday – this could be considered spamming.
- Using the same color text as the background to get more keywords and key-phrases “stuffed” on your web page.
- Using browser redirects, cloaking (delivering different content to Search Engines than general

public) and multiple pages with nearly identical content.

These strategies are not effective and may also get you banned from Search Engines.

When building your website, avoid using frames (a method of dividing the browser display area into separate sections, each of which is a different web page), JavaScript (a simple programming language) or Flash (an animation technology) for your navigation, as search engine spiders (the programs Search Engines use to map the web) have a hard time following this type of content.

Consider using a tool like Net Mechanic www.netmechanic.com, to check for HTML errors.

Design Decisions

Content rules on the Internet. Write and fine-tune your message, making it content rich and easy to read. Build your website around “content focused pages”, where each page reflects one main key-phrase.

When you create an HTML page for your site, use keywords and key-phrases relevant to the content of that page in your file names. For example, if you’ve built a “links” page, instead of naming the page “links.htm” try something more descriptive of the content on this page, such as “search_engine_links.htm”. By naming your files this way, you tell the search engines what it can expect to find on your web page.

Remember: your hyperlink text, image alt tags and filenames should make sense.

Finally, create a sitemap, which is a web page that lists all of the links available on your website. A sitemap is much like the table of contents in a book, and lets your users (and the search engine spiders) navigate throughout your website.

Are You Being Searched?

Your website is not static - plan to make changes. But don’t react too quickly to changes in search engine algorithms (a complex formula that determines rankings of URLs for a particular search query). Web pages should be easy to read, have lots of content and have a natural flow. According to Nielsen Net Ratings, almost 140 million Americans went online in December 2004. And the vast majority of them query a search engine when they go online. Check out your own website. Perform a search on Google using your most desired key phrase and look for your website in the search results. You may have to scroll many pages. Search engine optimization is not a quick fix – think of it more as a long-term strategy. When done right, your website will rise to the top of the list.

Note: Visit www.bfarrell.com/search_engine_list.shtml for a list of top search engines and directories. Submissions for most are free, some for a nominal fee. You’ll find links to the “Add Your URL” section for each listing.

About the Author

Brian J. Farrell www.bfarrell.com, The Word Scientist™, is a freelance copywriter and marketing consultant residing in Piscataway, NJ. He puts your marketing messages under the microscope - each word earns its keep and pushes your sales pitch forward. You’ll make more sales, get fresh leads and attract new customers to your business. Recent work includes non-fiction articles published in *Freebird* and on *Links-For-You.com*

Online Networking - "The Small World Effect" in Real Time

By Frauke Nonnenmacher

What has Hollywood actor Kevin Bacon got in common with worms and the US power grid? All have been linked by a mathematical explanation of the so-called **small-world effect**, in which apparently unrelated people turn out to have friends in common.—Robert Matthews, "Six degrees of separation," *New Scientist*

Building a network of contacts is a vital element to grow your freelance business and your client base. There are many ways to network, from large networking organizations like BRE or BNI to small, informal groups. And there is an alternative - online networking.

Online networking is "the small world effect" in real time. The phrase "six degrees of separation" derived from the Small World Project, refers to the concept that everyone in the world can be reached by through six friends of friends of friends. Be prepared to be amazed as you make network connections.

Equally mind-boggling is how rapidly networking goes exponential. Imagine developing a personal network of 250,000 people from around the world almost overnight. Imagine how your business could benefit. Just ask John Reese about networking. He sold over one million dollars on the Internet in one day, not through a massive ad campaign, not through high-powered sales letters, but through networking.

The advantages of online networking are many.

- You can reach a vastly larger group than is possible through face-to-face meetings.
- You build a valuable network of contacts around the world.
- You make quality business contacts.
- You're not tied to fixed meeting times nor do you have to worry about mandatory attendance.
- And businesses on a budget will be happy to hear online networking is generally much more affordable than joining a networking club.

On the downside you're not networking in a group that excludes your competitors – in fact, you may face quite stiff competition, depending on your line of business. No fixed meetings also means it's easy to let things slip, so it's up to you to make sure things keep rolling along smoothly.

Online Networking for Success

Here are a few hints and tips to maximize your success with online networking. The same tips can be used for face-to-face networking.

- 1) Don't bombard your contacts with requests for business. Instead, see if there's anything you can do to help others. Some networking groups have forums where you can offer help and advice to others – take advantage of the opportunity. Providing assistance is a great trust builder and gives you professional visibility. Useful advice does stick in peoples' minds – and so will your name.
- 2) Use your signature to your advantage. Create a short signature to use at the end of all your correspondence in the club. Your "sig file" can be the same as your email signature or tailored specifically to the networking group. Use a plain text signature rather than HTML. Make sure your signature contains your web site's URL and a good tag line. Including your tag line will help people remember you and including your website URL will improve your search engine rankings because most networking groups are picked up by search engines.
- 3) Recommend people you've done business with. Networking is just as much about getting business for others as for you. If you can recommend somebody you've done business with in the past, do it whenever possible. You'll find people will return the favour.

Here are a few online networking groups to get you started. The three selections are very different from one another. One may be more suited to you than another. All these online networking sites offer some sort of free membership - at this writing - but please do check for yourselves - you know how fast things change on the Internet.

LinkedIn www.linkedin.com - LinkedIn is a formal networking club. Unless a member has specified they're open for direct contact, it's only possible to contact other members via recommendations from people you already know. It takes time and effort to build a network here, but the ones you do build seem to have an extraordinary level of trust.

Ecademy www.ecademy.com - A semi-formal online networking group with public forums, private messaging, a marketplace, blogs and useful articles. You'll have to pay to get the most out of it, but it's well worth the investment.

Ryze www.ryze.com - Ryze is a very informal and chatty network, possibly best suited for small companies operating a retail business from home. Ryze has forums, guest books and private messaging available. On Ryze it's very easy to meet new people.

So there you have it - online networking in a box, ready and waiting for you to try. Find yourself saying, "It's a small world" and become part of the "small world effect" through online networking.

About the Author Frauke Nonnenmacher is a copywriter who specializes in marketing materials designed to build customer relationships. Frauke is Freebird's Web Master and also writes the occasional article for **Freebird**. Her articles can also be found at Netpreneurnow.com, Zongoo.com, GoArticles.com and IdeaMarketers.com For more information, visit her website at www.creativecats.com

Tool Box

Guide to Grammar and Writing

When you are in the middle of a writing project and land in a grammar sticky wicket, here is a site to bail you out. The *Guide to Grammar and Writing* is a comprehensive site like no other. The site covers every angle imaginable to educate you on grammar. If your writing skills need practice, read and try the freewriting exercises.

As you begin a new project and gather your thoughts, if you are having difficulty organizing your ideas, review the section on Outlines. There are lessons on "Writing With a Sense of Purpose" and a wonderful explanation and examples of exigence - a problem, a shortcoming or a challenge that compels us to communicate. You'll learn why understanding exigence is essential. You'll find tips to help you alter your tone of writing to effectively target your audience. The site also tells you how to overcome Writer's Block, if the problem presents itself. If you are still trying to master the rules of grammar or if you'd like to test your knowledge, the site has grammar quizzes galore.

The site's functionality allows you to find answers to grammar questions, while you are writing. Maybe you're having trouble with articles, determiners and quantifiers, those tricky little words that precede and modify nouns. As you write, if you need to check the rules on abbreviations, interjections, troublesome prepositions or pronouns, help is at your fingertips. Whatever grammar problem perplexes you, the *Guide to Grammar and Writing* will come to the rescue.

[Click here](#) to enter the gateway to the world of grammar. Then bookmark this resourceful site. You can't do without the *Guide to Grammar and Writing*, if writing is your business.

From the Travel Journal - Into the Heart of Ecuador's Amazonia

By Jean Ridlon

The current ripples around a shaded tree branch where dozens of tiny bats cling, appearing as amorphous dark lumps on the dead wood. We ease our canoe closer, careful not to make a sound as we seek this unique chance to photograph yet another indigenous species of the Amazonia. But even our most cautious movements alert these creatures to our human intrusion into their natural habitat. The startled black bats dart all at once from the branch, creating a cloudlike shadow across the river as they swarm above us.

We're on the last leg of our tour – deep into the Cuyabeno Jungle Reserve, an excursion in a motorized dugout canoe through Ecuador's Amazonia, home of more species of plants and animals than are found in all the rest of South America. Our canoe glides through the muddy river beneath a canopy of rich jungle vegetation. Slivers of sunlight slice the thick forest along each side of us. Only the drone of the canoe's small outboard motor and the occasional macaw screams from the overhead branches interrupt the eerie silence of the jungle.

A two-week old anaconda suns himself on a half-sunken log along the edge of the river, while yellow-streaked kingfishers glide gracefully just above the river's surface. Huge iridescent green butterflies alight briefly, and then flit off into the trees. Now and then our canoe scrapes over half-submerged branches. The tropical afternoon lulls us into the serenity of our journey down the river ...

Suddenly our canoe pops out into a huge, open expanse of water – Laguna Grande – where enormous trees grow right out of the water, distorting the boundary between lake and shore. Moments later we climb the wooden staircase leading from a dock to a small clearing in the jungle and Cuyabeno Lodge, our stop-over for the night.

In the long shadows of late afternoon, our cabana sits on stilts. With its windowless, faded wood exterior and thatched roof, it nearly blends into the surrounding jungle. The lodge provides candles, but we've been advised to bring along a flashlight – more effective for spotting frogs in the bathroom after dark!

We opt to spend the next morning off the river, a chance to explore the surrounding jungle. A biologist from the Cuyabeno Lodge guides us through the lush foliage. He talks about the pharmaceutical

importance of the rain forest as he points out curare vines and quinine trees. He draws our attention to a white blemish on the trunk of a nearby tree as he explains how certain species have adapted to camouflage themselves with their surroundings to increase their chance of survival – exemplified by that blemish which, upon closer observation, is actually a beautiful silvery-white moth with a wingspan of nearly a foot. We become more conscious of each step we take as our guide tells us about life on the floor



Aguarico River in the Cuyabeno Jungle Reserve – Ecuador

of the jungle. Like the inch-long ants carrying jagged leaf shards three times their size across our path and into a gnarled tree root or the highly venomous tree frogs – identified by the pair of brilliant yellow stripes and red splotches on their dull brown skin – hiding under dead leaves beside the path.

Later, in the relative safety of our canoe, we feel less vulnerable as we head further down river to a small native community above a sandy embankment. Women sit in the shallows at the water's edge doing the family laundry, while their children swim and frolic in the deeper water. Both groups seem unconcerned about the anacondas and piranhas that share the river with them.

Goats nap in the shade beneath the grass dwellings on stilts. Beyond the edge of the jungle, are banana and papaya trees, coffee bushes and yucca plants – the village supermarket. We're offered sweet and juicy papayas and flat bread – a diet staple that can last up to three weeks in the humid jungle climate – made from yucca and cooked on a huge pan over an open fire.

We've traveled into the heart of the Amazonia – a trip that started in metropolitan Quito with a 50 minute plane ride to Lago Agrio and a two and a half hour drive over deeply rutted dirt roads to the entrance of the Cuyabeno Jungle Reserve. We've experienced the jungle up close ... at times feared it ... but, mostly we've marveled at it. And that's the kind of trip that never really ends.



Heron at Laguna Grande

World of Graphic Design



Waves emanating from the "i" of the Echo Media logo, cleverly echo the company message "ideas worth repeating". A simple logo brands the company and provides a professional image.

About the Designer:

Justin Walton is an artist, graphic designer and web designer. His company Walton Design is located in Santa Barbara, CA. Using a spectrum of Adobe and Macromedia products such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, Fireworks and Dreamweaver, Justin Walton tailors his designs to suit his clients' needs. His freelance career sprang from manipulating photos into graphics and websites for family and friends in his youth and evolved into managing large projects for corporate offices. To see his designs visit: www.waltondesign.net