

The Writer's Toolkit, Part One

It used to be that a pen or pencil, a pad of paper, and a typewriter were all the tools a writer needed.

But this is the 21st-century and all writers - whether or you write fiction, nonfiction or advertising copy - need to have an arsenal with some good, useful tools.

In this two-part article, I'll give you some information about handy tools as well as fun things you can try.

Voice-recognition software

One of the most valuable tools I have found over the past few years is something called voice-recognition software. It allows me to speak into a microphone and the words are automatically typed on my computer. It's the modern-day version of the Dictaphone.

You'll need a couple of things for this tool to work well. I don't think I need to mention that everybody should be working on a computer. It's really the only way to go these days.

You'll want to buy voice-recognition software that has a good reputation. I use Dragon Naturally Speaking - the standard version. The software is easy to install and work with - as a matter of fact I'm writing this article by dictating it into my computer.

In addition to your new software you'll want to pick up a really good headset with a microphone. I like Logitech products and they have a comfortable headset with an adjustable microphone that works really well.

For novelists, using voice-recognition software is a great shortcut for editing. If you write your first drafts the way I do ... in longhand in a notebook ... being able to read it back into the computer will permit you to catch clumsy phrases and passages that don't work. It's also a lot quicker than typing it and saves on wrists and hands.

Web Hosts

A web site is absolutely required these days if you're going to do any effective marketing. And marketing really is the name of the game even if you have a good publisher.

Single web sites

If you're looking to put up a single web site use a host like Yahoo! It's the best way to go. You can get their starter version for \$11.95 a month and they give you web site building software that's easy to learn and implement.

Multiple web sites

If you're going to have multiple web sites, however, you'll want to look into a service that charges you one monthly fee and permits you to have as many web sites as you'd like.

You'll want to look for a host that offers a bulk or reseller account. I have about half a dozen web sites going right now and I use HostGator for my bulk host account.

When you go there, you'll have the chance to buy either a reseller account or go with a shared plan. While the shared plan is cheaper – and more attractive in some respects – do yourself a favor and go with the reseller account. It's \$10 a month more but you get a lot more flexibility in adding websites. Don't worry about the word "reseller." You don't have to be in the business of selling web hosting programs to have a reseller account. Believe me, I went with the shared plan at first – I thought I was so clever! – and ended up having to upgrade to do everything I wanted to do which took time and a bit more money.

HostGator comes with Site Studio which is a web site builder. It's \$2 extra per month per site to use it but it's worth it. It's WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) so you don't need to know html and there's a publish button so you don't have to worry about transferring files via an FTP server. You can easily upload files to your site at HostGator via file manager if you do them in another web building program.

When we meet again we'll discuss a neat piece of software for project organization, design programs and a free Microsoft Word toy that eliminates having two video monitors or switching back and forth between screens in order to edit. See you then!

About the Author

Victoria Rosendahl has published one adult mystery and has begun the Kathy & Martha Mystery Series with the first installment, Bitter Tastes. Check out [Bitter Tastes](#) for ideas on how to build a kid friendly web site and feel free to e-mail her at info@vbrosendahl.com.

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