

# Cygnature

August 2004

## May Meeting: Computer Whizzes De-Mystify System and Software Challenges – and Take on Internet Marketing *By Irma Chazotte*

*Guest Speakers: Stan Cohen, Ray Forgy, Bill Kelly*

As esoteric computer terminology tumbled from the lips of the evening's speakers at the May NJ Creatives meeting, it was touch and go there for a while for this member of the audience.

Experts Ray Forgy, owner of CT&T Systems, member Bill Kelly of William Kelly Design, and member Stan Cohen of Graphic Visions, who maintains the NJ Creatives Web site, spoke about everything you want and more importantly — need — to know about computers. What they had to say soon became perfectly clear as they identified problems and offered strategic solutions to the diverse range of professionals who use computers in their businesses.

Bugs, viruses, spyware, hardware upgrades, and data protection comprised the meat of Forgy's presentation about PCs.

"While a bug is a piece of code, a virus is software that invades your computer," he said. "Anti-virus software targets those nasty strings of code."

Spyware is free software that comes along with programs you might download, but it may also report your personal data — like passwords, account numbers, or your social security number — to the spyware's author. Programs including Norton 2004, and Spybot Search and Destroy can help rid your system of spyware. Using Safe Mode is an effective way to completely eliminate spyware, he added, noting that cleaning and

deleting these pesky files is the objective. Never give personal information out on the computer, he warned.

Regarding hardware, know what your system is supposed to do — how long it takes for a program to load, for example. A change in the workings is evidence that something may not be right. Since lack of space on your hard drive may be the culprit, Forgy suggested checking the amount of available hard drive space. Upgrades in software may require enhancing hardware, he noted.

Protecting data involves backing up the hard drive, should it fail. Forgy suggested storing backups on tape, CD, DVD, or external hard drive.

Bill Kelly's comments focused on MACs. "Don't think you're home-free if you have a MAC," he said. "Get virus protection if you have System 10, and get an external hard drive to back up data. Murphy's Law applies when it comes to saving data."

If you're using System 10, he advised, defragment your hard drive; it needs a contiguous system. Be sure your hard drive is big enough to accommodate programs.

If you are having problems, check USB ports and bad RAM modules, and run Disk First Aid. Adding new programs can create conflicts on a system. Rebuilding your desktop twice a month has many benefits.

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Stan Cohen, changing the subject from computer maintenance and safety, focused on marketing. His presentation was fortified with information from Ken Kowalsky of Blurt Inc. at [www.PromotionIsMyBusiness.com](http://www.PromotionIsMyBusiness.com), with whom he maintains the NJ Creatives Web site.

“A Web site is a necessity today,” Cohen said. “Four out of five businesses in the United States today have one. It shows you are in tune with the times.”

You can use it to promote yourself and communicate with your customers. Zones can be set up for specific clients, so you don't have to send out large files. To attract people to your site and make it easy to navigate, design it so it is indexed properly and search engine-friendly. Keep the site trim with as few bells and whistles as possible, including Flash, animation, and sound, to enable visitors to move about easily.

Your Web site is more than a showcase — it demonstrates that you have the necessary skill set required for solving problems. He suggested incorporating a contact form to request a visitor's name, address, phone, and e-mail as a convenient, non-threatening method to generate inquiries and response.

Web site promotion includes advertisements and business cards that include your Web site address. Online promotion is fueled by search engines that operate organically through key phrases or pay-per-click. Indexing, content, and the number of other sites referencing your site influence organic results. Your site's interest and relevance influence rank.

How the search is structured also influences results. Using quotation marks brings up results exactly as typed in. To come up, the word needs to be in text, not in graphics or frames. Successful optimization yields top results for key words and can produce traffic for a long time. Updating key words every few months can help.

Organic traffic is free and has benefits on a long-term basis, but it can take weeks or months before information on your site is absorbed into the search engines. With pay-per-click, you can control how many people view the site. It can, however, become expensive. Converting potential customers to clients requires a call to action on the Web site and further action on your part, such as telephone calls, offering subscriptions to newsletters, sending samples, and setting up meetings.

In other words, closing the sale is still up to you.

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## March Meeting: Advice from Veteran NJ Creatives Designers

At the March meeting, three veteran NJ Creatives designers offered advice on dealing with clients, contracts, printers and Web sites.

All suggested that the best way to avoid problems is to get everything in writing at the first meeting.

“Always use a detailed contract or job proposal,” said Ted DeCagna, of Ted DeCagna Graphic Design, Cranford. “Make sure you understand exactly what the client is looking for.”

Wayne Pollack, of Pollack Design, Woodcliff Lake, believes the initial meeting should be face-to-face--“Take detailed notes, and don't assume anything.”

“Nothing is worse for a designer than getting

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a project where all the copy has been written and all the marketing decisions have been made,” said Peter Adler, of Peter Adler Advertising Design LLC, Fort Lee. “It’s important for me to read and understand the copy, and know where the ad will appear.”

DeCagna and Pollack both recommend giving a client three or four ideas to choose from. Pollack says he allows for one round of drawings after the choice has been made.

“To calculate your bottom-line price, keep a log of your time, and figure out the average number of hours you usually spend on a particular type of job,” DeCagna suggested. He asks for 50 percent down and the other half on delivery, and says any big change in a job should require a change in the contract.

Pollack also charges per project, and renegotiates if the client requests changes greater than 20 percent of the entire job.

DeCagna works with several professional printers, and usually suggests the client let him oversee the final printing. He warns, “Watch out for phone and fax numbers, and Web site and e-mail addresses. They’re easy to get wrong, and in a big print run can be expensive to fix.”

Pollack keeps all notes and correspondence to avoid such mishaps. He also warns, “If you plan to use stock photography, mention it in your proposal and estimate the cost range for the client. It can be expensive, especially if used for a cover.”

Adler mentioned Web site design as an area where graphic designers often get in over their heads. He pointed out that while a Web site serves a purpose similar to a brochure—to sell a product, pass on information, or build or change a company’s image—the designer also must be able to handle the

interactive elements and tech support. “You need very focused content pages with the same basic template, a good navigation system, and an attractive look and feel,” he added. “The site should be search engine-friendly and designed for the simplest browser; you should not have to download special software just to view it. The designer also needs to think about how to market the site and maintain it over the long haul.”

When faced with a problem client, DeCagna suggests you limit how many options and revisions you’ll allow without additional payment. “If he doesn’t like any of your initial ideas, try to educate him about line, color and concept, but don’t come on too strong,” he said.

He recalled a client who requested many changes, then decided that because he didn’t like the final result he didn’t have to pay his bill. “I told him, ‘If an attorney loses your case, you still have to pay him.’”

Pollack notes that when he picks up on an “aggravation factor” with a client, he allows for it in his billing. He also advised, “Don’t give them a job too far ahead of the deadline, or they’ll expect that every time!”

His worst experience? When a product was misused, and the injured party tried to sue everyone including Pollack, who had merely designed the box. “That’s why so many brochures have to go through the legal department these days,” he said.

He added that it’s important to call the client if you have any questions, and keep the dialog open. “You’ll hear if something goes wrong, but rarely if everything is all right. After the job is delivered, call to make sure everything’s okay.”

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## The Morning After My Evening with Ilise Benun or Benun Offers NJ Creatives Meeting Tools for Successful Self-Promotion

By Rosemary Dreger

The morning after attending a 90-minute talk given by Ilise Benun at the June meeting of NJ Creatives, this writer's mailbox contained more emails than usual. Potentially lucrative emails.

I'm not talking about the usual barrage of offers for herbal remedies, an online diploma or an astonishingly low mortgage rate—there were messages from fellow professionals I'd met the night before. And they were offering me useful information I had asked for. Where were these emails headed? To more business, insists Ilise Benun, a nationally-recognized self-promotion expert, author of Self Promotion Online, and the featured speaker at NJ Creatives' June membership meeting at the Bergen Museum in Paramus, New Jersey. If the flurry of networking activity this writer experienced the day after the NJ Creatives meeting is any indicator, Benun's message hit home.

Addressing the more than 35 self-employed creative professionals—writers, graphic artists, illustrators, photographers, and multimedia artists—Benun shared insights and strategies designed to help business owners get the word out about their services and products. During a lively, interactive discussion, Benun emphasized a few simple but powerful themes: that self-promotion must be done consistently to ensure a robust business; that self-promotion can be painless; and that everyone you encounter—whether in a business or personal setting—is a potential contact, so be ready.

Benun's presentation began with a survey of the group's perceptions of self-promotion (the collective shudder spoke volumes!), and included an exercise that helped participants fine-tune their immensely important "15-word blurb." The audience was encouraged to explain what it is they do in such clear terms that even our mothers would understand—a surprisingly difficult task, yet when broken

down with Benun's "Blurb Worksheet," it was made easier. With member Wally Littman's input as an audience volunteer, we now know what a "gag" cartoonist is.

To help demystify the art of self-promotion, Benun detailed the "six secrets of self-promotion,"—namely, that "self-promotion is not bragging...it's not about you it's about them...and it's more about giving (your ideas, your expertise, etc.) rather than receiving (collecting business cards)." Through personal anecdotes, Benun illustrated the power of these secrets in action. And she underscored how the establishment of real connections can allow a business owner to set his or her name apart and ensure that name "pops up" when it's time to hire.

Benun's "Must Use Marketing Tools" included new twists on the basics (e.g. have lots of business cards on hand at all times; make samples of your work accessible online or in print), as well as innovations (like putting your phone number in the from field on all emails). She urged the audience to develop a marketing tool such as an online newsletter that creates a "loop" and keeps your company name top of mind. Using Powerpoint slides, Benun analyzed several highly effective websites and offered pointers on how to create equally effective sites using similar principles.

Benun sent the audience home with a detailed action plan to follow the very next morning: follow-up every lead; spend an hour a day on self-promotion; and call or email Ilise with any questions. It seems her advice has already taken hold.

If you missed Ilise Benun at NJ Creatives' June meeting you can view her Powerpoint presentation at [http://www.njcreatives.org/meetings/jun-2004/benun-ppt/self-promo\\_files/frame.htm](http://www.njcreatives.org/meetings/jun-2004/benun-ppt/self-promo_files/frame.htm) or log on to her website, [www.artofselfpromotion.com](http://www.artofselfpromotion.com)

## April Meeting: How Daniel Kirk Built a Career as a Children's Book Illustrator and writer.

*By Eileen Watkins*

Daniel Kirk's parents put on puppet shows for children in their spare time. Meanwhile, his father worked at a day job he hated.

"I swore I'd never do that," Kirk recalled.

At the April meeting, Kirk recounted his career as an illustrator, and sometimes author of children's books.

He first came to New York to be an artist, but didn't take to the art world. He "fell into illustration," creating many book covers and ads. Over the years, however, the venues for work dwindled. He didn't want to do Web sites or animation, and didn't particularly like taking orders from a boss.

He'd always collected children's books. Eventually, he had kids of his own, and while reading to them at night, he decided on a new career path.

Kirk came up with the idea for his first book, *Skateboard Monsters*, because his little daughter seemed spooked by the sound of skateboarders. He found a publisher through networking, and received \$3,000 to write and illustrate the work.

With his next book, *How the Wind Plays*, Kirk developed a "retro" style, based on 1950s and '60s kid's books, that he would return to frequently in his career. He took it even further with *Lucky's 24-Hour Garage* and *Breakfast at the Liberty Diner*, books designed to show children what everyday life was like in the 1930s and '40s. Of the latter, Kirk said, "It got great notices and awards, but it was the worst-selling of all my books, and went out of print in six months. It's what happens at Barnes & Noble that matters."

His best seller has been *Chugga-Chugga, Choo-Choo*, a train book geared toward toddlers. Kirk said, "It paid off the debt from my first two books that didn't do so well."

His most harrowing war story surrounds a holiday mailer he designed for his publisher—an ironically humorous image of snowmen

dancing around a bonfire. The publisher thought it could be a children's book, but couldn't decide on the approach. It went through repeated rewrites over a year's time, during which Kirk received no payment. After he revised it to a three-year-old's level, he finally got \$15,000 for several years' work. *Snow Family*, published by Hyperion in 2000, was the final result. He even did a "spec" script for a TV show based on the snow characters. It eventually became the book *Snow Dude*, which shuttled back and forth between "edgy" and cute before ending up in a form that pleased the publisher. It is due out this fall.

Kirk explained that "a whole committee of people" decides on the story line for a book, and only when everybody is happy does it see print.

He also warned, "People think if they've written a children's book, they should find someone to illustrate it. Actually, publishers hate that—it's their job to find an illustrator for the manuscript. I write and illustrate, and they don't really like that, either!"

As if the double threat weren't enough, Kirk also plays guitar and writes songs to accompany some of his stories. Both his books *Dogs Rule* and one about transportation called *Go!* include CDs featuring his original songs.

Next year, he'll bring out his first chapter book, *Rex Tabby, Cat Detective*, with about 75 illustrations, geared toward a "more mature" audience. He pointed out that the mass market is skewed more toward toddlers, while the library market wants books with more content for older kids.

Kirk works in oil paint or gouache on paper or canvas. He has never done his artwork on a computer, and said, "It seemed harder than painting and doesn't have any of the 'hand pleasure.'"

He advised artists looking to break into his field to check out books they like, copy the names of the publishers and submit to them.

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He advised, "Publishers these days are looking for people who don't have track records and are just getting started." He admitted that the big marketing dollars go to children's books by celebrities, but he promotes himself through his Web site,

[www.DanielKirk.com](http://www.DanielKirk.com), and school visits.

Kirk lives in Glen Ridge, works in a studio in his garage, and still collects kids' books to get ideas for themes. He said, "My favorite time of the day is still when I can read to my ten-year-old."

## President's Message:

The greatest part of this organization comes from the membership and the networking that we can do. When I joined more than 10 years ago, I was greatly relieved to talk with people who were in similar positions. I was able to ask them questions such as, "How is this done?" and "What should I charge?" Having that "knowledge base" was so important when I started freelancing because fellow members could answer my many and varied questions easily based on their expertise and experience.

While being overloaded with work can be stressful, it can also benefit you and a fellow member when you "in-source" to other members. One major benefit of membership is the ability to never turn down a job, but instead refer that client to another member who could handle the work, or sub-contract the work to another member. It is invaluable to know I have "backup" in the expertise of fellow members that I could easily tap into. When the client or prospect asks whether I can handle another job, it is easy for me to say either simply yes, or, if I can't, I know someone who could.

Do you know of someone joining the freelance ranks that might benefit from membership in our organization? Please extend an invitation to join us at any meeting, to review the website, and to talk to other members about what makes us different. I believe that special difference is in the quality of our networking.

As we begin preparations for 2004-2005, I would like to review some of the events of the past year.

Your Board of Directors has been working hard, short of the full complement of Board members, to keep this organization moving forward to grow and continue evolving with the times. We need your support to

help this organization thrive and flourish.

We have had a colorful collection of guest and member speakers for our monthly meetings on a wide variety of topics; a holiday party rescheduled due to a blizzard; a wonderful picnic day that started rather dismally; 10 to 15,000 unique visitors a month to our website; and of course, lots of successful networking among members and meeting guests.

We had great publicity done by writer Donna Poler, wonderful postcard design and production handled expertly by designer Bill Kelly, outstanding new design and layout of the newsletter by designer Julius Williams, great meetings with the help of Dave McCoy, refreshments and greeting guests at the meetings handled expertly by George Kamper and Liz Kassler, and my revisions of the website, introducing the meetings, making sure bills got paid and keeping the organization moving forward. These are just some of our activities among many others.

Speaking of finances, the Board has been working on ways to conserve your membership dues and put them to best use. How? The post office box, which no longer served a purpose, was closed. That resulted in a savings of \$60 a year. The bulk mail permit, which was no longer used, was not renewed. The savings for that was \$150 a year. Our phone number, which was not being used, was cancelled, resulting in a savings of \$26 a month. Postage wasted on undeliverable meeting postcards saved us \$10 to \$15 a month with a cleaned-up mailing list. The new meeting location resulted in a savings of \$35 a month. Monthly meeting refreshments purchased from cost-effective vendors have been funded by each meeting's non-member fees.

As most everyone who is a member of the organization can receive e-mail notification

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or access meeting information on our website, it made little sense to spend nearly \$300 every month producing the meeting postcards when that money could be better used to promote the organization and its members. With this past year's effective publicity efforts, our increased exposure in the media has achieved far better results in attracting new visitors and potential new members than those of sending out postcards.

This year the board approved the phasing out of meeting postcards after the June 2004 meeting. We will continue to publicize meetings on our website, using the talents of our designers and writers.

The \$2,700, formerly used to send out postcards to members, will now be used to promote the talents of our membership and the expertise they can offer to potential clients. A new mailing list will be derived from Adbase.com, a mailing list service for creatives, and postcards will be mailed to names on the Adbase list a minimum of four times a year. We are hoping that this will bring further awareness of the organization and promote the quality of our membership's work and more visitors to our website every month.

Using our recently added e-mail service, meeting and other news notifications will be

done in a timely manner by e-mail. You can now add, delete or change your e-mail address at your own convenience. Non-members can subscribe as well and receive meeting notifications. We also plan to upgrade this service for a more modern look which can include images in an e-mail.

Other plans for the future call for upgrading the website so that members may have greater control of their information and samples as well as creating a Yahoo! Group Forum for members.

As you know by now, we have asked for your approval on legally changing the name of S.W.A.N. to NJ Creatives Network. We do this with the best interests of the membership and the organization in mind and believe that this is the best way to keep us moving forward. We ask for your support in this important matter.

As always, please feel free to contact any board member with concerns, suggestions or an offer of volunteer support. We need your help in running this organization. It doesn't run by itself – it takes people – talented people who want to make a difference.

Respectfully,  
 Stan Cohen  
 President and Webmaster



## Member News:

deb hoeffner  
 illustration  
[www.debhoeffner.com](http://www.debhoeffner.com)

A recent project of mine came to me in a new way of marketing for me. Back in December, I took advantage of a free trial of the Adbase listings. From this I created my own lists of Art Buyers, Art Directors and Designers across the country in a wide range of markets. I then sent emails with the link to my website to the lists.

In May the project came in to do character development sketches for the Burger King logo for a design studio in Miami. The challenge was to give the old king a bit of dimensionality and updating. A bit of a stretch for me and had an extremely tight deadline but they loved the final results. As is happening more and more frequently, the project was all done by email including sending of final art. Fellow Swanee's will appreciate how far I've come from my original anti-computer stance. I must admit that the computer has its advantages.



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### **Share Your Successes!**

Let fellow NJ Creatives members know what you're up to! Report your successes, deals and other accomplishments here. If there's a web link to your work, please include it! Send all submissions to William Kelly ([Newsletter@NJCreatives.org](mailto:Newsletter@NJCreatives.org))

Also, please pass along items that might interest your freelance colleagues, i.e., tips for working more efficiently and profitably, and resources you've found valuable.

**Cygnature** is always looking for contributing writers, editors, designers, illustrators and photographers. Please volunteer your time and talents!

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