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Common Sense Journalism

An extension of the Common Sense Journalism monthly column by Doug Fisher, former broadcaster, newspaper reporter and wire-service editor. From new media to old, much of journalism is just plain common sense.

"In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock." - Thomas Jefferson

SATURDAY, JUNE 24, 2006

Orato officially launches

One of the latest entries onto the freelance/citizen journalism scene is Orato.com.

Actually, it's been lurking for more than a year, but for a long time was not much more than a shell. There's now enough content that its owners have declared a grand opening of sorts.

The site specializes in first-person and as-told-to stories.

But there's a bit of a catch here, and **aspiring writers beware**. Editor-in-chief Paul Sullivan writes on [his blog](#): *And welcome to Orato, the news organization that aims to give everyone a voice*. But eventually for a price, apparently. Read this from the site's [FAQ](#):

How much do I pay to post a story?

For a limited time, posting stories on Orato is free of charge.

What happens after I pay to publish my story?

Orato's readers, writers and editors rate your First Person story on a scale from 1 to 5 stars. Then Orato editors take the top rated stories and evaluate them for placement as features on the home page. If we elevate your story to a "feature" position, we'll pay you our regular freelance rate. Every story has a chance, based on its quality and popularity, to be selected for payment.

Having gone through the [terms of use](#), the [guidelines](#) and the FAQs, I don't find any "rate card" or language for what they might be thinking of charging aspiring authors -- or when they plan to do that.

The terms of use are pretty standard -- Orato keeps a nonproprietary right to your material, and as it says in the FAQ: *Orato is an Internet product. However, we might syndicate your story to other media outlets, including newspapers, magazines, other Web sites, radio and TV, without an indication of whether it intends to share fees from those uses.*

You get to be an exalted "special correspondent" who gets paid if your stories consistently get high ratings from the audience.

The guidelines are pretty good journalistically -- and, frankly, worth reading for any journalist.*

About Me



Name:
Doug Fisher

[View my complete profile](#)

Yes, I do coaching and consulting. That is the only shameless commerce you'll get from me here. Go to the [bottom](#) of the blog for more details.

Who am I: A longtime print and broadcast reporter/editor/producer and then AP news editor who now professes journalism at the University of South Carolina. (But please note, nothing on this blog represents official university policy or sentiment. If it did, I'd be very concerned.)

My point: That journalism is a great occupation, that most journalism is common sense and that our problems arise when we sometimes don't use it.

What's covered: My interests center on editing and writing and on editors and the challenges they face in a changing environment. I'm convinced editors are not being trained enough to face these challenges, but that common sense rules the day. I'm heavily involved in Newsplex, the new-media newsroom at the University of South Carolina. But my interests are wide-ranging, so anything, from ethics to some aspects of Web design, is fair game. Hope you find something here worthwhile.

[E-mail](#)

[Hartsville Today Report \(1Mb PDF\)](#)

There is some good stuff on the site. The [story about the autopsy outside of Chernobyl](#) is some pretty powerful reading.


And few other [classifieds sections](#) have a Bounties and Rewards category. Voyeurism is definitely part of Orato's product. **

So while I'm always happy to see new entrants in this area, I'd recommend that if you want to post here you go in with your eyes open. Those TOS could change at any moment. I'm not convinced this site has the best interests of its writers at heart. ***

* See, for example, "When in Doubt, Leave it Out," advice that could be profitably followed by a lot more mainstream journalists, too.

** It looks like the site is using Drupal with its "nodes," etc. The proprietors could stand to burnish their bylining system a bit. The "as told to" rigid construction produces such laughers as: *By Heather Wallace as told to Citizen Correspondent [Heather Wallace](#)*
Hello, is Bob Dole in the room?

*** Sorry, but I'd feel a lot better if that potential pay-to-play language didn't hang over the site. Smacks a bit of bait-and-switch. If you really have the welfare of budding "citizen correspondents" at heart, why not remove that? Or have an option that allows free posting forever (with the prospect of getting in the money if the ratings come in), along with a slightly higher -- and very clearly identified -- paid tier with perhaps better display?

posted by Doug Fisher @ 4:35 PM [3 comments](#) | [Trackback](#)  [Links to post](#)

3 Comments:

 At 3:10 PM, [Murley](#) said...

Apparently, they've never heard of ohmynews, as the billing on the front page says: "It's the only news site in the world dedicated to First Person, citizen-authored journalism."

Still, I'd be skeptical of a site that required me to pay to publish there.

 At 12:54 PM, [Paul Sullivan](#) said...

Hi Doug. Just read your comments on Orato. Perhaps I can comment in return -- re: Murley's comment: Of course we've heard of OhMyNews!

Orato features "first person" journalism, that is, storytelling in the first person voice, which is our unique distinction.

There's enough excellent third person reporting around, and we wanted to emphasize the immediacy, simplicity and freedom of the "I".

We originally saw Orato as paying for itself by charging a nominal fee to post a story, and that's our intention down the road, but it's free to post right now and for the foreseeable future, so we hope journalists and aspiring journalists will seize the opportunity.

- [CSJ-the column](#)
- [Doug's Homepage](#)
- [A J-School Year](#)
- [The Freedom of Information Act Wiki](#)
- [EFF: Legal Guide for Bloggers](#)
- [Journalism Wiki](#)
- [Robert Niles' Reliable Numbers Online](#)
- [A copy editor's lament](#)
- [AP's Ask the Stylebook Editor](#)
- [Am. Heritage Usage Guide](#)
- [Your Dictionary](#)
- [One Look dict. - includes reverse lookup](#)
- [Yiddish dictionary](#)
- [Alan Cooper's homonym list](#)
- [Sentence Diagramming Guide](#)
- [The Passivator](#)
- [Vocubula Review - for your inner prescriptivist](#)
- [Language Log - for your inner descriptivist](#)
- [Lieberman's "Language Wars"](#)
- [alt.english.usage and FAQs](#)
- [Biker Week Cross-Media Coverage](#)
- [Journalism Desktop - Resources](#)
- [The Racial Slur Database](#)
- [Online Education DB's "150 Resources for Writers"](#)

Other good sites:

- [Google News](#)
- [Yahoo News](#)
- [Topix.net](#)
- [CJR](#)
- [AJR](#)
- [Poynter](#)
- [ACES](#)
- [ACES Discussion Board](#)
- [On the Media](#)
- [Free Daily Newspapers](#)
- [mediadrop](#)
- [Media Bloggers Association](#)
- [Florida Press Club](#)
- [The Numbers Guy at WSJ.com](#)
- [Covering Crime and Courts](#)
- [Mystery Pollster takes the mystery out of political polls](#)

I think we will always require commissioned pieces to add quality and texture to the mix and we are serious about developing a world-wide network of trusted correspondents -- in fact, we already have more than 1500 writers registered and have established a good working relationship with a number of them.

Meanwhile, we're diligently cleaning up bugs ("by Heather as told to Heather!) and are quite excited about the quality of the stories that people are bringing to the site. If you or your readers have any specific questions about Orato, I'll be glad to answer them.

Paul Sullivan,
Editor, Orato

At 1:29 PM, [Doug Fisher](#) said...

Paul:

Thanks for the info. I'm sure you understand the pay-to-publish skepticism. I'll be interested to see what develops.

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[Bob Baker's "Newstinking"](#)

[Testy Copy Editors](#)

[Bill Walsh's "The Slot"](#)

[Walsh's "Blogslot"](#)

[Walsh's "Off-Topic"](#)

[A Capital Idea](#)

[Headsup: The Blog - "editing and the deskly arts"](#)

[McIntyre's "You Don't Say"](#)

[Bechtel-"The Editor's Desk"](#)

[Nelson-"Triangle Grammar Guide"](#)

[Robinson-"Words at Work"](#)

[Kilian's "Ask the English Teacher"](#)

[Willis-"The Scoop"\(investigative/CAR\)](#)

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