

## WHY PUBLISH A ZINE?

This is the age of instant communication; blogs, tweets, Facebook, and myriad other electronic shouters a twentieth-century-kinda-guy like myself knows very little about and, in fact, can scarcely comprehend.

But I do know one thing. Here today, gone faster than you thought possible. Electronic fame is fleeting. To stand out from the crowd you have to shout louder than anyone else. And for what? Eons ago Andy Warhol said anyone could be famous... for fifteen minutes. That was cutting edge social commentary-wit back in the day. Does his comment still apply? Anyone can STILL be famous... for about fifteen seconds...

If you are an adrenaline junkie, then the modern “look at me” tumult on the web is exciting and invigorating. You’re competing with half the planet! What could be more exciting than that?

But suppose you’re tired of – to use an old expression – the ‘rat race.’ Suppose you want to slow down and relax with an absorbing hobby that gives you personal satisfaction and pleasure and can be done at your own pace whenever you feel like losing yourself in a personal project with no time pressure or any other kind of pressure. That’s what publishing a fanzine is all about.

To be sure, there are faneds (fanzine editors) who work themselves into a panic trying to meet a self-imposed deadline, either because they’ve taken on the task of publishing a time-sensitive newzine, or because they’ve chosen to produce a genzine (a zine with many contributors, each impatient to see their article in print as soon as possible). Such faneds tend to take their participation in the SF genre very seriously, which is fine in terms of promoting the genre and contributing to its development, but has nothing to do with the ‘hobby’ zine approach I’m proposing.

I am suggesting you consider creating and publishing what is known as a ‘Perzine.’

Simply put, a perzine is a personal zine. It depends entirely on your own personal interests, vision, input and effort. It’s entirely a reflection of who and what you are.

Who am I? You may say. Who am I to inflict my views on other people? I’m no star, no actor, no author... I don’t do special effects... nobody has ever heard my name. I’m not famous. I’m just a fan.

Exactly. A fan... writing a FANzine... an amateur publication FOR fans and published BY a fan. Simple as that.

One hobby enthusiast sharing their enthusiasm with other fans of the same hobby. You wouldn’t find this odd or unusual among stamp collectors, or plastic model makers, sports fans, or even barbed wire collectors (the hobby exists). So why does it strike you as odd that one SF

fan would strive to impart his/her personal views on the genre to fellow fans? It's not odd at all. It's a great idea.

Of course, you can attempt to do this at club meetings, or at conventions, but once again you are competing with others, many of whom may be able to override your comments and force people to pay attention to THEM instead, either because they happen to have better conversational skills than you, or because they're a conversational bully who will literally speak louder and louder over your talking till they you shut up in frustration. Sometimes face-to-face conversation in a gathering of fans is not quite the pleasant and wonderful experience you had been hoping for. Often other fan's big egos and big voices can make you feel worthless and not worth listening to, especially if you happen to be shy and lack self-confidence in the first place. God knows it happened to me often enough in my early days as a fan. Fanzine publishing is the ideal hobby for the fan still struggling to find their own voice.

Here's the big secret of perzines. It is one-on-one conversation. There is just you, and the reader. That's right... THE reader. The person who picked up (or opened online) your zine because they want to read what YOU have to say.

To be sure, you're hoping countless individuals will do the same, thousands, millions... Nevertheless, you are writing for that ONE person, the reader.

Don't be a fool and try to second guess what the largest possible target audience will want to read. If you do that you'll wind up stripping all the personal idiosyncrasy and the unique from your zine and convert it into a dull, boring, generic piece of crap. In effect, allowing a committee to write your zine rather than yourself. Don't do that! The whole thing is a waste of time if you do that!

No, in a sense, you're zine is all about YOU. That's what brings it to life.

In the 1930s the majority of the first rush of fanzines were imitations of professional newsstand magazines like AMAZING STORIES and ASTOUNDING. This made sense back then, the prozines being the only role models available, but the resulting amateur zines were occasionally pretentious, to say the least. Gradually, as fandom grew and zines flourished, fans became more personal in their approach, and the resulting zines less dry and more interesting.

There is such a thing as going too far. In the 1970s (influenced by the hippie era) many perzines were positively confessional, frequently uncomfortably so. Some faneds 'let it all hang out' and many of their readers wanted to "stuff it back in" having had their day ruined by too much information. Worse, these overly honest faneds would include their friends when they hung out the laundry. From the odd looks and comments I was getting from some of my friends and acquaintances over a period of some months I gather someone had written that way about ME. But hey! My wife's nickname for me is "Perry Como." What could there possibly be written about me that would verge on scandal? Why, nothing at all, of course, of course

You have to strike the right note, achieve a happy medium. I'm thinking here of Forrest J Ackerman, editor of FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND in the 1960s and 70s. Like his many competitors (though his prozine was the first), FM was all about Monster movies and SF films, past and present, aimed at a 14 year old level of readership (as I was when I first discovered FM). The thing is, he set up an editorial persona as 'Uncle Forry,' a wonderful guy who would (literally) invite you into his house to see his vast collection of stills and genre memorabilia. He melded the subject genre together with his enthusiasm for the genre. At least for his younger readers, it was a magical combination. We all envied Uncle Forry and wanted to be just like him. This reader loyalty was entirely the result of Forry treating his prozine FAMOUS MONSTERS as if it were a fannish perzine. (Something which came easily to him by the way, since in the 1930s he had been consistently voted – in numerous fannish polls and surveys -- the number one most popular SF fan and fan editor in the world!)

I am not suggesting you aspire to Forry's level of renown. Just aim to please your reader... THE reader.

But how do I do that? You ask.

Couldn't be simpler. Write to please yourself. Write as if YOU are the reader. Write what YOU would like to read. That way you can't go wrong.

Certainly I sometimes find myself chuckling on reading what I just wrote, marvelling at my Voltairean wit, etc. I don't know if any of my readers have that reaction. Don't care. I write to please myself.

And that's the whole point. Your hobby is YOUR hobby. You're doing it to please yourself. You're not out to save the world, to create a lasting monument, to make others fall over in awe. You're doing it for a sense of completion, of accomplishment, and because it's fun.

The ultimate truth of the matter is that once you don't give a damn what other people think of your zine you are well on your way toward writing something worth reading.

If it IS worth reading, your readership will find YOU once word of mouth begins to spread. Count on it.

So... assuming I've convinced you creating a zine is a worthwhile endeavour, the next question is: HOW DO I CREATE A ZINE? (See article two)