ONCE UPON A TIME

WEBSITE FEATURES FREELANCE WRITERS COVERING MANY TOPICS

Sometimes a little light reading is just the thing to pass the time. The website **Suite101.com** features thousands of short articles on a wide variety of subjects.

As the name implies, the articles are cursory examinations of their subjects. They don't give a lot of background or burrow too deeply into a topic. They range from 400 to 1,000 words, so they only take a few minutes to read.

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InSites

The subject matter is pretty diverse. While exploring the site I read articles on Bob Dylan's famous ballad "Hurricane," an analysis of the upcoming NFL playoff games, a review of the "Golden Globes" awards show and a story on a potential breakthrough in treating antibiotic-resistant infections. I also read articles on Mount Etna's volcanic activity, generating electricity from ocean currents, a sculpture exhibit in New Zealand and the Iraq War.

Something for everyone

The home page has a spotlight section as the dominant element. It cycles through photos and headlines of several featured items, changing every few seconds. There's also an Editor's Choice section that features a different article each day and a link to the Suite101 Blog.

The middle of the home page contains photos and synopses of five of the latest news articles and five recommended articles, each with links to the full stories. At the top of the page there's a search field and a drop-down menu listing all of the topics the site covers. These range from Business to Writing, with a diverse mix between the two.

At the bottom of all the pages, the links to the different sections are repeated. An about section lists links to information regaridng the site, such as, frequently asked questions, contact info, terms and conditions, privacy policy, careers and more. The bottom of the home page also has links to Facebook and Twitter.

Clicking on a section link takes you to a new page that contains an introduction to the topic and links to all the articles about that subject. Each link has a photo, headline and brief description of the article. There are 20 articles on each section page with buttons to additional pages covering the same subject at the bottom. On the right side of the pages are links to subsections within the subject. For instance, in the History section there are subsections on American History, Colonial America, Ancient History, etc.

Meet the writers

Section pages also have links to specific writers that cover the subject. Clicking on a writer's link takes you to a new page with a photo and profile of the author, and links to all of the writer's articles. There are also links to e-mail the authors, to subscribe to an RSS feed of their work and to read their blog posts.

All of the articles on Suite101 are written by freelance writers. The writers are not paid a set amount for their articles. The pay is determined by how much traffic is generated for the ads displayed alongside, and within, the articles. Writers who have a lot of articles posted for a long time have a better chance of earning some good money than those with only a few articles. Also, writers who understand how Internet search engines work have a better shot at generating traffic.

There are sections on the site for writers interested in submitting work for publication. Accepted writers have to register in order to submit or edit work. Information is available to help authors improve their writing and their search engine optimization. Staff editors review the work before it's published.

The good, the bad and the ugly

The site claims to have more than 20,000 contributing writers. Because the articles are written by so many different writers, there's a wide range of styles and quality evident. It's the job of the staff editors to impose quality control on the writing, but from what I've read, their efforts are inconsistent. Most of the stories I read were well written and followed the basic rules of grammar. However, several stories were riddled with errors and poor sentence structure.

Suite101 is fairly organized with simple, functional navigation. The logo and banner are clean and simple. The pages feel a little cramped, with lots of elements bumping up against one another. The placement and aesthetics of the advertisements causes some visual confusion, particularly on the article pages. I think this is intentional, since some of the ads are in the middle of articles, which would seem to increase the likelihood of being clicked.

Overall, the site is a nice way to kill some time online. You won't necessarily gain an in-depth understanding of any particular topic, but you can learn some interesting tidbits on a wide variety of subjects.

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