



[Welcome to the Writers' Rough Draft Podcast, where I climb behind the glamorous book launch world of successful writers and entrepreneurs, and into the mind of folks like you who are just getting their start. Equal parts, witty writing information, and unabashed content curiosity—with a healthy dose of laughter thrown in—my conversations with these pros shares some of the trials, tips, and techniques that others have used to help you build your writing and content, and establish you as a leader in your field.]

[I'm your host, Elisa Doucette, and I'm here to talk about all of that, and have some fun with Peter Shankman today. You can find the links, resources, and transcript of our chat at my website, elisadoucette.com/episode3.]

Peter Shankman is a best-selling author, multi-venture entrepreneur, international speaker, and social media star who's managed to figure out how to make magic things happen when you merge creativity, a bit of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and a healthy dose of adventure. When he is not training for and competing in triathlons and Ironmans, Peter is traveling the United States and even the world, holding one-day mastermind events called ShankMinds for entrepreneurs who want to have big business breakthroughs, but need to free their mind and talk it out with peers.

Previously, Peter was the mastermind himself behind the site HARO or Help A Reporter Out, that match sources looking to share their expertise with reporters looking for set expertise, and the boutique PR and Marketing firm, The Geek Factory—a personal favorite business brand name of mine.

A frequent commentator on various news network shows and reports, he's also written three books on public relations, social media, and positioning your business to not only stand out, but excel. He's been writing on his site, shankman.com, since 1995, and this leadership on the online world and marketing industry has led to his seat on multiple advisory boards, including the NASA Civilian Advisory Council. When he isn't busy with his own businesses, speaking gigs, and writing pursuits, he's looking for up-and-coming superstars to invest in.

ELISA: Thank you so much for taking time from your very, very busy day, Peter, to talk to me. Is there anything I missed out there?

PETER: Nah, you probably said way too much. It's fine.

ELISA: Well, you probably do way too much, so it was hard to even capture those few snippets that we put in.

ELISA: So, you have been doing this for quite a long time in terms of the world of online. So many people now are online superstars who've been at it since the rippled age of 2007? How did you get started in writing?

PETER: I actually have a Journalism degree from BU. And I was in graduate school out in Santa Barbara studying photography, and lost my financial aid. The government actually took away my financial aid and said, "Your parents make too much." I said, "Yeah, they do, but they keep it."

PETER: And the government didn't find that funny. So I wound up just randomly meeting someone in the chat room in America Online, and that lead to a job with AOL. And I spent two and a half to three years working at AOL. I had a blast; just learned so much. And probably the most important thing I learned was that work and fun don't have to be mutually exclusive. I've sort of taken that role and that guidance with everything I do in my life.



ELISA: So starting out from kind of those AOL days, and really getting your feet wet in the online writing, do you remember what your routine was like then? Did you have any sort of like processes or structures that you were following?

PETER: No. You know, it's funny; I remember that I like to write, and I remember at AOL, we knew that that, sort of, the web was coming. We knew it was even more than just AOL at the time. So for me, I remember the first thing that I did was I grabbed shankman.com, my domain. I remember it cost me something like \$75 to buy the domain name. I remember just owning it and being like, "Okay, now what?"

PETER: And there wasn't anything like a blog. Blogs didn't exist. It was me pouring my thoughts into this sort of digital paper. And it turned out I had this talent for writing. And my mom said that I did. She always knew that I had this ability to write, and she always said I should continue it. And as it kept happening, I kept realizing, "Wow, I guess I'm okay at this. Maybe I should do this more." And there we go.

ELISA: How did you feel when you first started writing? A lot of people kind of have that nervous energy around really sitting down, and not only getting the first words out, but hitting publish. Did you have any of those kinds of feelings, especially coming in so early in the online writing scene?

PETER: Nah, I've always been sort of like, "I'm going to do whatever I want. And I don't really care what people say." So for me, it was just about writing. If no one read me, if one person read me—I don't really care. For me, I was having a blast. I was really enjoying the writing process, and then I started getting an audience, which I thought was pretty cool.

PETER: And people started liking what I had to say, and yeah, there we go. It's pretty crazy.

ELISA: Do you ever get any sort of... Especially for someone who's written that long, and has taken some pretty serious dances on opinions on different ways that people can and should do things in their businesses or online... Generally that faces a slight bit of backlash, occasionally. From people reacting to your stuff. Do you get that often?

PETER: I do. I definitely had people get angry at some of the things I've posted. You know, you could be saving kittens from alligators and there will always be someone out there who has a reason to hate you for it.

ELISA: You're starving that alligator. How can you take them away?

PETER: Exactly.

ELISA: So, is that kind of how you were able to get over some of that hatery that people like to dish out?

PETER: You know, it's very simple: if you don't have haters, you're not doing enough change in status quo. So I'm a big fan. If I'm going to get haters, awesome; it means I'm out there and it means people are listening to me.

ELISA: When you are sitting down to do writing now, your writing process—and especially when you are doing it not only for shankman.com, but working on your books, working on client work, and that sort of stuff—I'm guessing it's a little bit different than when you're sitting down to write in your "just above an AOL site" blog in 1995. How have things changed?

PETER: I think the biggest thing is I've noticed that everyone in the world has the ability to write now. When I started in 1995, I had to know how to code. You had to know HTML. Now, you have fifty million people who can



just go get a .com and start a blog. The problem is most people aren't really interesting. And most people post stuff and like, no one reads it because they are not really interesting. And they don't know how to write.

That's the biggest problem; they don't know how to write. There are all these people out there who are just not good writers. So for me, I would love to read people who are talented writers. Give me people who know how to write and actually have something to say, and I'll read them every day.

ELISA: What kind of people would that be? What kind of stuff do you find is actually interesting and well-written?

PETER: I guess, give me anyone with an attitude, with something to say, and are not afraid of what might come. If you have something to say, own it. I'd much rather read someone with an opinion, whether I agree with it or hate it, than someone who is just sort of wishy-washy.

ELISA: So what kind of things are you doing now in your stuff that make sure that you are always that type of person as well? Because I imagine if that's the type of writing that you like to read, that's also the type of writing you'd like to put out.

PETER: For me, I think that what people wanna do is they wanna be able to get out there and they wanna have a point. Write about what you're passionate about—whatever that is. Whatever that is, have fun. And do it, and own it. But if you are going to talk about it, own it. Make sure you're having a good time with it, and make sure that it's you, and that you trust it.

ELISA: So, your schedule is kind of crazy; I watch you on the Twitters and Facebooks of the universe and see you hopping around to different triathlons and news appointments, and different meetings for your masterminds. So I doubt you have kind of an average day. Seems like they are all very different, but if there was an ideal "Peter Shankman creativity working business to get everything done that he wanted to" day, what would it look like?

PETER: I'd be in a beach somewhere...

PETER: With a computer that—it was not affected by sand or anything like that.

ELISA: Seriously, tech communities, get on this.

PETER: Mhm. Basically, having a machine that can somehow keep up with my brain. So as quickly as I think about things, it would jot them down, because I think one of my biggest problems of having ADHD is I tend to write stuff and immediately forget it. You know like, "Okay. Wait, what? Squirrel!"

PETER: So if I can get the ability to have that stuff come out, that would be the perfect day. And I'd do email newsletters, I'd write blog posts. I'd do all that stuff. That, to me, would be awesome.

ELISA: In addition to doing, as we're talking about, a fair amount of writing, I know you do have the new book coming out, you do have your blog post, you do have a lot of marketing stuff you do, but you also run a few, very successful businesses. You advice a bunch of people, you angel invest. Do you ever find that there are times that you really want to get something written or want to get an idea out, but you realize you just have to do some sort of business thing first?



PETER: Yeah, I mean, it's tough because you naturally gravitate to things you do well. But the hard part, to me, is focusing on the things that I don't necessarily do well or aren't as exciting, whatever, knowing that I have to do those. So you force yourself. You find ways to do it. It's the same way that I have to work out at 4:30 in the morning because that's the only time I have. Do I like getting up at 4:30 am? I really don't. But you know what? I get it done.

ELISA: How has writing helped your business? I mean, from following the trajectory as well as I could in a very, very, story trajectory, I think Geek Factory was after shankman.com, your first real entrepreneurial venture out of the gate.

PETER: Mhm.

ELISA: From Geek Factory to where you are now, how do you think writing has helped build your businesses to the point where, you know, you're able to sell HARO for a healthy size of amount by Vocus?

PETER: I think good writing is necessary. There are so few people who write well, that good writing puts you above the pack just to begin with. You are so much better if you know how to write. For me, I'm very fortunate that I'm doing it. I'm constantly taking classes and trying to improve and forcing myself to write more. I'm literally putting the finishing touches on my last book yesterday. And it just went to the publisher yesterday, so I'm done with that one. It's like giving birth; it's a process.

PETER: So for me, it's always just continuing to write, continuing to try, continuing to do it.

ELISA: Now with the good writing versus kind of—there's a mentality of “better done than perfect,” and “just ship it and see what happens,” but obviously, with something like writing, when you're trying to really put out that good quality stuff, that is establishing you as an authority in your space. Do you ever have stuff that you write and afterwards, you look at it, maybe after it's been published or before you go to publish it, and you look at it and you're just like, “I take it back.”

PETER: We all do. We all write stuff that we look at it later and go, “Wow, that's just... shit.”

PETER: The goal is to make that as few and far in between. And to make sure that when you do do it, learn from it. As long as you learn from it, it's a win.

ELISA: And you probably start doing it less and less, as soon as you start recognizing the quirks that you have in your writing that make it that way?

PETER: Oh yeah, totally.

ELISA: And speaking of quirks, I have a fun little game that I like to play with folks on the show. It's super easy. Over the next two minutes, I'm going to ask you a series of either/or questions, and I want you to answer with the first thing that pops into your mind.

PETER: Okay.

ELISA: We're going to try to get through as many as we can, and get a little sneak peek into the secret thoughts of a writer's mind. Feeling ready?

PETER: Sounds good. Let's go for it.



ELISA: All right, let's go. Pen or pencil?

PETER: Pen.

ELISA: Mac or PC?

PETER: Mac.

ELISA: Coffee or tea?

PETER: Coffee.

ELISA: Night or morning?

PETER: Morning.

ELISA: Good writing or correct writing?

PETER: Good writing.

ELISA: Noise or silence?

PETER: Silence.

ELISA: Lefty or righty?

PETER: Lefty.

ELISA: Weird or Typical?

PETER: Weird.

ELISA: School or no school?

PETER: School.

ELISA: Outside or inside?

PETER: Outside.

ELISA: Clean or messy?

PETER: Messy.

ELISA: Teacher or student?

PETER: Student.

ELISA: Town or city?

PETER: City.

ELISA: Trains or planes?



PETER: Planes.

ELISA: Skiing or surfing?

PETER: Surfing.

ELISA: Fantasy or reality?

PETER: Reality.

ELISA: Love or money?

PETER: Love.

ELISA: Introvert or extrovert?

PETER: Extrovert.

ELISA: Good content or good marketing?

PETER: Good content.

ELISA: Smile or game face?

PETER: Smile.

ELISA: Call or text?

PETER: Text.

ELISA: Money or fame?

PETER: Money.

ELISA: Be older than you are right now, or be younger than you are right now?

PETER: Younger.

ELISA: Think before you talk, or talk before you think?

PETER: Talk before I think.

ELISA: Have a dragon, or be a dragon?

PETER: Have a dragon.

ELISA: Best-selling book or million-dollar business?

PETER: Wow, that's a hard one. Best-selling book.

ELISA: Site you're loving right now?

PETER: Great when we hear those alarm sounds.



My go-to for amusement is Imgur.

ELISA: What's Imgur?

PETER: I-m-g-u-r? It's a photo site.

ELISA: Ah, that's where the quality memes come from.

PETER: Mhm.

ELISA: I'm a meme aficionado. Well, thank you so much for taking time to talk to me today, Peter. Where can folks find your writing and business and everything else?

PETER: My whole life is at shankman.com. The Mastermind Series is at shankminds.com. And iampeter@shankman.com; I answer all my own email. Try it.

ELISA: I do the same thing, and people are continuing to be more and more amazed—I don't know if they are with you as well—that I actually answer all of my own email.

PETER: Yeah, you have to.

ELISA: I get it, but I don't get how anyone else can do it.

Do you have any other parting thoughts or kind of writing wit and wisdom for people listening?

PETER: I keep a napkin in my wallet that I wrote on several years ago that says "Fail often" to remind me that it's always okay to fail, and it means you're trying.

ELISA: That is some great advice. Thank you again so much for taking time to chat with us today, Peter.

PETER: My pleasure. It was fun.

[You can find this episode's notes and resources at elisadoucette.com/episode3, and the Writer's Rough Drafts full archive at elisadoucette.com/podcast. If you wanna talk more writing with me, or just say hi, you can always catch me on Twitter at @elisadoucette. This show was produced and published by my outstanding content management team over at WritingBusinessWell.com.]

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[OUTTAKE]

PETER: There you go.

ELISA: How are you doing?

PETER: Good. It's like I wanna start off with "Bless your heart."



ELISA: Thank you. I felt horrible. Have you ever had that happen with like an electronic device plugged in to your computer before—for some reason it just won't recognize the connection and you just have to like restart everything?

PETER: Yeah, it happened before. Don't worry about it.

ELISA: Ugh, I was like, "Come on!"