

# CHAPTER 12

## *Writing Humor for the Cloud: Social Media, Blogging, and More*

I was raised on the Internet.

—Lena Dunham

Before Al Gore “created” the Internet, comedy was delivered via traditional mediums. Classic humor writers, such as Mike Royko and Erma Bombeck, published their work in something called a newspaper. Stand-up comics performed at hundreds of comedy clubs located in markets of varying size. Television and radio appearances by humorists were primarily a marketing ploy to sell books, records, or concert tickets.

It's been my policy to view the Internet not as an “information highway,” but as an electronic asylum filled with babbling loonies.

—Mike Royko

The creation of the Internet caused a comedic big bang, and professionals quickly adapted. Will Ferrell and his writing partner, Adam McKay, created *Funny or Die*. Many traditional comedy sources, like *The Onion* and *Comedy Central*, established online presences. Niche marketing of comedy happened rapidly with websites like *College Humor*, *Cracked*, and *Farked*. Even major news outlets, such as *The Huffington Post* and *The Drudge Report*, created portals to daily megadoses of humor.

The Internet? Is that thing still around?

—Homer Simpson

A big bang occurred with audiences, as well. Instead of some regional, limited, and targeted groups, the Web allowed immediate access to a global audience. From a marketing perspective, the potential is huge. Writers and performers can now reach millions instead of hundreds or thousands. If something goes viral, the audience could become hundreds of millions.

But the Internet's rapid expansion also created a comedic black hole, a gravitational force that attracts all humor. Almost overnight, the Internet became the world's largest repository of humor. Any search with "humor" or "comedy" as descriptors yields millions of hits; there are hundreds of joke banks, like *Jokes* and *Jokes2000*, with thousands of one-liners; and just about every comedy performance, show, or movie ends up on *YouTube*. Since anything funny is rapidly consumed by millions of users, the Web significantly shortens comedy's already limited life span.

The gravitational pull of the Internet creates all kinds of problems for professionals, especially for live performers. In the old days, someone might repeat a few jokes they heard at a comedy club, recite a handful of lines from a play, or describe a funny movie scene. Today, with almost meaningless and unenforceable copyright laws, performances, shows, and movies are illegally recorded and distributed on the Web.

The Internet is just a world passing notes around a classroom.

—Jon Stewart

Social media is a leading contributor to the black hole phenomena. Given billions of users with an abundance of narcissism, there is a constant need to stand out. Users learn quickly that posting photographs of their latest Olive Garden meal on their Instagram feed will not increase the number of likes. Attracting Web traffic requires interesting content, and instead of creating original material, many users borrow or plagiarize the work of others.

The trouble with the Internet is that it's replacing masturbation as a leisure activity.

—Patrick Murray

For the humor writer, the Internet, social media, online dating, and other forms of virtual communication offer new challenges and opportunities.

Although the principles of humor writing are universal, there are special considerations for each unique social media galaxy.

## **TWITTER: JOKE'S BIG BANG OR BLACK HOLE**

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Like the Internet, Twitter had a profound impact on the world of comedy. With its 140-character limit, it triggered the big bang of creating and sharing one-liners.

Twitter is the bathroom wall of the Internet.

—Jason King

Twitter is a virtual playground for amateurs and professionals to share funny. There's no need to write a book, host a talk show, or perform stand-up to share your jokes—just tweet.

Damn. Forgot to hire babies off Craigslist to pose as my fake children in my Christmas card again this year.

—Aziz Ansari

A superquick way to look really disturbing is to walk through the rain really slowly without trying to cover yourself at all.

—Mindy Kaling

Sometimes playing catch is very similar to throwing things at a child in a backyard.

—Demetri Martin

Twitter is like a humor fitness club, and you can exercise your funny bone at any time. The 24/7 feed forces you to stay abreast of current events, while the 140-character restriction is a constant reminder to stay punchy. It's no surprise that nightly comedy show writers tweet some of the best and most popular feeds. Justin and Eric Stangel, former head writers and producers of *Late Night with David Letterman*, have over 100,000 followers because of tweets like the following:

Million Dollar Idea: Legal Sea Foods should open a chain of adult restaurants and call it Barely Legal Sea Foods.

—Eric Stangel