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How to Write Articles For Magazines and Newspapers

A short guide to the wonderful world of free publicity: how to demonstrate your expertise, while establishing yourself as a qualified source of assistance or products.

The Relationship Marketing Copywriter

***Websites and Internet Marketing * Content Marketing * Print Marketing ***

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1. INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You have just taken the first step toward becoming a published author. And nothing says 'expert' like being published.

When you write articles for magazines, newspaper or periodicals, you are receiving free exposure to an entirely new group of prospects, and establishing yourself in their eyes as an authority in your field.

It's really amazing that more small-business owners don't promote themselves this way, but you have just joined a rather elite group. Of course, realizing the potential is just the first step toward getting published, but this course will teach you the steps you need to take before submitting your first article idea.

In this course you will learn:

- ◆ How to identify which publications to target
- ◆ How to pick article subjects
- ◆ How to present your ideas to editors
- ◆ How to write articles that reflect the style of your targeted publication
- ◆ How to plan your article, compile the information and present it in a form that will be interesting and readable
- ◆ How to make sure that your article achieves your own objectives

Remember – your own expertise and experience is entirely unique. While you may not consider yourself an 'expert', you probably know a great deal more about your particular field than most people. If you share a little of that knowledge, it could prove an interesting read, and a great way to promote your expertise.

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2. SELECTING YOUR PUBLICATIONS

a) Your Publication Shortlist

Your prospective publications will depend very much on your product or service, and your target market.

Firstly, you need to be aware that one of the major national publications is unlikely to take up your article on IT solutions for the human resources manager, or scrapbooking (or whatever). At least, not unless you have something extraordinary to say, and are already a 'celebrity' in your particular field of expertise.

So, think about where your customers or clients are likely to go to look for specialist information on your product or service:

- ◆ **Specialist publications.**
- ◆ **Specialist sections of local publications.**
- ◆ **Newsletters of organizations, associations or clubs that cater to your market.**
- ◆ **E-zines that relate to your field.**

So, for instance, let's say you offer sales coaching to entrepreneurs and small businesses, you might consider business magazines, the business section of your local newspaper, and the newsletters of networking groups.

If, on the other hand, you sell health and wellness products via the internet, you might target health magazines, or women's magazines. Bear in mind that many of the free publications are keen to accept content from a variety of sources.

Go and take a look on the shelves of your local bookshop, or the stands at your supermarket where free publications are distributed. This is a great way to find out about publications that may be suitable for your article.

Check out the internet for e-zines relating to your field. This is really only viable if you have a product or service that does not depend on your proximity to your buyer. There are article

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submission services that will submit your article to loads of different e-zines, but this service usually costs a monthly fee. You need to decide whether the payback will be worth the outlay.

Always aim to reach your prospects in a publication which they will be reading when they are wearing the right 'hat'. Don't try to write an article about model trains in a business publication, just because your customers seem to be mostly business people. Aim your article at a hobby magazine.

When checking out publications, observe the following:

- ◆ In the masthead at the beginning of publications, check the names of the staff members and sub-editors. Did they write all the articles, or are there articles by contributors? This means that they accept content from non-staff writers.
- ◆ Are the contributors freelance writers, or are they subject experts (in other words is that article about alternative health written by a naturopath or by a writer who interviewed alternative health professionals)?
- ◆ Are articles followed by a short biography of the writer, and contact details? This probably means that writers were not paid for the article, and that the publication will accept content from experts who are not professional writers.
- ◆ Check the web-site of your target publication. Look for writers' guidelines (often on the contact page), which give information on how to submit and the kind of articles the publication is looking for.

So, as a starting point, you need to be searching for publications that:

- 1) Accept freelance submissions
- 2) Work with subject experts, as opposed to professional writers
- 3) Include a biography of the article authors.

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b) Finding a Publication: Worksheet

1. Considerations

- ◆ Geographic limitations?
- ◆ Consumer or business publications?
- ◆ Specialist or general interest?

2. Possibilities

Based on the above criteria, write the names of all the publications that might be relevant to your area, or read by your prospects:

| Magazine Name | Accepts Submissions by Contributors? | Writer Biographies Included? |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
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When you have a list of possibilities, check to see if they provide writers' guidelines on their web-site.

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3. PLANNING YOUR ARTICLE STYLE

a) Assessing Your Publications' Styles

Once you have a list of prospective publications, it is time to determine the kind of articles they carry.

Read the publication through – preferably a few different issues - and consider the following points:

- ◆ Are the articles written mostly in the third person, or the first?
- ◆ Is the writing formal, or chatty and personal?
- ◆ What formats do they seem to favor, for instance: how-to's, top ten lists, profiles of people or companies, case studies etc?
- ◆ Do they have a set number of feature articles, and then departments or sections with shorter articles?
- ◆ How long are the articles? Count the words by determining the average number of words in each column, and then multiplying that by the number of lines in the article.

While examining these details, it is important to notice if there is any distinction between those articles penned by staff members, and those submitted by contributors. You may find that only certain types of articles are written by non-staff writers.

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4. SELECTING YOUR SUBJECT

When considering subject matter, it is important to find something that does the following:

- ◆ Demonstrates your expertise
- ◆ Has not been covered recently in your target publication
- ◆ Can be made new and interesting
- ◆ Can be instilled with lots of useful information
- ◆ Can be written in the number of words found in the articles in your target publication.

It can be very tempting to try and write an article that does not give away any information, implying instead that the reader needs you to help them. However, if your articles don't contain valuable information then they won't get published.

Imagine, for instance, a Feng Shui consultant. An article on how to improve the energy in your living room might have considerable appeal to someone curious enough to give it a try for themselves. On the other hand, it would also appeal to the kind of people who might be more likely to bring in an expert consultant for an in-home assessment. That person would still read the article, and would then recognize the writer as an expert and a possible source of assistance.

In other words don't be afraid to give away free information, because there are plenty of people out there who are looking for someone to delegate to.

How-to articles are an ideal format for your piece. As an expert in your field, you are in a great position to provide detailed instructions for a process or activity.

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5. WRITING A QUERY LETTER

Some publications will request that you start with a query letter, rather than submitting unsolicited, finished articles. This means that you should send a brief proposal outlining your intended subject from which they will decide if they wish to have you write the article.

Follow this format:

Dear Mr So-and-so,

(Always try to find out the real name of the person you should address)

Introduction

Your first one or two paragraphs should be the first couple of paragraphs of your planned article. You need to start with a catchy and interesting headline or first sentence, followed by an introduction to the subject of the article which would convince people to read on.

Article Outline

Here you say that you would like to propose an article, giving the following information:

- ◆ Proposed length
- ◆ Subject matter
- ◆ Details of what you will cover in the article
- ◆ Reasons why this will be interesting and valuable

Remember to show here that you understand the interests of the magazine's readership.

Your qualifications

Give details of what makes you particularly qualified to write this article, including your relevant experience and knowledge base. If you have had any other articles published, mention them.

Your contact details

Make sure you supply all your possible contact details.

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6. WRITING YOUR ARTICLE

When it comes to actually writing your article, follow this process:

- 1) Gather all the information on your chosen subject, including any research or interviews you may need to complete.
- 2) Prepare a skeleton, or outline for the piece, in three sections.
 - a. Introduction in which you say what the article is about.
 - b. Body text in which you give the bulk of the information.
 - c. Conclusion in which you sum up and suggest ways to use the information.
- 3) Make bullet points for yourself, organizing the main information into a logical order.
- 4) Write the article. Don't worry too much about style or length at this point, just write what comes into your head.
- 5) Write a short biography to include at the end. Check other articles in your publication for the length your bio should be. Make sure that you give your website URL, e-mail address and phone number here.

If you really know what you are talking about, then it should not be too hard for you to prepare this first draft. It is the editing that will turn it into a readable and publishable article.

When you are ready to edit, read your article through again and consider the following points:

- ◆ **The length.** If your article is way too short or long, you need to re-read with a view to adding or deleting. Try to get your article within 50 words either way of your target length.
- ◆ **Sentence length.** You should try to keep your sentences as short and simple as possible. Text that is printed in narrow columns can look very intimidating if it's too long, and it is easy to get lost mid-sentence. Go through and try to divide long sentences into two or more.
- ◆ **Paragraph length.** Likewise with paragraphs. Keep them short.
- ◆ **Bullets and sub-heads.** Is there any way your information can be divided into bullet-points, or numbered sections? This makes an article very easy to read, and simple to follow.

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- ◆ **Jargon.** Depending on the publication, it may be acceptable, or not, to use a lot of jargon and technical language. Read through and make sure that you are speaking the language of your reader, not necessarily your own.
- ◆ **Sequence.** Make sure that your article follows a logical order, that is easy to work through. Whatever your subject, try to think of it as a process and make sure that you are starting at the beginning, working through the middle, and concluding at the end! It sound simple, but leaping back and forth is an easy trap to fall into.
- ◆ **Simplicity.** Never assume any prior knowledge in your reader (depending, of course on the publication). It is always safe to give as much information as possible, and present it as simply as possible.
- ◆ **Information.** Most importantly, make sure that your article contains valuable information, not just puff (filler, whatever you want to call it). Will the reader really learn something?
- ◆ **Self-promotion.** Finally, remember above all, that this is not an advertising piece. Your article should not promote your company in the text - the bio at the end will do that. The purpose of the article is to provide enough useful information and ideas to establish you as an expert.

Now that you have edited for all those points, go away and have a cup of coffee or walk the dog. When you have had a break from your article, come back and read it again. Try to imagine that you are a reader of the publication, and that you have not seen the article before. How does it flow? Is it easy to follow? Is the information useful?

If possible, it's a really good idea to have someone else read the article. Pick someone who will be honest, but gentle: someone who will provide constructive suggestions. A second eye can be invaluable as it is easy to get too close to what you have written.

Finally - when your article comes out, make sure you use it! Ask permission of the publication to reproduce it on your website. Give copies to your prospective clients. Show it to people. It is a great marketing piece and you need to make sure you get the full benefit.

Best Wishes!

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