



Exclusive News



How to pitch stories
to publications.

BY DON KRESKI

While most publications welcome well-written news releases, editors have another need that a press release can't really address. Editors need longer, more informative feature stories that their readers will value and that set them apart from competing publications.

You can tap into that need by approaching editors and writers one-on-one with story ideas tailored to their specific publications. The tactic is not new, but it's not widely used with trade journals. If you try it, you can gain a real advantage over those who send only press releases.

At Kreski Marketing, we have found that there are five steps to making this one-on-one approach work:

1. Read the publications in the industry or market area you're interested in. You can learn a lot about almost any trade magazine from its online edition, but consider subscribing to those that best fit your target markets.
2. Look at the types of stores they publish.
3. Brainstorm with others in your organization—your sales force and project managers in particular—to identify story ideas that might make sense for you and for one or more of these journals.
4. Identify the editor or specific reporter most likely to be interested in each idea, then email or call.
5. Offer your ideas on an exclusive basis. That is, promise you will not share the story, prior to their use of it, with any other publication going to the same target readership.

TYPES OF STORIES

There are several types of features trade journals publish regularly: case his-

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stories, “how to” stories, explanations of a new technology or new product, and analysis of trends in the industry.

Not every magazine publishes every kind of story, and each has its own style and individual approach. But the common thread is that they publish stories they think will be most useful to their readers. If they like a case history you submit, it most likely will illustrate how an expert (like you) has solved a problem that their readers commonly face. If they pick up a story about a business trend, it’s because it helps their readers cope with changing conditions.

Almost every magazine publishes an editorial calendar, and it can give you a good idea of what the editors will try to emphasize in each issue. Look for it on the publication’s website or call and ask for a copy. Note, however, that editors will often publish stories that don’t fit the calendar if they are otherwise timely and interesting. Also note how far in advance most editors plan their schedules. Don’t expect your story, once accepted, to appear in next month’s issue. It may take two to six months or even longer.

SUBMITTED STORIES VS. STORY IDEAS

As you study a new publication, pay attention to whether they publish stories from various people in the industry or seem to rely on the same writers each week or each month.

If the publication will accept them, consider submitting (or offering to submit) a finished article, even though it takes more of an investment on your part to write the piece or hire someone to do so.

The most important advantage of submitting a finished story is that you maximize your control over how it is written and how your company is portrayed. An editor may trim or rewrite the piece if he

or she thinks it’s too long or too self-serving, but with practice you should be able to write articles that provide interesting and useful information while, at the same time, promoting your company.

If the publication assigns its own writer, try to be as helpful as you can, returning calls, arranging interviews promptly, and sending photos and other materials as requested. Be truthful in everything you say. Trade magazines are not muckrakers, and you don’t have to worry about them going out of their way to blast your reputation. On the other hand, if there’s a dark side to a given story, maybe you should think of another idea, rather than trying to spin something your way. The writer or editor will make the ultimate decision on what to include.

Because deadlines tend to be tight once a story idea is accepted, make sure you have any permissions you may need lined up before you approach the press. Most likely your client will love being featured in the press, but you can’t make that assumption.

Don’t expect a trade magazine to send a photographer out to your site. You will need to provide photos to illustrate your stories, and often good photography is the difference between getting a piece published or not. Take the photos before you approach the press or at least have your client and a photographer lined up in advance, so you can get the images shot on short notice.

WRITING A PITCH LETTER

Once you have the story or story idea, prioritize who you will offer it to and then go after them one by one.

Most people find it difficult to approach a magazine for the first time. Editors and writers are busy and may not want to give you the time of day. The process is very similar to making a cold call, but if you’re professional and persistent, you can definitely succeed. Once you begin to establish some relationships, everything gets a lot easier.

Rather than starting with a phone call, I usually write a pitch letter or proposal outlining the key points of the story I have in mind and the reasons the editor or writer may be interested. If it’s an editor I don’t know, I usually don’t send a finished article, even if I’ve already written one, but instead suggest what that article might include. That way the editor feels more free to ask for changes or assign a writer if he or she prefers. For that reason, you may save time and headaches by finishing the article only when it’s been accepted.

It’s often helpful to write the first few sentences of your story proposal as though you were writing a lead for the actual story and then follow it up with the most important details you would include. Take your time and write your proposal carefully. The editor will not take you seriously if it’s not professionally written and interesting in and of itself. If you have some special expertise on this topic, say so, or include the names and expertise of the sources you intend to use.

Be sure to include the fact that you’re offering the story on an exclusive basis and mention that you will be providing high-quality photography.

Send this pitch letter as an email, preferably without attachments, since including an attachment will be more likely to trigger a spam filter.

If you don’t hear anything in two or three days, call, and consider sending another email as well. I will often send low-resolution photos, if I have them, as a follow up, since good photos can get as much attention as the original proposal.

Unfortunately, you won’t always get a “yes” or a “no” to your inquiries. If, after a couple of weeks you don’t have a reply, move on to your second priority publication.

Keep trying. It takes time to gain acceptance by the editors and writers, but if you’re honest, straightforward and helpful, they will accept you and the process will keep getting easier. [EVC](#)