

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT WRITING FOR A TRADE JOURNAL?

Trade journals are magazines, but they are substantially different from consumer publications. The trades are highly specialized and target a very niched market. In many cases they are the official publication of a trade association.

Most important of all to freelancers is that they are not as demanding stylistically as consumer magazines. But they are sticklers for facts and information. Content is the most important element for trades. That's because the audience is narrow and usually relatively well informed. They read the journals in their specialty to learn still more.

The reader of a trade asks two specific questions. How can I benefit from this article? What can I learn that will make me better at my job? If your article answers that, it will be welcomed by the editor.

That doesn't mean you have to be a highly experienced person or an expert in the field. If you are willing to do the research and interview the key persons who are expert in the field, you can write a very worthwhile piece.

Getting Started

Your first step is to look inward and decide what fields hold the greatest interest for you. It's probable that you will have had some prior contact with the specialty you select, but that's certainly not necessary if you are willing to do the homework we spoke of in the previous paragraph. If the subject continues to fascinate you following your initial publication, you will undoubtedly want to continue writing additional stories for trades in this sector.

Once you have made that decision, it is time to find the best journals to approach. Begin by entering "Directories of Trade Journal" in your favorite search engine. A number of directories will come up. Some will give you adequate info; others will simply introduce you to the directory and expect you to purchase it. Before you do, head to your library's reference room to see whether that or a comparable up-to-date directory is available.

You can also find trades listed by category in the two resources I have spoken about in past columns on article writing: *Writer's Market* and *The Wooden Horse.com*.

In the reference room of your library you will also find directories of associations. Look under the category you have selected, and see in the listing whether or not any of those organizations sponsor their own trade magazine.

Click on to the web sites of the publications you select. There you will find writer's guidelines and a calendar of editions and their highlighted subjects

Spend some time reviewing past editions. Hopefully you selected a journal that is on display in your library. If not, you might try the library of a local college or university. You'll want to familiarize yourself with the journal's writing style, the type of content it carries and the format in which it presents its articles.

Query First

Your first contact with the editor of the magazine(s) you have chosen will be the query letter. Look at last week's column to learn all you need to know about queries, although this one will be little different. Since content is so important to the editor of a trade journal, you must

convince him/her in those first few paragraphs that you have a worthy approach to the subject that will inform and benefit the magazine's readers.

Your knowledge and resulting ability to write in your chosen subject is of major concern to the editor, so take care to make him/her understand why you are qualified to do the job. Editors also will be impressed by your professionalism if your query makes him/her feel that you have taken the time to study and understand the journal. You can do that easily by making reference to the section of the book you might be targeting or by explaining how your proposed piece dovetails perfectly with other recent articles.

Writing the Piece

It may surprise some of you that I have left the writing for last. Far too many wanna-be writers compose the manuscript first, and then reach out to find a receptive editor. That's foolish on three accounts. First, most busy editors prefer initially to scan a brief query than take the time to read a full article.

Second, most editors will want to discuss with you how he/she wants the piece focused. You will be given the desired length and the deadline by which to submit the finished piece. Third, you want to tailor your article to the style and format of the magazine. If your manuscript is rejected, you've wasted a good deal of valuable time.

Writing for a trade journal is very basic. No flourishes. No fancy prose. Present the facts in a simple, direct narrative form that can be readily understood by an average reader. Be positive. What readers are looking for is essentially a how-to. They want to know how to accomplish a task in the most efficient and effective way. They want, as I stated earlier, to be able to receive a direct benefit from reading your piece.

Use quotations from the experts you have interviewed to add credibility to what you state. The editor may ask you to help obtain graphics to accompany the piece. Request those from your experts. Most companies will welcome the chance to supply graphics. Contact their PR department with your request. Just be sure to credit them in the photo's credit line.

Do not use the article to pitch your book, if you've published one on the subject. The purpose of the article is to inform the reader, not enrich the writer.

The place to promote yourself and/or your books or other products is in the bio box at the end of the article. Make certain you give readers a means of reaching you. You can direct them to your web site, send them to a landing page where they can purchase your book or simply promote your skills.

Follow up

You will be told the editor's preference for submissions. Some prefer to receive the piece in the body of an e-mail. Others will want you to send it as an attachment. Some may want a hard copy to accompany the submission. If you haven't been told earlier, ask the editor when it will appear. Despite your anxiety, do not harass him/her with telephone calls.

However, you likely will be called as publication date nears and asked to make some minor changes. Follow the editor's instructions. Don't argue. But if you feel the changes he/she has requested substantially change the point you were making, you have every right to question the editor and point out why you feel the copy should not be changed.

Never argue or become demanding. Now that you are an "expert" in the field, you will probably want to write future articles. Don't allow your ego to slam the door shut. However, if you believe that the proposed change radically differs from what you believe, explain that graciously

and ask the editor to allow you to withdraw the submission. Then send it off to a competing publication.