

# Get Your Articles Published!

A detailed guide on how to "pitch" and write articles for trade publications.

By Dianna Huff  
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## Get Your Articles Published!

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### Introduction

According to a 2001 survey by [Patrick Marketing Group](#), most senior business managers are unhappy with their company's PR efforts. When asked to rate their company's effectiveness in PR on a 1 to 10 scale (10 being the highest), the average response was 5.8.

Of those who responded, 95% identified those areas where they could improve PR. **"Doing more contributed articles" topped the list.** (Other areas included having the CEO become an industry spokesperson, conducting frequent press tours, and using trade shows for disseminating messages to the press.)

According to the survey authors, "many respondents say they would like the opportunity to provide relevant, credible material . . . in an unbiased forum – yet it is surprising how few firms realize these opportunities often exist simply for the asking."

What do the study authors mean when they say, "opportunities exist simply for the asking"? Quite frankly, they mean that it is much easier to get articles into trade publications than most people think.

Yet, if conversations with my clients are any indication, confusion reigns when it comes to getting articles published.

That's why I wrote this guide. In it I tell you how to generate article ideas, pitch those ideas to reporters and editors, and then write the articles that lead to increased leads and sales.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dianna".

Dianna Huff  
President  
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### **Why Contributed Articles are Important**

Pick up any trade publication your company receives and take a look at the articles: Many are written by people in your industry – probably even your competitors. (How can you tell? Take a look at the "bios" following each article. If it's a contributed article, the bio gives a brief summary of the writer, his/her title, company name and possibly an e-mail address.)

Savvy companies frequently contribute articles to trade publications because they know contributed articles deliver many benefits, which include:

#### **✓ Building credibility in a way advertising cannot.**

Advertising is basically a sales pitch – one that we all tune out on a regular basis. And, publications have to run our ads because we pay for the space. So any information presented in an ad is seen as biased toward the company doing the advertising.

Articles, on the other hand, are considered "editorial." Almost all publications demand that contributed articles be free of bias and sales pitches. The information presented must be of interest and/or use to the publication's audience. Hence, articles are seen as providing credible information – even if people other than the publication staff write them.

#### **✓ "Forwarding" or "pass on" factor.**

Articles in trade publications get read, clipped, saved, and forwarded. I personally know a number of people who clip articles in order to forward them to customers, colleagues, and co-workers. Hence, your article is seen by more than just the publication's subscribers. And, many people save their magazines for reading when they have time – sometimes months down the road. I had a press release published in "[Target Marketing](#)" last year – and am still receiving responses!

#### **✓ Feedback and sales inquiries.**

If your article is thought provoking or includes cutting-edge research, people will respond to it via e-mail or telephone. Articles also lead to eventual sales. When I write an article, I will usually receive one or two inquiries that start, "I read your article in XYZ magazine . . ."

## ✓ Proving your product works to a skeptical marketplace.

My colleague sells scientific instruments. One question he hears frequently is, "What papers are out there?" meaning, "What are the research findings using this instrument? Can you cite what's been written?" Researchers and other technical people want to know **who** is using a particular instrument, **how** it is being used, and **what results** are being obtained. No one wants to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on an unknown product. Contributed articles – most particularly peer-reviewed articles – ensure everyone in the industry knows.

## Common Misconceptions about Contributed Articles

Experienced MarCom and PR professionals know how to get articles published in trade publications. (If you're one, you can skip over this section.) Yet, based on conversations with my clients, many of whom are small and mid-sized businesses without a dedicated MarCom staff, confusion reigns when it comes to writing contributed articles.

A few of the misconceptions I've heard over the years include:

- "Publications have to print your article if you're an advertiser."
- "We can't afford to advertise so we want to write an article about our product."
- "We've already written the article. Now we want it published in these six publications."

Hold on there, Sparky.

It's true editors of publications are always looking for good material that will be of interest to their readers. However, most trade publications (if not all) maintain a strict boundary between advertising and editorial. This means editors and reporters will not be happy if you call or e-mail to say, "We're an advertiser and we have this great story for you." And, your article will also not get printed if it's one long infomercial about your product or company.

What are editors looking for? **Fresh, thought-provoking, and insightful news and information.**

"Great!" you say! "We have some interesting things going on at our facility that would make a great article." Well, maybe. What you consider interesting information, most editors probably won't want to hear about. That's because we're "biased" when it comes to what we think constitutes news. Most of us think

our company's accomplishments merit full coverage – when in reality, it's not the achievement per se that is newsworthy but the reason behind it.

For example, Widget Company completely overhauled their manufacturing plant and wanted their publicist to write a press release stating the company now had 20,000 square feet of "state-of-the-art" manufacturing space.

The publicist, being the professional that she was, asked for a tour of this new plant and discovered products were now being built on a new ergonomic assembly line – one that required less lifting, loading, and bending. The company had drastically cut workman's comp complaints by 70% due to this new line. Now there was news! The publicist contacted magazines specializing in manufacturing and ergonomics and the company ended up with two very nice articles, plus photographs, about its new plant, assembly line, and stress-free, healthy workers.

Before contacting any editor or reporter, determine your article's newsworthiness. Below are a few examples of news and information that are of interest to editors and reporters:

- Trends in your industry and how they are changing the way people work or solve problems.
- A "scoop" or "exclusive" on a new technology, service, or product (be careful with this one – your product or application should truly be unique or innovative).
- A case study, tech brief, or application note that shows how your company has solved a recurring problem. (Although these types of articles will mention your product or company by name, the focus is on the application, not on your company.)
- An on-staff expert who can discuss a new application or technology and how it will affect the industry.
- New research findings – These may be more suitable for prestigious "peer reviewed" journals than B-to-B trade publications.
- "How-to" articles – These are the easiest to write and get placed.

Which brings us to our next point – how do you generate ideas for articles? If you're like many of my clients, you're too swamped to even think about it!

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## Five Tips for Generating Article Ideas

Remember those funky Volkswagen Beetle ads from the 1960s and 1970s? The writers of those ads did something extraordinary for the time: They headed for Wolfsburg (Germany) to

"roam the 270 acres of VW factory and to meet as many of the 44,000 VW employees as they could. According to Bernbach [Bill Bernbach of the ad agency Dolye Dane Bernbach], 'We spent days talking to engineers, production men, executives, and workers on the assembly line. We marched side by side with the molten metal that hardened into the engine, and kept going until every part was finally in place. . . . We were immersed in the making of a Volkswagen. . . . We had seen the quality of the materials that were used. We had seen the almost incredible precautions taken to avoid mistakes. We had seen the costly system of inspection that turned back cars that would have never been turned down by the consumer. We had seen the impressive efficiency that resulted in such an unbelievably low price and such a quality product.'"

--From *Is the Bug Dead?* by Alfredo Marcantonio, David Abbott, and John O'Driscoll

What Bernbach and his copywriters came up with was the selling proposition for the VW Beetle.

However, as you can see from the paragraph quoted, they also got to know the car and the company inside and out. Why is this important? Because it's also one of the easiest ways to generate article ideas!

If you're having trouble coming up with ideas, the following five tips may help you.

**Tip #1:** If you haven't already, **tour your facility's manufacturing plant or production floor.** Talk to the people who work "on the line." Ask how products are made, how the work is done, what the machines and equipment do. Learn about your product and company from "the ground up."

**Tip #2: Tour your R&D facility and talk to the people who are creating future products and applications.** One of the companies for whom I work has a modern R&D facility; each time I'm onsite, I'm itching to knock on closed doors and ask what's going on. If you do this, you may find some of the work to be classified information, but you may also find a project near completion that will

merit a "scoop" or "exclusive" story in your industry's publication. Or you might learn something that will be the spark for a story related to something else. At the very least, you'll have a full pipeline of future story ideas.

**Tip #3: Make a point to call your company's customers.** By contacting customers, you'll learn about product applications you've never even considered. If you have little or no contact with the end users of your product – aka, your company's customers — ask sales people to put you in contact with them.

**Tip #4: Talk to your product managers, account executives, phone reps and sales people on a regular basis.** Tell them you're trying to generate article ideas and ask if they know of anything customers may be doing that is newsworthy. Many times product and marketing managers are sitting on exciting news — but they don't know it. For example, when I worked full time for one particular company, I learned from one of the sales guys that a customer was using one of the company's instruments to measure how much paint was in baby's saliva after the baby had been chewing on toys. Working with my freelance writer, we turned that interesting bit of information into a feature length, four-page article.

**Tip #5: Read everything.** Nothing generates ideas like reading business books, magazines, and newsletters. One, you'll see what other companies are writing about, and two, the material will inspire you to look for ideas within your own company.

Once you have your ideas in hand, it's time to "pitch" them to publications.

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### Submitting Queries – Otherwise Known as "The Pitch"

According to Lyn Chamberlin, President of [skye media, inc.](http://www.skye-media.com), "Pitching articles is an art. You must know your publication, its audience, and most importantly, your editor or reporter."

Chamberlin advises reading a publication for a number of months. This will give you an idea of the types of articles the publication likes and what it has run in the past.

Although it may seem daunting to contact an editor (especially if you have little or no experience) it shouldn't be. Says Steve Anderson, Editor of [Laser Focus World](http://www.laserfocusworld.com), "Editors live in an idea world and not enough people generate ideas for articles. And, editors can't be experts in all fields. **We rely on contributors to call us up to say, 'Did you know about XYZ and we've been involved with it for awhile and would you like an article?'**"

What are some of the dos and don'ts of pitching articles to trade publications? According to Anderson, you should keep in mind the following strategies and advice:

- Study the publication's editorial calendar in order to pitch an idea that fits with the editorial focus for any given month. A caveat – publications work at least three to four months in advance. You won't be successful if you pitch an article idea in September for the November issue. Says Anderson, "We're already assigning articles for the September and October issues – in March."
- Visit the publication's Web site to see how to deliver the pitch and to whom. Most editors and reporters communicate via e-mail. (Due to the proliferation of unsolicited e-mail (spam), however, you may do better to call an editor as an article query can get lost, overlooked, or inadvertently deleted.) Other publications have special e-mail addresses to which you can send article ideas.
- Keep the pitch short and to the point. State the article idea, the author's qualifications, and a short case for why the publication's readership would find the article of interest. Remember, you're trying to sell the editor on your idea. Think the way he/she would think.

- Keep editors apprised of any articles you have "in stock." Some companies will write three to six articles in advance and then send summaries of the articles to editors, who keep them in a special file. When an editor has a last minute hole to fill or is looking for an article on a particular topic, he or she will consult these files.
- Don't pitch to more than one publication at any given time. Editors want original content. If you don't hear from an editor or reporter within two to four weeks, try another publication.
- Don't tell the editor you're an advertiser. He or she doesn't want the editorial copy "tainted" or "biased" by advertising. Most publications maintain a strict boundary between advertising and editorial.
- Build relationships with editors by introducing yourself at trade shows and other industry events. Invite editors or reporters to visit your facility if they're in the area and don't be afraid to pick up the phone and run possible ideas by them. The more editors get to know you, the more they'll call to see if you have an article they can run.

And remember, writing articles is not a way to get out of advertising. Says Chamberlin, "While closely related, PR and marketing perform different functions. To be effective, a marketing campaign will include both."

### **A Sample Query**

In August 2003, I did a newsletter article on employee surveys for my client, [Hostedware, Inc.](#) While doing the research, I realized the newsletter article (once it was repurposed) would make a great contributed article for a publication covering human resources or employee communications. Hostedware agreed.

Below is the query I used to pitch the idea to three publications. The article, "Creating a Balanced Scorecard: How Companies are Using Online Surveys to Measure Employee Satisfaction," appeared in the January 2004 issue of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) electronic publication, "[Communication World Online](#)."

(Which brings up another point – don't rule out contributing articles to online publications as well.)

### **THE PITCH**

Dear Ms. [Editor's name]:

Linking employee satisfaction (ESAT) to the bottom line is not new. First cited in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1994, this theory (called the

service-profit chain) holds that satisfied employees deliver superior service that creates satisfied clients – and satisfied clients create growth in revenue and earnings and increased shareholder value.

Because technology is significantly more sophisticated (and cheaper) than it was five years ago, companies are using online surveys to reach out more than they ever were for employee feedback. And, according to Charlie Watts, Global Practice Leader for Organizational and Employee Research at Towers Perrin, they are increasingly linking ESAT results to the bottom line.

This topic is timely and of interest to Communication World Online readers – many of whom are in employee and corporate communications. The article would cover the following topics:

- History of online surveys, new technologies, and how HR departments and companies are using surveys today
- Why companies are concerned with employee satisfaction and its affect on the bottom line
- Quotes from industry experts about this trend
- Why companies are using online surveys to conduct more ESAT surveys
- Dos and don'ts for conducting online surveys

Article length would be 1,200 to 1,500 words with the article available in 4 – 6 weeks. Byline will go to my client, Hostedware, Inc., a company providing sophisticated online survey technologies to companies such as 3Com, Agilent Technologies, and Sony Pictures Entertainment.

(I will be writing this article for Hostedware and can supply clips if necessary.)

I look forward to hearing from you.

Dianna Huff

Why this "pitch" worked:

✓ It states why the article will be of interest to the publication's readers. Remember, you're trying to sell the editor on your idea so make sure he/she understands you know who your audience is (and that you've actually read the publication).

✓ It tells the editor what will be covered in the article so he/she can quickly determine if the content is right for the publication and its audience.

- ✓ It tells the editor how long the article will be and when it will be available.
- ✓ Sometimes editors want "clips" or examples of articles written for other publications. This is especially true for freelance writers – which is why I included it in this "pitch."

Once your idea is accepted by the publication, it's time to write your article.

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## Writing Articles that Get Read

If you're like most people, you cringe at the thought of writing an article for a trade publication. Either you're too busy, or you've never done it before and therefore have the fear factor of writing for a national audience. I know, I used to, too. The fear of putting my writing in the spotlight for all of my peers to see was paralyzing. However, writing good articles your readers will enjoy (and that lead to sales) is easy once you know these how-to "secrets":

### 1. Eliminate the "Genesis Beginning."

When I started writing twenty years ago, the editor who rejected my first article gave me a piece of advice I've never forgotten: **Don't start your articles at the beginning.** What did he mean by this?

When you write articles, (even if they're technical) you're telling a story. So it's natural to want to start your article at the beginning by introducing a person or company or giving the factual information up front.

However, starting your article at what I call the "Genesis beginning" (as in, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth") isn't the best thing to do. Why? Because the first couple of paragraphs are your hook: If your article doesn't attract your readers' attention right away, you lose them forever.

Pay particular attention to how journalists begin feature articles. **They usually begin with attention-getting quotes or statistics, a play on words, or by putting readers in the middle of the action,** the way *Fortune* writer Stephanie N. Mehta did with her article about Comcast CEO Brian Roberts:

"At the cable industry's annual confab in Chicago, the place to be is, well, anywhere Brian Roberts is. As the Comcast CEO cruises the convention center's carpeted halls on a cool mid-June afternoon, executives who sell technology and television programs to Comcast – or would like to – schmooze shamelessly, some trotting double-time to keep pace with the fit, 6-foot-2 Roberts."

## 2. Loosen Up.

Have you ever read an article and felt like the writer was wearing a straitjacket? When writing articles, picture one person in your mind, then talk to this person as if you were having her to dinner. **In other words, don't be afraid to be familiar with your audience.** You'll find the writing process goes more smoothly, and your audience of "one" will feel like you are talking directly to her.

"But what about technical or research articles full of esoteric data?" you may be asking. Yes, these types of articles are going to be different from a "how-to" article or case study. This is why it's important to read a publication before submitting articles. Each publication has its own "tone" or "voice" and some are more formal than others. But for articles that are of general interest, don't be afraid to be familiar with your reader.

## 3. Use the Basic Case Study Outline.

Like a boxed cake mix, the case study outline is a never-fail strategy for an application note or tech brief:

- **State the Problem** – What was your company's or customer's problem? Be specific. For example, X Company was wasting 50 people hours a month using antiquated software.
- **Flesh out with Background** – Here is where you'll give that "beginning" information mentioned above. Background includes historical or technical information your readers need to know in order for the problem/solution to make sense.
- **Discuss the Solution** – How was this problem solved? Generally, trade publications ask that you downplay your company and talk more about the solution and how it solved the problem you described.
- **Sum up with Results** – What results did the solution provide? Give real numbers if possible: Widget Company saved \$250K a year using this new software.

## 4. Include Evidence.

Use charts, data, and findings from recent studies as well as photographs and quotes from industry experts (or customers) to support your ideas.

## 5. Conclude with a Call-to-Action.

This can be as simple as, "Contact the author for more information" to a two-sentence blurb about your company and a URL. If the publication allows it,

include an offer with a specific URL so you can track any leads the article generates.

**Two Bonus Tips** – The following two tips aren't important to your readers, but they will endear you to your editor!

**Bonus Tip #1: Carefully read and follow the Author's Guidelines.**

Most publications have a format they want you to follow, generally known as "Author's Guidelines." These guidelines include information on article length and format, using images and data, etc. Be sure to read them and format your article accordingly.

**Bonus Tip #2: Don't blow off your deadline!**

Once you and a publication agree on an article, you will be given a deadline. The worst thing you can do is call an editor two days before your article is due and say, "We're not going to be able to supply that article to you" or "Our article is going to be late." According to Anderson, an editor might be able to assign your article to a freelance writer – but often times the publication is left with a hole (which may translate into an opportunity for your competitor who sent in article summaries three months prior!). If you think you may have trouble getting the article written, hire a freelance writer to write it for you.

Writing articles for trade publications is easy once you know the tricks. Hook readers with a good opening, present information in the problem/solution format, and include data and other evidence. Your readers will not only read your article, they'll most likely contact you for more information.

Want to contribute articles but don't have time to write them yourself? Read on.

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## **Professional marketing writing and consulting services from DH Communications, Inc.**

I know what it's like to be overworked and trying to manage multiple deadlines, product lines, "personalities" and priorities, so trust me when I say I know writing articles is the last thing you want to do. That's why I hired a consultant to do it for me when I worked for a large company.

The vendor I hired was wonderful. She managed the entire article process for me – from generating ideas to interviewing and research to writing and formatting the articles for publications. She made me look so good! I almost cried when she found a fulltime job.

My mission is to provide the same level of service to you. Whether you want someone to manage the entire process or just need to get an article out the door, give me a call. My article writing services include:

- Generating ideas and topics
- Querying B-to-B trade journal editors
- Researching (online and print)
- Interviewing engineers, researchers, customers, product managers, and senior management
- Writing clean, energetic copy editors love

For more information how you can get more articles published, call me at **603-382-8093** or send an e-mail to [info@dhcommunications.com](mailto:info@dhcommunications.com).

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### **About Dianna Huff, ABC**

Dianna specializes in business-to-business marketing consulting and copywriting for companies such as Beckman Coulter, Microsoft Business Solutions, Thermo Electron, Cabot Corporation and a host of small to mid-size companies and agencies. She is a frequent contributor to national publications, both print and online, and is a three-time IABC Silver Quill award winner in the categories of E-newsletters, Marketing Writing, and Marketing Communications.

Dianna is an Accredited Business Communicator (ABC) through the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and is an active member of the New England Direct Marketing Association and the Business Marketing Association. She also teaches a Marketing Writing class at Northeastern University in Boston, MA.

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