

Wasting Time

By Bob Osgoodby

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Whether you are writing an article for a magazine, trade journal, online publication, or a press release, there are certain conventions you must follow. If you follow them, you have a chance of it being published. If you don't, you are simply wasting your time.

When a publisher contracts with you to write an article, you have no doubt established contact with them, and know the format they desire. If you are not being paid, and are hoping to build your "recognition" through publication, it is to your benefit to present it properly.

Publishers are busy people who have deadlines to meet. The easier you can make it for them, the better chance you have of them making a favorable decision.

The very first thing you should do is to give them some idea of what the article is all about. A sentence or two describing the content, and who it is targeted to, is essential. If you don't do this, they might read a paragraph or two and make a decision based on that. You might have a great article that is rejected, simply because the first few sentences don't get their attention. Do you provide a word count? This is absolutely necessary.

Publishers have different amounts of space available for an article every time they publish. Many times their first "cut" is made on length rather than the actual content. If they have to take the time to figure out how long it is, it might just end up in their trash.

Now, will these two things guarantee it will be published? Of course not, but it does give you a shot at having it read. Even if the content is not a "fit" for the current publication, if they know what it's about and how long it is, they might just save it for a future edition.

Spelling errors are usually an immediate "kiss of death". There is absolutely nothing that will get your article rejected faster. Most publishers reject "out of hand" an article with spelling mistakes. Think about it - if you submit an article with these types of errors, a question is immediately raised as to the accuracy of the content.

Have you actually read your finished article? The best thing is to have someone else proof it for you prior to submission. Sometimes you get so close to an article, what may be perfectly clear to you, is not to someone else. Never submit the article the day it is written if at all possible. Let it age

for a day or two and reread it. Concentrate on content the first go round, and on presentation and form in subsequent readings.

Let's discuss articles for online publication. Never send an article by email that requires someone to open an attachment, go to a web page to retrieve it, or request it through an auto-responder. A publisher, faced with a deadline to meet, just won't jump through these hoops to see if your article is appropriate.

Realize that the presentation of your article is paramount. If it is a "jumbled mess" with long and short lines because an improper line length was used in your email, it will not be read. This is simply sloppy, and reflects negatively on the author. Any submission should be compatible with the line length used in the publication, and should be between 60 and 65 characters in length. Articles with these line lengths don't require substantial editing, are appreciated by publishers, and have a much greater chance of being accepted.

A common error many authors make, is to make the article too long. In any publication, space is at a premium. If your article is over 900 words, the chances of it being published, are greatly decreased. While you might have a great article, unless it has appeal to a very specialized audience, very few people, if any, will ever see it - it's just too long. The ideal length is between 700 and 800 words. Articles of 250 to 350 words are also a good bet, as publishers are always looking for "fillers".

Most publishers will immediately reject an attachment in .doc format because of the danger of viruses. If you do include an attachment, do it in .txt format as that is safe to open.

A great way of sending articles, is to format them in a fixed line length in the body of the email, and include an unformatted copy with no fixed line length in text format as an attachment. This allows the publisher to be able to read the article, and if they publish in an HTML format to directly import it into their publication. If they archive the articles, they can put them on their web site with no editing required.

If you provide a short synopsis of the article, a word count, and a properly formatted article, the odds of it being published are good. Publishers are busy people, and anything you can do to reduce their workload, will pay dividends.

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