



How to Pitch Stories to Magazine Editors and Get Published

Editors of print and online publications need content – articles, case studies, opinion pieces and expert comments. Major magazines have more and better quality writers competing to write for them (and even pay for those stories), but most industry publications depend upon free content provided by industry experts to fill their pages.

How can you identify opportunities to get your content published and submit your ideas in a way that will give you the best chance for success?

The first and most important step to get your article published is to know and understand the magazine to which you are making your pitch.

- Go online, **look at a couple of back issues**, and see what kind of articles it publishes – subject matter, tone, intended audience.
- What are some of its regular sections and how long are typical articles?
- Can you identify articles written by professionals outside the magazine staff (i.e. are most articles written by paid staff writers and editors or by subject matter experts like you who work at other full-time jobs in various industries)?
- Look for a magazine's **article submission guidelines** – many post these online and will tell you what you need to do to be considered. If they post these and you don't read and follow, editors may not give you any consideration.
- Look for the magazine's **editorial calendar**. Monthly print magazines have four-to-six month lead times. Most magazines publish an annual editorial calendar that shows the topics it will feature in future months. Look at that to see if there is something coming up that you could write about.
- **Identify the right person to pitch**. In most cases it's not the editor-in-chief or managing editor; it might be a section editor or association editor. Again, look for editors covering the topic area you will be proposing to write about. Look in either the masthead (which is the box on the first couple of pages listing all of the staff – it is not the logo/name of the magazine; that is the “banner” or “flag” fyi) or the About or Contact pages on the web site.
- **Research your intended editorial contacts online** – their bio on the magazine's web site, their LinkedIn page, other online search results – connect with them on LinkedIn and follow them on Twitter. They may send out requests for articles or quotes from experts.
- **Check your online persona** – the first thing an editor may do is Google YOU and see what's on your LinkedIn page, so make sure it reflects expertise in your proposed topic area.

Develop your proposed topic

If you have done your research, you will find it much easier to develop topic ideas to pitch. Look at the publication for article and subject matter types. These might include:

- Case Studies (with client approval, of course)
- Predictions & Trends – Where is an industry, practice, technology headed
- Survey Results
- Best Practices & Tips
- Impact of Recent/Upcoming Regulatory Changes
- Impact (how a change in one area is creating challenges and change in another)
- Instructional “How To”

When you have your general topic area, **do an online search of your topic** – both websites and news – to see what has been currently written. And once you’ve narrowed down your topic, check again to make sure your idea hasn’t been done millions of times by someone else. And if it has think how you can give it a new twist.

Also think about possible sidebars and pull-outs that could accompany your article -- editors like to see packaging ideas .

Invest some time in a great headline idea or two – something that would grab a reader’s attention (and the editor’s).

Editors say that the most common mistake writers make is pitching a general topic, rather than a story – so get specific!

Write Your Pitch

The Pre-Pitch

Send the editor a pre-pitch email. Introduce yourself, and tell him/her you have an idea that might be a match for his/her magazine. Reference a particular magazine section or include something that demonstrates your familiarity with their publication. Summarize your idea(s) in two sentences and ask the editor to email you back if he’d like a full pitch.

You might also (or instead) send a “what are you looking for?” email, briefly explaining your qualifications and asking if there are topics for which an editor is seeing content.

If you receive a positive response, thank the editor and state that a pitch will arrive from you within a week.

The Full Pitch

A good magazine pitch should be a page to a page-and-a-half.

In your pitch letter, start by summarizing your story idea. This first paragraph demonstrates your ability to write in a clear, compelling style, so put some extra effort into it!

Tell the editor how you'll approach the story (first person, interviews with experts, case study, instructional, etc.); explain what fresh angle can you bring to the topic.

Suggest the number of words it will be based upon what you have seen (one magazine page = about 700 words).

Explain why the article is timely (regulatory change, industry incident, reported trend); and why the magazine's readers would be interested in or should know about this topic.

Explain why you're a qualified writer for this topic (include background details or credentials that support your case; mention if you've been published elsewhere).

Make sure your pitch is perfect – no spelling, grammar, punctuation mistakes. Get someone to QC it for you.

Sending the Pitch

Choose the right time to send it. There are better times to pitch; Tuesday through Thursday is a lot calmer than a Monday or Friday. Between midday and 3pm is best.

Put your idea or headline in the subject line.

Paste the pitch into the body of the email, rather than attaching it as a separate document.

Check on whether the pitch was received. Follow up on email 3-5 days later and then a week later call up the office and ask to speak to the editor and politely ask if email was received. But DON'T harass.

If your idea is rejected, revise the query and send it elsewhere.

If your idea is accepted, do a great job: work with (not against) your editor; follow your assignment letter; write no more than 5% above or below the desired word count; alert the editor to any problems that arise, but don't make excuses for being late (I'm really busy at work this week; I have a big proposal to get out; etc.); proofread your writing; meet your deadline; provide fact-checking info; be open to feedback; make revisions promptly. In other words, be professional—and you'll earn yourself another story in the future!

Good luck!