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How to Write How-to Articles That Promote Your Expertise

By Joan Stewart

There she is again—your biggest competitor. She’s smiling back at you from the inside of a local business magazine. She’s doling out free advice on how to do something people should have hired you to do. Why didn’t the editors ask you to write the article instead of her?

Guess what? They probably didn’t ask her. Most likely, she wrote the article and offered it to them for free.

Editors of newspapers, magazines, trade journals, and print and online newsletters need articles that will inspire, educate, calm, enlighten, humor and entertain their readers. Here’s a step-by-step guide on how to get in on the action and use articles to position yourself as an expert.

Choose a Topic

This is easy. Name the three biggest problems your target audience faces. You’ve just come up with ideas for three different articles. Now select a title. Can’t think of one? Scan the covers of magazines the next time you’re in the supermarket. Select a headline that’s appropriate to your article, and substitute a key word. Here are a few examples:

Cash in on the _____ Trend
Common Errors That Kill _____
How to Bounce Back from _____
How to Turn _____ Into _____
11 Questions You Must Ask When _____
8 Tips for Better _____

Write the Lead

Let readers know you feel their pain. For an example, go back to the first paragraph of this article. Think of how your customers feel when they can’t figure out how to handle the problem you are writing about. Present the problem as succinctly as possible, perhaps by offering a hypothetical example like I did.

Tell Them Why They Should Care

Now explain in one or two paragraphs why solving the problem is important. What’s in it for them? How much money can they save? How much aggravation can they be spared if they do what you say? Work in a sentence that explains what you do and why you are the expert. For example: “In my 10 years as a sales and marketing manager for a major chain that sells pharmaceutical products, I have found that the best sales techniques are...”

List Bullet Points or Sub-Heads

This is the meat of the article. Offer a list of tips in bulleted format or with subheads, like those you see here. Be consistent in the presentation. If the first word of the first bullet is a verb, the article might sound better if the first word of every paragraph is a verb. If it’s a longer article with longer paragraphs, boldface the first sentence of each bulleted item, then elaborate. If your article is in the range of 500 words or so, keep sentences and paragraphs very short.

Summarize

Close with a summary paragraph that offers hope or encouragement to readers who follow your advice. Your article doesn’t have to end with a cowboy riding off into the sunset. But don’t list your last bullet point and end abruptly. Provide a nice closing. See how I wrote the closing paragraph in this article below.

Include an Identifier Paragraph

Include a paragraph listing your name, company, what you do, and how readers can contact you (phone number, e-mail address, or both). Also include your web site address (URL). Don’t rely on the editor to write this for you. But if you are offering the article for free, suggest that the editor include what you have written. Always offer your photo, too. You can write your identifier paragraph the same way I wrote mine, below.

Make Reprints

After your article is printed, call the publication and ask for permission to reprint it. Make reprints for your media kit, to mail to customers, and to take to trade shows.

Now get going! There’s an editor someplace who is just waiting for you to call.



Joan Stewart, a.k.a. The Publicity Hound, publishes “The Publicity Hound’s Tips of the Week,” a free weekly ezine. Subscribe at www.PublicityHound.com and receive free the handy checklist “89 reasons to send a press release.” Contact Joan at jstewart@publicityhound.com or 262-284-7451.

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“How to Submit Online Articles that Pull Traffic to Your Website” tells you how to submit your articles quickly to online portals—places where print and online publishers look for valuable content. Before long, your articles will start showing up in places you never knew existed. It will also tell you how to turn all that website traffic into valuable sales leads. Read more about it at http://www.publicityhound.com/publicity-products/marketing-tapes/submit_online_articles.htm