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How to Pitch a Story

By Elizabeth Kirwin

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How to Pitch a Story

Ever wonder why we refer to convincing an editor a story is worthy by "pitching a story?" I have. I'm a baseball enthusiast, and it makes a lot of sense to me. When the editor is at bat with you, he or she has a few swings to make before making a connection - through the story idea (ball) that could end up being a base hit or a home run. Naturally, everyone wants to hit a home run when they go to bat with an editor. Sometimes publicists and writers do have to walk to first base for the story assignment. Here are some helpful tips on how to pitch a story to an editor - and how to at least hit a single, double, or triple - if not a home run on occasion.

Use an Editor's Time Productively

Time spent on the telephone with an editor is more like a gift from God. If you want to be successful at purveying a story idea, it's best to have the information you want to convey rehearsed, or in note written form prior to your call. Try not to spend more than 10 or 15 minutes speaking about your story idea. Always ask the editor, "Is this a good time for you?" before beginning your pitch. Another great way to reach an editor is by a well-written e-mail pitch. In either case focus the presentation or conversation on your story idea(s). If the editor is interested, he or she may ask more questions. If not, the editor should tell you.

Facts, Sources, Images

The editor needs to be interested in the theme of your story. A quick 2-3 sentence synopsis should offer an original focus or angle on a topic related to the publication. For example, if I wanted to pitch to Ms. magazine, I'd want to have a feminist event, profile, or feature idea that would be appropriate. Identify potential research sources for your story, or elaborate upon contacts with experts in the area, to let the editor know you are capable of tackling the subject. This expansion on your topic is key to

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keeping the editor's interest. Many magazine and newspaper editors will also ask you up front about the availability of photographs to go with the story. Be prepared answer this question with some viable suggestions for photos and a creative approach. By now you've sold the story idea. So, don't forget to ask about the availability of a staff photographer from the publication to assist with photos.

Where do I Find Stories to Pitch?

Whether you are working for yourself or an organization or company, you have your comfort zones. These are vendors you are doing business with, your immediate environment, and social functions that seem aligned with your work. Go outside of your usual boundaries, experiment in other social venues, and talk to people as often as possible. I look for story ideas when I'm on assignment with a story. Because I write daily, I know that one story will inevitably lead to another. I also pick up story ideas in the bar, at the university where I work as a teacher, from other clients, from students, local activists, or during outdoor group activities such as hiking and camping. I listen closely to what people say, and I

carry around my favorite pocketbook sized bungee notebook to record my thoughts and story ideas. When I have an editor on the telephone, or am lucky enough to meet one in person, I act like I did when I played ball: I just start pitching.

Tools of the Trade

Once, I had a bead collection I acquired from a friend who was sick of beading. She said to me, "if you just look at the collection long enough, you'll have ideas." This is what I did, and this is how I made my necklaces.

For writers, I recommend they look at as many hard copy and on-line publications as possible. Don't forget to obtain a copy of the current Writers Market. It's a useful publication for profiling buying publications. I suggest the budding writer look into publications in sync with their personal interests. For example, I enjoy backcountry hiking and camping. I would probably want to contact outdoors magazines to pitch them some stories. I also have an interest in local newspapers, travel, educational, and holistic healing magazines. I've pitched to all of these types of publications. When you find a publication you really like, write down the editor's name, e-mail, phone number and start to pitch. There's also a great writers' site called

. For \$8 per month you can review an

interactive on-line listing of publications which are currently buying new work. With these links, you can visit the publications directly, read about them, and e-mail the editor your pitch. The longer you look at these tools of the trade, the more ideas will percolate.

Hit a Home Run

You want to hit a home run with an editor and land a story? Well, try going to bat with two to three story ideas instead of just one. Or the story you've developed can be pitched at different angles, which may make it more suitable for your publication of choice. Make sure to view at least several articles from the

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publication itself before pitching an editor, so you can have an idea of that editor's taste in material and style. All of these tips should help you land a great story, and even more in the future. As with baseball: practice. With practice, you'll learn how to pitch like an expert.

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newsletters, brochures, and other marketing materials for companies and health care organizations nationally. For more information, e-mail ekirwin@bellsouth.net.

Calling All Moviemakers...

By Kim Klaver

Yes, you. Movie Maker. Two ways.

#1. MOVIE MAKER. Starts with a story THEY really want to tell. Anything THEY are excited about. Something that they were/are touched by, something that affected them or connects with them somehow.

YOU: A successful network marketer starts with a story – one YOU really want to tell. A story is not a promise about what will happen to someone else. The story you tell is based on your experience with say, the product. You RELATE something that happened to you, or affected you, or how something is aligned perfectly with something else that's important to you. That has the makings of a story.

(E.g. Say you had achy knees for months and were nervous about surgery. You tried 7 different GNC or health store products, and nothing seemed to do much. Then one day you tried this other product and lo! Your achy knees lessened in a week or so, and now, 6 months later, you've even playing tennis again.)

#2. MOVIE MAKER. Beginning movie makers usually try to sell their movie to the studios (and investors) by pitching it as something everyone will want to see. Who could say no to that, right? Think of the income!

YOU: Many beginning network marketers pitch their products (or business) as something everyone will want because well, they're just the best thing out there, aren't they? How to get everyone to love them is the only obstacle. Indeed.

But Whole Foods isn't for everyone is it? Yet their business is booming. Whether you shop there or not, even. Madonna isn't for everyone, is she? But does she need everyone to be financially wildly successful? You name something, I'll tell you that everyone DOES NOT LOVE IT or want it. Sniff.

No one has ever had even close to everyone to make a success of things. "Almost no one" will do fine,

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actually. Like a few hundred customers for your product line, of the 300 million people in the U.S., say.

Savvy movie makers have long abandoned the "for everyone" pitch. In Hollywood, the smart ones talk about "finding your audience." This is what you should do. Because nothing is for everyone. Not even God.

Kim Klaver is Harvard & Stanford educated. Her 20 years experience in network marketing have resulted in a popular blog,

, a podcast,

and a

giant resource site,

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