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When the Editor is NOT the Enemy

By Mridu Khullar

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They can be mean, unethical and downright unprofessional. But not all editors fit that bill. In fact, most editors would rather give you money that take it, make no changes than rewrite whole pieces two hours before deadline, and accept every piece of crap than start their mornings sending out rejection slips. But step into an editor's shoes, and you'll know why that's not only hard, it's just plain impossible!

Here are the most common complaints writers have, and why editors aren't always guilty of them.

Completely Changing your Work

An editor I frequently work with was in distress. One of her regulars had just written to complain about his perfectly brilliant beginning being chopped off. "They sometimes don't get our style," she told me over lunch. "We need more quotes, we put them in. We need a stronger beginning; we change it. There's nothing much I can do about it. It's the way we work." But while this editor was very forthcoming about her reasons, and gave the writer an explanation, you'll usually get no further correspondence. That doesn't mean that they don't understand the anguish you go through. But they've got word limits, voice and style limitations and a dozen other factors to keep in mind. And they simply don't have the time to offer explanations to each writer.

Paying Less or not Paying at all

Most writers believe (or are led to believe) that editors just don't want to dish out the cash. Sure, if they're running a small business from home and can hardly pay their bills, they probably won't. But editors in big offices don't really care whether you earn \$100 or \$1,000. After all, they're not the ones paying from their pockets!

I was in a publisher-editor meeting the other day, and one common concern was raised—why weren't suppliers (including freelancers) paid on time? A complaint unanimously raised by... editors!

An important thing to remember is that while it may appear so to us, editors aren't really the ones calling the shots all the time. That's the publisher's job. So hating the editor's guts won't get you anywhere. While some editors may be creeps, most of them are on your side! So, if you want more

money, just ask for it. Chances are the editor is the only one who can help you get it.

Not Responding

They'd love to, you know. But there's only so much they can do. And while each e-mail you send will determine where your next paycheck comes from, an editor will get paid regardless of the number of queries rejected. Their job is putting together quality content. No one's going to promote them for being nice to freelancers. It's a simple matter of priorities. And when the choice is between finishing up the issue and answering yet another freelancer's query, get real—the editor will finish up and go home.

Killing Articles

We tossed a coin. The losing editor would have to tell the freelance writer that his article had been killed. That too after we asked him to send us a dozen writing samples, come up with a dozen off-beat

ideas, get a feel of our style and send us a 600-word piece. We'd even negotiated the price. It would have taken him at least a day's work, if not more. We felt cruel, but decided that the guy had potential for future assignments.

I lost the toss and sat down to draft the e-mail. I explained at length how our policies had changed, told him that we'd be willing to give more assignments and even added a touch of humor. But the writer was obviously blinded. He thought of me as the devil. And by doing so, he'd just lost a perfectly good opportunity for more assignments.

Editors aren't out to take advantage of freelancers or make their lives miserable. In fact, if you get to know them a little, you'll find that they're often a very friendly bunch. Stop looking at your editor as the enemy, and you might just find a friend.

Mridu Khullar is the editor-in-chief of www.WritersCrossing.com, a free online magazine for writers. Sign up for the free weekly newsletter to get a complimentary e-book with 400+ paying markets. Also check out her e-book, "Knock Their Socks Off! A Freelance Writer's Guide to Query Letters That Sell," available at <http://www.writerscrossing.com/queries.html>

In PR, You Must Choose Your 'Enemy' Wisely

By Rusty Cawley

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When the great Carthaginian general Hannibal was just a boy, his father forced him to declare his undying hatred for Rome. After his father's death, Hannibal used that rage to propel him in a lifelong battle with the emerging Roman Empire.

Hannibal crossed the Alps with his army and its elephants. He defeated the Romans in battle after battle. Unfortunately for Carthage, Hannibal was wonderful at winning battles, but incompetent at winning wars.

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After Hannibal's death, Rome took its wrath upon Carthage. The Romans destroyed the city, sold the inhabitants into slavery and sowed the land with salt so that no city could ever rise on that spot again.

The story of Hannibal points out two truths about developing a singular identity.

First, it helps to choose a well-known enemy. Two thousand years after his death, Hannibal still ranks with Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon as one of the most famous generals of all time. (Just as Hannibal had Rome as his enemy, Alexander had Persia, Caesar had Pompey and Napoleon had Wellington.)

Second, it is important to choose the right enemy. By choosing Rome, Hannibal selected an enemy he could not defeat, an enemy he was forced to fight on its home turf, and an enemy that was so ruthless that it wiped Carthage from the earth.

So what is the right enemy?

To begin, it's important to realize there are two kinds of useful enemies.

The first is competition.

If you are anything less than the No.1 brand in your category, then your competitive enemy is whoever is on top. For Pepsi, the enemy is Coke. For Oracle, the enemy is Microsoft. For Reebok, the enemy is Nike.

If you are clearly the No. 1 brand, then your enemy is the No. 2 brand. You can't declare war on everyone. You must define your enemy to get any use out of your enemy.

Always try to define the battle as No. 1 versus No. 2., and forget everyone else.

The second kind of useful enemy is a public problem. This type of enemy gives you the opportunity to define your identity by seizing an issue.

Declare war on illiteracy, or on disease, or on famine. Take on any significant public problem that appeals to you.

But make sure of three things:

1. Your company has a logical, apparent connection to the cause. Exxon Mobil is contributing funds to help save endangered tigers. This is logical, given the long history of Exxon's mascot, the Exxon tiger. Yes, it's tenuous. But it's logical, and that's what counts.

2. Your company has the resources to make a significant impact on the problem. Don't take on hunger in Africa if you lack the time, money and resources to actually help alleviate hunger in Africa. You want a cause that is large enough to register with the public, but one that isn't so large that it straps your company or makes it look foolish.

3. Your company can remain committed to the cause for the long haul. How long? For all practical purposes, forever. The last thing you want is to become known as the company that used to do that

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very important thing that really helped the community, but quit.

Now you may ask why it's so important to have an enemy. Because we are defined by our rivals.

In the world of boxing, Joe Frazier was defined by his rivalry with Muhammad Ali. Among airlines, Pan Am was defined by its battle with TWA. Among department stores, Macy's was defined by its war with Gimbel's.

David was defined by Goliath.

Churchill was defined by Hitler.

The Hatfields were defined by the McCoys.

If you want to create a singular identity, you must contrast your position with a rival. You need an enemy.

Don't wait for an enemy to appear through happenstance. Find the right enemy and declare war now.

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