

Six Tips for Pitching Trade Editors

By Gerri Knilans

Lisa Nardone, editor-in-chief of *Construction Executive*, a b2b publication covering the commercial, industrial and institutional construction sectors, has been the recipient of hundreds of public relations pitches, many of which are doomed to immediate rejection.

According to Lisa, the main reason is that PR professionals don't take the time to really understand her audience. "Pitching a residential construction project wastes our time and theirs," she says.

There are other reasons why PR professionals lose favor with editors. Sometimes, an individual pitching by phone doesn't take the time to find out if an editor is on deadline, and that's a fatal flaw. Additionally, callers may not know all the ins and outs of a project and wind up shuffling papers to find the information because they never thought a live editor would answer the phone. Another error is to send pitches for topics that have already been covered in previous issues of the publication. These approaches are annoying to editors and are not likely to result in success for the agency or clients the agency represents.

For a better chance at piquing the editor's interest, maybe it's time to go back to that proverbial drawing board for a refresher course on what constitutes an effective b2b pitch.

As a brief reminder, consider these six suggestions:

1. Do your homework.

Research the profile of the publication's readers to see if it's the right audience for the story you want to place. Look to see whether the publication uses contributed pieces. If the publication has an editorial calendar, review it to see if the topics slated for future issues are a good fit. Remember, original, unpublished work is essential.

2. Keep it newsworthy. No editor of a trade or general interest publication will stand for any pitch that is self-serving. It does not have to be hard news, but it should be informational and enlightening to readers. If you're providing the copy, make certain it is thoroughly researched, accurate and well-written. Anything less and the editor is not likely to be receptive of future pitches – a problem that will not be appreciated by your clients or employer.

3. Create interest through query paragraphs. Start with an interest-generating head-

line or title, followed by a short and succinct description of the proposed article. Focus on what is new, important and perhaps even controversial to readers. Then add a short list of questions that the proposed article will answer for readers. The editors know what their readers are looking for, and you should too if you hope to craft an effective pitch.

4. Limit the number of query paragraphs.

There should be no more than five topics to present to editors. Three is even better. Editors' time to review queries is limited, and they want no part of a shotgun approach in which too many ideas are blasted in the hope that one will be accepted. There is nothing wrong with submitting more than one story idea provided you don't overdo it.

5. Demonstrate the author's credentials. If a b2b magazine is interested in a bylined article, be prepared to explain the source's credentials, including the author's area of expertise, years in business, previously published works and accomplishments. Provide enough material that can justify the editor's decision to accept the author as a worthy contributor.

6. Fulfill your end of the bargain. Ride hard on the

content, and make sure it's solid journalism. Follow the publication's editorial guidelines and learn what style the magazine prefers (in most cases, it's the Associated Press Stylebook, but verify just to be sure). Submit all work on time, every time (including any graphic support that has been requested). No exceptions. Editors don't have time or patience for late submissions. Be accommodating if the editor requires changes to your copy. After all, this positions you as a valuable resource who could be asked to contribute content again in the future.

All of this may seem like Public Relations 101, but trade editors will tell you it's a gospel they're tired of preaching. The bottom line is that an effective pitch comes down to knowing the audience, having a solid story idea and being able to answer any questions the moment the editor asks them. Anything less and your pitch will likely be sentenced to the editor's version of capital punishment: the delete key.

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