

5 ways to not write a guest blog post

[Business](#)



Imagine that you're on a date. He's tall, dark and handsome -- your dream guy -- but soon enough things start to go wrong. He lies about everything, exaggerates his achievements, jumps from one topic to the next without pause or logic and, even worse, whips out a briefcase of fake Cartier watches and tries to sell you one.

You'll be asking for the bill before you even get to dessert and then uploading him straight to , right?

Well, that's how commissioning editors feel when they start to read a promising article, and it's full of inaccuracies, doesn't follow a clear structure and simply turns out to be a big advert for your product.

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One of the top reasons editors reject articles is that they don't add value to the readership, but there are also many other things to consider, such as content, research, originality and relevance. So let's talk about rejection: a topic writers are especially familiar with, then go into how to make sure your article is worthwhile and doesn't get scrapped by an editor right away.

1. Don't intentionally write about your product.

Online advertising is a huge industry, globally valued at , and nearly all publications with a digital presence make at least some of their money from advertising.

Aside from the obvious pop-ups, banners and videos, you've probably seen sponsored articles -- also known as native ads. These articles blur the line between advertising and editorial. They lure you in with an interesting

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headline, setting up an argument or problem and then outlining why a certain company solves it. The purpose is simple: to get you to buy a product, or sign up for a service. Instead of a traditional conclusion, there's a call to action -- " find out more," or " buy it now."

Don't make the mistake of writing one of these and thinking you can pass it off as a thoughtleadership piece. Publications to feature advertorials, so the moment an editor sniffs out a promotional article, he or she will expect you to pay thousands of dollars to publish it, or, more likely send you away with your tail between your legs.

A thought leadership article, on the other hand, does not attempt to persuade the reader to buy anything. It is not marketing or advertising, in any sense. Instead, its aim is to provide value, giving the reader action points to implement, or useful advice to consider.

Here's an example of a good thought leadership piece. Nicholas Tenhue, the user experience and project strategy lead at Genospace, wrote a piece on his area of expertise, Tenhue has social proof -- he is a leader in the field -- and he doesn't promote his product or company at all.

The value for the author and the company is in the article byline: the part that lists your name, company and position. Your aim is to build social proof and establish yourself as an expert in your industry. Insightful articles can also impress investors and create trust among your clients and future client base. Publications don't charge anything at all to feature these types of articles because they are valuable to the reader.

2. Don't accidentally write about your product.

Okay, so you get it: no writing sneaky ads for your company. But it's not that simple. Startup founders are extremely focused people. They set out to solve a problem and succeed in business. Although this might sound silly, it's very easy to fall into the trap of writing about your own solution without even meaning to.

Editors don't just read your arguments, they read between the lines. While you may be an expert in your field, you also have to make sure that when you write about your industry, you're not describing the exact problem your company solves.

For example, even if you present a well-rounded argument for the need for a new virtual reality (VR) streaming platform, and the article has value for readers, an editor will most likely reject it if that's what your company is offering.

Instead of talking about the problem you're solving, look at challenges that you and your competitors are facing. Outline the obstacles the industry will face in the future, and give others in your particular ecosystem action points to follow for the future.

The litmus test is simple. Ask yourself: In theory, would a competitor of mine be happy sharing this article? If the answer is no, then perhaps it's time to rethink your idea.

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3. Don't forget to do your research.

An article without evidence is like a bicycle without a chain; it looks like a bicycle, it feels like a bicycle, but it won't get you anywhere fast.

A good article needs more than just opinion. It needs facts. Although you might be able to talk for hours on the benefits of targeted email marketing, it's no use asking the reader to take your word for it.

You'll need statistics, expert research and quotes to make your case. Even if you are saying something truly original, your ideas don't exist in a vacuum, so give some context.

Don't lure an editor in with a tasty pitch, only to disappoint by not giving him or her the facts that constitute the main course. Ask and answer questions. How big is the market you are talking about? How important is the change or challenge you're talking about? Why should industry insiders care? What impact will your idea have on the consumer?

Lean on big consulting and research institutions, like McKinsey and Deloitte, or broadsheet publications like the *New York Times* and *The Guardian* for help -- just make sure to reference them with links. Even aggregate sites like Statista can be useful references.

Look at Kristof Horvath's or Mike Galarza's Both look at the state of different industries and provide insightful, original ideas while also referencing plenty of reputable sources.

4. Don't be disorganized or impractical.

Don't treat your article as a chance to complain about all the things that are bothering you about your job. Instead consider it an opportunity time to offer solutions, insights and advice. As my dear old grandmother used to say, " It's no use just whining about it; you have to do something about it."

Much like children, articles need structure and discipline if they are to do well. Outline your argument, provide evidence and most importantly, leave the reader with something practical to take away.

That's not to say you need to write a how-to article to get featured in a top publication, but clear advice for the reader is a big plus in many editors' books.

A good example is Charles Francis' article on , explaining the benefits of meditation and giving evidence for its claims. It provides useful pointers on how to implement the practice in the office.

5. Don't offer 'old news.'

Research the title and keywords before you put pen to paper, because nothing spells rejection quite like an article that just rehashes trite ideas that have already appeared on multiple top-level publications.

When you're thinking about an article topic, one of the first things you should do is run it through Google. That exercise might not be very technical, but it is very effective. How many hits are there? When was this topic first written about? Is it in a major publication? Is it already on your target publication website?

If your story was first mentioned in 2011, and there's been nothing written about it since, it's likely no one cares anymore. As sad as that may be, please avoid writing it -- unless you're absolutely sure what you're going to write is new, bold and innovative and will have editors asking for your autograph.

On the other hand, you also need to be careful when there has been a lot published recently on the same topic. Although a trending topic is more likely to catch an editor's eye, you need to make sure you're not just saying the same thing in different-colored ink. Ensure your angle is new, your idea is fresh and your opinion is valuable.

In a similar vein, if no one has ever has written about the topic, that might be a sign that either you're a genius or it's not that great of a topic. To be doubly sure, run it past a few of your most trusted colleagues -- by trusted, I mean those who won't just say yes because they're scared of you -- to see if they think it's viable.

Related:

There's no hack to becoming a thought leader. While guest articles are an important public relations tactic, you can only get out of these articles what you put in. If you ensure that you are providing readers with a valuable, well-written article, filled with research, original ideas and practical advice, you're likely to see great results and be featured on a top publication.