

Writing for Trade Magazines by Kendall Hanson introduces both professionals and beginners to writing and marketing to a world of potential magazine markets not covered in any other book on writing.

Writing for Trade Magazines

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Chapter 1

What you absolutely must know about trade magazines but were never taught in school—and why.

The benefits of writing for trade magazines

Trade magazines pay as well or better than general interest magazines. A myth has long existed, I think, that trade magazines don't pay as well as their better known sisters. I've never written for any trade magazine for less than \$300 an article, find that most pay between 25 and 35 cents a word—at this writing roughly a dime higher than most of the general interest magazines I know of, or about an extra \$100 per thousand words of copy if you want to think of it that way. In fact, on some assignments I've seen my copy go for as much as \$2 per word, and I'm hard pressed to think of more than a handful of general interest magazines which pay that well.

Trade magazines are relatively easy to break into. Imagine you are the articles editor for Ladies Home Journal. How many query letters do you receive in a single day? How many unsolicited manuscripts? Fifty? A hundred? Multiply that by two

hundred and twenty working days a year. No wonder those editors take work home at night and on the weekends. Even with assistants, how do you screen all of that material?

Now compare that with a recent cold call I had with the editor of magazine covering the audio/visual industry:

“Freelance?” Long pause. “I don’t think anyone’s every asked me before. Yeah, I suppose we would use some freelance if it fit our magazine. What’s the story?”

I name three, all installations of audio/visual systems in local office and business projects under construction.

“Yeah, those sound great. Those would work in our “System” sections. When can you send them?”

Quite a difference from the standard form rejection from *Family Circle* which arrives three or four months after you query.

We quickly get into a discussion about the pay for these articles which, admittedly, are on spec—but not really because I already have looked at the magazine and know exactly what is wanted for the “System” section. The agreed price is slightly less than what I would receive by writing the same length pieces for *Family Circle*. But considering the time and effort I would waste sending a query, waiting six to eight weeks for a potential reply, and then putting together the article, probably on spec anyway, my spec assignments from this trade magazine are almost like money in the hand. By the way, they paid on acceptance.

Not all trade magazines are quite so easy to break into, but the vast majority compare more than favorably with their consumer-oriented cousins.

Trade magazine editors tend to be loyal. One of the by-products of having few freelancers providing stories for trade magazines is that most trade magazine editors are very loyal to their freelancers. I don’t mean to imply that consumer magazine editors can’t be just as loyal, just that, again, the narrow market of good trade writers means that trade editors often don’t have any back-up writer waiting in the wings.

For good reason. Writing for a trade magazine, as you’ll

learn in these pages, has an added element that favors writers willing to spend the time and effort necessary to learn an industry's needs and issues. The basic truth for a trade writer is that the writer is not a member of the audience he's writing for.

Think of that implication. If you write for a newspaper, you generally can count yourself as one member of its vast general audience. If you write for a shelter magazine, and live in a house or an apartment, then you can count yourself a member of that magazine's potential audience. You already know in a visceral sense what that audience wants to know about, what topics are of interest, what topics are old hat, and what material within a particular topic is most important.

Unless you are an audio engineer or a subcontractor who installs A/V systems, you don't know what's important to your audience in *Systems Contractor News* because you aren't a member of that audience. Don't despair, though. I'll show you how to find out what's important to a trade audience within these pages. Once you understand how to act on this simple secret, you'll be able to go forth and tackle any type of trade magazine subject.

Trade magazine writing provides a base of research that can be used in crossover articles for consumer magazines and newspapers. One of the great benefits of writing for trade magazines is the spillover effect of a potential topic into the more traditional channels of consumer periodicals. There are hundreds of ways to reconfigure most basic research in a trade article to appeal to a consumer audience. Let me give you an example. Recently I came across a young man who was building post-and-beam buildings using an updated version of the oak-pegged mortise-and-tenon construction our founding fathers used to build their homes and their barns.

The potential sales of this article floored me. First, it was easily possible to pitch an article to a regional trade magazine. At the same time, it made sense to pitch the article to a national magazine for commercial architects who design facili-

ties for winter resorts (and often crossover into high-end custom homes at the adjoining housing developments). Since the builder was using pre-engineered wood (joists and beams made from strips of wood pressure-glued together), it was also possible to pitch the story to a construction industry environmental trade magazine (yes, there is such a thing, several in fact) as well as a wood industry magazine. The likelihood of these magazines competing directly with each other was slim.

Next, I could reslant the article to the consumer market for those who are thinking about building their own home. Could have gone to a national magazine, but I opted instead to self-syndicate the article to regional daily newspapers. Once I'm sure those dailies who want the story have run them, I'll can recirculate the article to weekly newspapers.

But we aren't done yet. As long as the article is interesting to home owners in the U.S., what about home owners in England? Australia? Switzerland? As far as that goes, lets query the same types of trade magazines in every language we can find. Why? Because most are willing to interpret the article for you.

If you think about the possibilities inherent in reselling articles and reslanting your basic research, it becomes obvious that writing for trade magazines offers a virtual gold mine for the magazine writer. Magazine articles all have the same basic characteristics:

1. Contacts that are quoted.
2. Facts that are cited.
- 3 A human interest angle.
4. A defined or implied trend.

Trade writing still requires the same dedication to good writing that you would find in consumer-oriented publications. In some ways writing a good trade magazine feature is even more challenging and satisfying than writing a similar piece for a consumer periodical.

What trade magazines are

Today, trade magazines are prospering, and in many ways are more prosperous than their consumer-oriented relatives because their mission is one that will be ongoing for some time. Trade magazines are:

News providers. The foremost function for most trade magazines is to provide news for the industry they serve, including news about products, services and techniques that can help businesses within the industry either prosper or avoid loss.

Marketplaces. There is no doubt that almost all trade magazines view themselves first and foremost as a marketplace where supplier can reach user. The essential financial fact of modern magazines, trade or otherwise, is that advertising revenue is what keeps the magazine in business. But in addition to advertising, most editors realize that information on new sources of supplies or new innovations in equipment or services available are vital for keeping businesses competitive and vital.

A forum for important issues. People within an industry must come together to share ideas, or the industry as a whole will fall behind in providing the right goods and services to match the changes in society. Debate in an industry is healthy—it shakes up the thinking and lets new solutions emerge.

In the construction industry, for example, debate about the cost of environmentally sensitive construction versus cost-effective construction has gradually changed the way marketers talk to owners, often emphasizing the lifetime cost of a building, including maintenance and utility costs, which often are much less when a little more money is spent in making the building environmentally sensitive.

Initially, environmental sensitivity in construction had few supporters within the construction industry, but as I've watched it progress over a nine-year span, more and more general contractors, subs, and suppliers have realized that not only do they feel good about building that way, they also can maintain

their profits and even reduce their costs in many instances.

Idea generators. While you can't truly say there is nothing new under the sun, you can say there is very little. Trade magazines are marketplaces not just for goods, but for ideas. In the example above, the environmental debate showed how an industry can shift. In my area of the country, however, one architect has had a tremendous influence on his industry. He insisted the firm's design for every project be as energy efficient as possible and maximize natural light.

Naturally, this saved money for building owners, so the firm grew apace. Other firms noticed, and started emphasizing energy efficiency too. Now this trend is in full swing within the region, and judging by the articles I've seen in design magazines, it is a trend that's gone national.

As it happened, I've had my own small part to play, first reporting in a regional magazine on a government facility the firm had designed. Next I saw a national magazine do its own version of a story on the facility, and then other similar projects made their way into a variety of national trade magazines during the next several years.

In fact, trade magazines are also idea generators for the consumer press as well. Many trends first get noticed in the trade press, so it is a wise journalist who looks to trade magazines for consumer story ideas.

Watchdogs. A very real myth exists that trade magazines won't take on difficult topics that might cost them advertisers. Although trade magazines are first and foremost loyal to the industries they serve, much like an association, that loyalty is tempered with an understanding that honest practices serve everyone's long term interests. Every industry, it seems, has its own set of "sharp" practices that may be within the limits of the law but are frowned upon.

Trade magazines, however, have a good history of exposing fraudulent practices and decrying the worst of the sharp practices. Although a trade magazine's first duty isn't to be a

member of the ethics police, in the everyday pursuit of stories, most editors get to know the industry intimately, get to know what is acceptable and what is beyond the excessive in either a legal or ethical sense, and will often use the bully pulpit to bring abuses to task for the good of the industry.

On the other end of the spectrum, however, the freelancer should approach controversial story suggestions with caution. If trade magazines are often watchdogs, they are often apologists as well. It's possible to condemn an industry practice without condemning the industry, and freelance writers who want to work on more investigative stories should remember that. If a story is going to uncover, say, an industry-wide practice whose scope is harmful outside the industry, a general publication is probably a better format, especially if such a practice is considered ethical and common within the industry.

What happens, of course, is that industries are run by human beings who, after all, tend to put blinders on when their best interests are threatened. A good example, in my estimation, was the spotted owl controversy in Oregon a few years ago. The construction industry was up in arms at first because they perceived a major source of lumber—and thus their means of supplying production—would be cut off. But a response to such a situation had already been growing, the production of “pre-engineered” lumber made by gluing fragments of wood together to make beams, I-joists and even wood studs and molding.

The result, ultimately, was that the industry learned to replace the old materials with the new technology, and discovered in the process the shift was both good for the industry—for the new wood produces a truer wall, better support for roof and floor, and is quicker to install—and good for the environment. Once again an industry's ethics had been notched up a level, willingly or not.

“Community newspapers” for an industry. People move, they get promoted, they receive awards, they retire, they pass away. Companies move, their products change, their management

changes, their scope changes. In a very real sense, an industry becomes a “community” as well as a place to work for most people who get to know colleagues and competitors alike in their daily work. Trade magazines help them keep track of each other over the years.

What trade magazines are not

It’s tempting to lump in various profit centers that may be adjunct to a trade magazine as part of the trade magazine “market,” but in practice writers will find that there are few opportunities for them there.

Some publications often appear analogous to trade magazines, but aren’t trying to fulfill the same functions. For example:

Technical journals. From a freelance writer’s standpoint, technical journals offer only a limited opportunity and that is to co-author an article or “ghost” it for an expert in the particular field. Technical journals fulfill a much needed role—continuing education and a forum for ideas—but don’t include many of the other functions of a true trade magazine such as providing a marketplace and serving as a community newspaper.

Also, technical journals seldom pay their contributors except in copies. Since their primary function is educational, they are looking for contributed articles from scholars or working experts within the field. Typically these articles go into much more depth and are much more technical than would be found in a trade magazine, because the audience for a technical journal is most often a small group of experts involved in that particular field or those in related fields who must have some crossover knowledge of the subject.

One way of distinguishing between a journal and a magazine is to count the number of advertisements. While some prominent journals have begun to accept advertising in the last 20 years, most still depend on subscriptions for their main income instead of relying on advertising revenues. That fact

alone tends to keep their circulation small because few subscriptions are sold to those outside the field.

Newsletters. Newsletters can offer some potential for freelancers, but their function is almost the opposite of a journal's though frequently targeted to much the same limited-focus audience. Rather than go in depth, however, as a journal does, a newsletter's function is to give the most up to the minute information or view in a particular subject.

In practice, say, a food engineering journal might have a 5,000 word article on detecting and eliminating a certain bacteria within a certain process for producing chocolate flavored yogurt including detailed directions or measures so that another food engineer can duplicate the experiment or process. In the newsletter, the 300-word article would mention that such a process exists, that so and so have tried it successfully, and that more information can be found at such and such a place. Or it might report that a new group has formed to support each other educationally to make this an industry-wide standard—in short, the news of the subject, not the subject itself.

Directories and data services. Directories and data services are a natural outgrowth of the trade magazine business because to remain successful with circulation—and thus advertising—a publication must always be accumulating and updating various lists. Subscribers. Advertisers. Potential advertisers. Potential subscribers. As long as a publisher has people doing that kind of work anyway, why not make a little extra profit selling those lists to others who need them? However, directory publishing and data services, while useful to freelancers who need to know who is where, seldom offers any direct opportunity to sell articles.

The one exception is when a company decides to do a combined piece that includes both written articles and directories. Sometimes these become special issues. *Remodeling*, for instance, will publish a directory of suppliers in a once a year

special issue, and the issue will also contain some articles. In most cases, however, most of the material is generated by the magazine's staff or contributing editors.

Occasionally, some publishers put together such a combined directory/magazine as a separate piece. *Engineering News-Record*, for example, bundles its survey of the nation's top contractors, a directory of their addresses and phone, together with articles on the health and future of various construction markets, and put that bundle of related information into a supplement sold separately as *The Top 400 Contractors Sourcebook*. While *ENR* and *Remodeling* have sufficient staff to do these publications in-house, not all trade magazines that publish such directories have the staff to accomplish this, so there are a few scattered opportunities to write articles around such a service.

Borderline publications. Some publications are hard to classify as either trade magazines or trade journals. Two that come to mind are *Fire Chief* and *American Jails*. On the one hand, each carries a variety of industry news on issues, people, events; provides a marketplace; provides a forum for the discussion of issues; and without a doubt are publications where new ideas can be generated.

On the other, most, if not all, of the articles published are solicited from experts in the field and peer-reviewed with the intention of providing continuing technical education on narrowly focused subjects, and from that perspective, a freelancer's opportunities are limited to much the same options as a trade journal. If you do see an article recognizable as a "feature," it is almost always written in-house.

How big is the trade magazine industry?

It's difficult to measure how large the trade magazine industry is. No single directory seems capable of listing all of the trade magazines which exist. One of the best sources for finding trade magazines is Standard Rates & Data Service's *Business Rates and Data* which lists around 4,500 magazines. When you

look at volume three, however, which deals just with publications in the healthcare field, both magazines and journals that accept advertising, you probably add another 500 purely “trade” magazines as well as 500 technical journals.

Although *Business Rates and Data* is a place to start, it is by no means definitive on the subject of trade magazines. During the years I was editor for three trade magazines produced by McGraw-Hill, none of the three ever appeared in the SRDS. Those three magazines were part of a network of regional construction magazines known as the Construction News Publishing Network (now known as Dodge Construction Publications) which totaled fourteen different magazines, only one of which ever appeared in SRDS because a listing there requires an audited circulation figure.

Auditing circulation is an expense many smaller magazines see no justification for. In Intermountain Contractor’s case, the publication’s actual circulation was only about 3,500 subscribers. In practice, however, the weekly magazine was passed around an office because of the detailed news it gave on projects in planning and projects out for bid. At a medium-sized construction office, perhaps five estimators plus the marketing manager and president would look at the magazine each week. IC claimed an actual readership of 10,000, and my personal experience tells me that figure was on the conservative side. But since there is no reliable way to audit “pass around,” but only actual subscribers, it wasn’t in the magazines interest to spend the money. With its long tradition in the area, no advertisers ever blinked at this situation.

One way to estimate the potential number of trade magazines is to look at the amount of six-digit SIC (Standard Identification Code) numbers that businesses are divided into. SICs classify industries, and as already noted, most industries have one or more trade magazines serving them. As I look at a recent directory of mailing lists sent to me, for example, I check the first entries for “E”. I’ve never seen a magazine specifically for Ear Piercing Service (7299-28), but there may be one. I do know there is a magazine as well as a couple of newsletters

that serve the Earthquake Products & Services (1799-78) sector, a trade magazine for Eating Disorders Information and Treatment Centers (8049-31), several for Eating Places (i.e. Restaurants—5812-08), a good one for Eaves & Troughs (1761-03), and at least two that I know of for Economic Development Agencies (8748-75).

If I were to hazard a guess in print, which I will, my instinct tells me that in 1998 in the U.S. alone there were probably a few more than 8,000 trade magazines accepting advertising, and if you expand that definition to include those journals and newsletters that accept either occasional advertising or the occasional freelance article, the number of potential markets would probably jump to about 13,000.

On the international scene, it becomes even more difficult to isolate a particular number. Uhlrich's Guide to World Periodicals lists about 17,000 trade magazines, including many in the U.S. It's not so broad a list as the SRDS, but again, my years of experience tell me that figure is probably low and more likely the figure is closer to 20,000 or more worldwide if you include the international editions published by North American publishers. Surprisingly, *Intermountain Contractor* was listed in the edition I checked.

Remember, trade magazines have as many profit/loss difficulties as consumer-oriented magazines, and while their mortality rate is somewhat lower, they can still die off. As we develop the notion about who the audience is for a trade magazine, you'll see that when an industry shifts, it can cause the magazine to go under regardless of the quality of the editorial product.

How trade magazines define their audience

The starting point for any writer is to understand the audience to write for. For trade magazines, as for any other publishing concern, an audience is made up of readers who share similar interests and goals. Inseparable from an understanding of the broad audience is an understanding that you are also writing for one specific person: the editor. It's necessary,

therefore, to understand how a trade magazine “positions” itself.

I would submit that most—though certainly not all—trade magazines will target one of what I call the “Big Three” groups: manufacturers, wholesalers, or retailers. Another way to look at this breakdown is as a simple supplier/user continuum. When you have a supplier and a user, you have a marketplace.

In construction, for example, the material supplier’s end user is the contractor. The contractor’s end user is the owner. One group is always trying to “reach” the other and therein lies the justification for advertising. In healthcare, the biomedical manufacturer is the supplier, the healthcare professional is the user. In the travel industry, the airline or the rental car agency or the hotel is the supplier, the travel agent is the user, or more specifically, the gatekeeper to the user.

Most industries have a manufacturer who sells the product to a wholesaler, a wholesaler or distributor who then resells the product to a retailer, and then the retailer sells the product to a consumer. That simple process is breaking down in many industries even as I write for a variety of reasons. Changes in technology allow manufacturers to take their product directly to a retailer more cost effectively than had been possible in the past.

To get a good handle on what types of articles a trade magazine editor may want, you must look at who they are trying to reach how. Here’s how do it.

By the type of circulation. Magazines always have a simple choice: Paid subscriptions or free subscriptions. Charging nothing is called a “closed circulation.” For a variety of reasons, many trade magazines charge nothing for subscriptions. In the case of magazines produced by associations, the cost of the subscription is often buried in the dues structure. For most trade magazines, the cost of producing and mailing to a targeted group is inherent in the price for advertising.

Just because a magazine uses controlled (i.e. free) circulation, it doesn’t mean that the editorial standards are necessar-

ily lax. What it does generally mean, however, is that the magazine uses a minimum of expensive staff for production and frequently outsources for writing as well as other services—good news for you. At the same time, a controlled circulation also means you must absolutely focus on the needs and wants of the reader they are trying to reach.

Even full subscription magazines have their share of complimentary copies going out. Understand that a full subscription magazine still derives the majority of its revenue through advertising (unless it is a true journal). For the most part, subscription based audiences tend to be broader in scope than controlled circulations because they will often include subscribers who have a peripheral interest in the field as well as those who are specific to it. This doesn't change your responsibility to target the right reader, but it does mean there will often be a broader range of topics considered by the editor of this type of magazine.

By subscriber type. First and foremost, trade magazines exist to reach a specific type of reader within an industry. In construction, for instance, you can generally look at a book and tell immediately whether it is intended for building owners, contractors, designers or suppliers. The actual field is almost superimposed over this industry breakdown. Thus a magazine may be designed to be read by, say, contractors in the audio/visual field, such as *Systems Contractor News*. The readers are A/V contractors and A/V engineers. The advertisers are producers and wholesalers of A/V equipment. You can generally develop a vertical hierarchy that gives you a sense of who you are writing for and whose money is driving the ad revenue.

If a book is designed for a certain category of building owner, then the contractors, designers, and suppliers will be interested in reaching that owner through both advertising and stories. If the magazine is for contractors, a few kinds of designers will be interested in reaching that readership and almost all suppliers. Why the designers? Because in construction nowadays, the design/build method of delivering projects

means that contractors instead of owners are now hiring the designers. This approach is being seen in other industries as well where production and design have been separate in the past. The reverse is also true. In magazines for designers, particularly architects, contractors who perform design/build projects like to get their name in front of the architectural firms because in the standard process of commercial construction, designers are most likely to hear about a particular project first because the owner contacts them in the preliminary stages to help determine how much space will be needed.

In most types of industries where a product is produced rather than a service, there will be magazines serving a vertical hierarchy such as this, i.e. an "owners" or end users magazine, a wholesaler/distributor/supplier magazine, and a manufacturer's magazine. There can be different levels of manufacturers as well, generally as a number of components are needed to make the final product. Again in the construction analogy, there's a manufacturer of framing lumber at one level, providing a component through a distributor to the final manufacturer, the general contractor. Each rung on the ladder is trying to reach the next rung up, but often there are some advantages for the rung up to reach down as well. For example, a manufacturer's rep who wants to expand the lines he represents may advertise in a manufacturer's magazine.

Service hierarchies tend to be slightly different. Service companies often need both products and other service companies. An advertising firm may use outside design services, or outside market research services, or outside video production services, or outside mailing services. It will also need more concrete products such as printed brochures, photographic duplicates, etc. So while there is a manufacturer-distributor linkage for some elements, there is more often a direct "manufacturer"-user linkage.

By direction. We have been talking about the vertical nature of the trade audience, but there are also horizontal magazines. These are often based on professional positions or man-

agement areas that cut across industry lines such as accounting, safety management, contract management, food service management, database management, etc. Products or professions or trades that cut across industry lines.

As Patrick Clinton notes in *Guide to Writing for the Business Press*, covering multiple segments of an industry is a horizontal strategy. In a magazine where both vertical and horizontal coverage is wide-spread, the magazine can tend to take on the nature almost of a “generalized” niche publication, an oxymoron that actually makes some sense in practice.

For a magazine such as *Engineering News-Record*, which seeks to cover the broadest range of subjects within the commercial construction industry, it’s hard to feel any vertical tug in the editorial direction although maybe the best way to categorize that tug is to say the magazine serves construction industry company owners. To do that, *ENR* concentrates primarily on news, trends, and broad service articles, with an occasional company or personal profile thrown in—a mix strategy you will find in magazines that seek to cover the entire scope of an industry.

By industry function. While there are magazines such as *ENR* which take a broad look at an industry’s business issues, there are also trade magazines that look at just one function within an industry, generally in management, marketing, maintenance, purchasing, data management, or safety.

By location. Many trade magazines exist to serve an industry in a particular region. Sometimes these magazines field a wide range of industry issues, but concentrate on how those issues play out within their region. *Intermountain Contractor*, which I was privileged to edit for many years, tried to strike a balance between building and engineering construction within Utah and the immediate areas bordering it. *UTAD News* covers the “media” industry in the Salt Lake metropolitan area, including radio and television, print, advertising agencies, public relations, video production, and virtually any element that

makes up the promotion industry in the area.

Regional trade magazines offer a good opportunity for a freelance writer to break in. If staff is now spread thin at national magazines, it has practically melted into the toast at regional magazines. During most of the time I was editor at *IC*, I was also producing articles for—and finally editing—*Intermountain Architecture*. At the same time, I was also editing *Utah Building Magazine*, a monthly for the residential industry, and edited about forty of the fifty-two issues per year of *Intermountain Contractor News Weekly*. From the time I began as editor in January of 1990 until the organization was restructured in January 1997, I had exactly two—two!—freelance queries.

One of the benefits of writing for a regional trade magazine is also the quick access it gives you to experts within your region. All industries are, in a sense, regional, so generally those folks who are good at what they do understand how beneficial it is for their name to appear in the region's trade magazine as well as in national publications. Some actually prefer the regional coverage over the national because their customers are in the region.

Trade magazine publishing is a growth cycle industry

One of the most interesting aspects of trade magazines is how they are tied to the growth of an industry. In the late 1960s, for example, you would have searched long and hard to find any trade magazine devoted exclusively to computers or the computer industry. By the mid-1980s, such magazines were much more plentiful, but just fifteen years later, more than 100 national trade magazines are devoted to one aspect or another of the computer industry, and virtually all trade magazines across the board will have an occasional article on how computers are affecting their industry and changing its face.

For that matter, the growth of trade magazines has proliferated thanks to technology and science in general which create new industries almost every day. Satellites may watch over potential enemies, for instance, but they also make your pager

beep and feed your favorite soap opera into the local television station for retransmission even as they help surveyors plot the land. Each of those functions has built up its own industry, complete with manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers or representatives.

The way markets “become” is interesting in itself. Al Reis and Jack Trout identified an interesting phenomenon in the 1970s in their book, *The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing*. For years IBM was synonymous with the word “computer.” Now computer in the 1970s meant anything from a big mainframe to the relatively new PET personal computer. Along came a very smart man, Steven Jobs, who developed a computer with his friends. Realizing they would never be able to compete head to head with IBM, they decided to create a new category: “Personal” computer. Voila, a new industry was launched.

What’s important about the growth of new industries for trade magazine publishers is the understanding that new trade magazines *must* target specific niches. It’s not a great intellectual stretch to understand why. In fledgling industries, there are few advertisers and possibly few readers. To be successful, trade magazines must deliver a coherent group of readers an advertiser wants to reach.

If you are manufacturing magnetic imaging devices for medical diagnoses, you need to advertise to hospital administrators and the doctors who serve on the advisory panels. You don’t need to reach the nurse on the ward, the operating room orderly, or even the family practice physician (journals will take care of that task).

Advertising dollars drive the trade magazine industry. What that means for the writer is that there are always two audiences that you are basically writing for. First and foremost is certainly a magazine’s reader. No one disputes that. But the nature of the trade magazine industry is such that you are also writing somewhat for the ad salesman. In so far as your story reaches the magazine’s reader, you have provided the service that’s needed, but it’s important to understand that in many situations, the editor must “sell” your story to the advertising

staff.

In most consumer publications, and generally within newspapers, there's a tacit "firewall" between the editorial and the sales department. In trade magazines such as *Engineering News-Record* where content focuses on news across a broad industry range this division still holds fairly true.

The more targeted the magazine's editorial mix and geographic location, however, the more input most advertising departments have on the editor's choice of stories. That's not to say that editors will pass up a good story, but it is to warn the potential freelancer that having a hook ad reps to sell to, as well as an interesting story slant, is becoming more and more important in the trade magazine market.

The challenge for the freelance writer

The most fundamental truth about writing for trade magazines is that the writer is seldom, if ever, the same as the audience. That basic fact is both the challenge and the excitement of writing for the trades.

With trade magazines, however, familiarity with a subject based at least in part on being a member of the audience is minimized. If you are a writer who plans to write for *Restaurants & Institutions*, *Facility Management*, and *Environmental Design and Construction*, chances are you *could* be a member of one of the audiences, but certainly not the other two.

In fact, if your training is primarily in writing, you will have almost no understanding of the audience for a particular trade magazine because trade magazines deal in specific information, not general information. You are out of the loop when it comes to professional understanding, although if you work within a field for a long time, you'll likely pick up a sense of the industry which makes you somewhat a part of the audience.

To start off, though, the first challenge for the freelance writer is to find a mentor, a member of the industry who can advise you about issues and give you some direction.

That may be why writing for trade magazines gets such short shrift in journalism schools. Uncovering information of use in everyday life is relatively uncomplicated, so study assignments which develop particular skills are easier to make. Uncovering information of use within a particular business industry involves developing very specialized knowledge, including specialized contacts. At the same time, writing for trade magazines opens up so many more opportunities for a writer that it's difficult to understand why more emphasis isn't put into the subject.

In the final analysis, writing for trade magazines has many of the same challenges as writing for general publications plus a few more. But the rewards in profitability and the opportunity to broaden your scope of understanding about how the world operates make trade writing a valuable supplement to

Writing for Trade Magazines by Kendall Hanson introduces both professionals and beginners to writing and marketing to a world of potential magazine markets not covered in any other book on writing.

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