

RECREATION MANAGEMENT

IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS FOR RECREATION, SPORTS AND FITNESS FACILITIES

Sponsored by:



Transform your pool from
INDOOR TO OUTDOOR
in under 2 minutes



Career Development

So You Want to Write an Article?

From Blank Page to Published

By Jessica Rosenberg

"I know I want to write an article, but I don't know where to start. Or what to write about. Or how to get published." So begins many a conversation in my office, in which my colleagues—who spend their days doing super-hero-type things like advising on facility developments—confide that despite their best intentions, an article just isn't happening for them. They're frustrated; they want to get their thoughts out into the world, but the blank page sits before them like a mountain. They know technically it's possible to climb that mountain, but it's daunting. They don't know the first step to take, let alone the full path to walk.

As the firm's content marketing manager, charged with, among other things, helping colleagues publish, I've had this conversation dozens of times. So I know just how to coach someone from blank page to published. If you want to write your own article, but feel unsure how to start, read on.

Decide What to Write

When someone doesn't know what topic to write on, I share three proven ways to think about writing an article. As you read, consider which appeals to you.

Article Type 1: Speak to your expertise. Whether you are one year into your career or one year away from retirement, you possess expertise. Your particular history is comprised of the work you've completed, the conversations you've had, the articles and books you've read, your education, the conferences you've attended, etc.—and this history means you have insights to offer that no one else does, and that others might benefit from reading.

To access this expertise, first, think about patterns. Over the years, what have you seen come up again and again—for better or worse? What conversations have you had repeatedly, what problem have you helped solve repeatedly, what solution has worked repeatedly (or not!)? A pattern is a potential topic.

Second, think about frustrations. What is something you wish colleagues knew? Rec center patrons? Vendors? What is a common misunderstanding that irks you? If you're aware of something people get wrong—or don't get at all—that's a potential topic.

Third and finally, think about what you've read and haven't read. Are there topics you see written up, even repeatedly, but the authors miss a key point? Or perhaps there are topics you never see but that you know to be useful. All are good candidates.

Article Type 2: Write a case study. These real-life stories generally describe a challenge and solution, offering readers a glimpse into how an industry colleague has worked through a problem. If you have a compelling story to tell, a case study is always a solid option.

Article Type 3: Use the article as a chance to do professional development. Whether you are one year into your career or one year away from retirement, you could also stand to learn something. Perhaps there's a topic you've been hungry to explore, but just haven't had an excuse to dig into. Of course, something big to consider here is time. If you go the expertise or case study route, you already have all the material within you—or most of it, at least. If you go the professional development route, you are about to embark on a big, long research journey—so make sure you have time.

Now, between these three ruminations, did something percolate? If not, keep thinking, brainstorm with a colleague and, most importantly, read. See what other people are talking about and, again, what they're not talking about. What topic has your favorite publication not covered in a while, if ever? Of course, if the ruminations left you with multiple topic options, that's a great problem to have. Focus on the one that excites you most.

Get the Editor's Go-Ahead

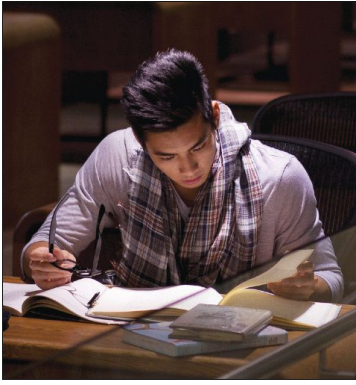
Once you have a topic, get the go-ahead from your ideal publication's editor. Search the magazine's webpage for an "About Us," "Contact Us," "Writer's Guidelines" or even "Advertising." When I go to Recreation Management's website, for example, I see "Contact Us" in the top-right corner. Clicking brings me to a list of the publication's staff. Perfect. I'm looking for the editor—the person whose job it is to find and develop great content. And there she is, listed with name and e-mail.

Before I craft my e-mail, I just need to make sure I'm not ignoring any information the publication has already put out into the world—writer's guidelines specifying when and how I should reach out, an editorial calendar identifying themes for upcoming issues, etc. If I don't see any of that, I'm fine to reach out directly to the editor. If those resources exist, though, I read them and act as needed.

Next, write your pitch—your brief proposal. A reliable pitch format is a couple of paragraphs describing what your article will talk about and what the editor will get with your article. Think beyond the core topic, and about why the publication's readers—generally, your industry colleagues—will care. What will they learn from reading your article, and why is that knowledge useful for them? You might also include a few lines about yourself at the end—a little rah-rah chest beating showing who you are and why you're writing on this topic. That's it. Wrap it all up with a thank you, and hit send.

Then, you wait. Some editors will get back to you within days, others weeks, others even longer. You can always check in if you haven't heard in a while.





Take the Final Steps

When you do hear back, ideally the response is one of interest in seeing the full article. Of course, then you have to write the article and share it! And if the editor says no, that's OK; there are a hundred reasons an editor might say no—none of them personal—so you just have to move on and try again.

But whenever you get that magical e-mail from the editor that says she plans to publish your full article, the first thing you should do is celebrate. This is exciting! This doesn't happen every day, and it means you'll be a published author—whether for the first or 50th time. Next, make sure you have all the details you need—does the editor require a bio from you? Will she send a few free copies of the printed issue? When will the issue come out?

Finally, more waiting. It might be a week until publication. It might be six months. Sit back and relax, and when you finally see your article on a glowing screen or get the issue in the mail and hold it, feeling its weight and glossy pages, just enjoy. It's a great feeling to contribute to others' understanding!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica Rosenberg is content marketing manager for Brailsford & Dunlavey Inc., a program management and development advisory firm with comprehensive in-house planning capabilities. For more information, visit www.programmanagers.com.