

Pitching Publishers Survey

Introduction

Writers at the NYtimes.com, [The Guardian.com](http://TheGuardian.com), and CNN.com receive 26,000 pitches per year. Meanwhile, these writers reported that they never write a story based on something that was sent through a pitch

This epidemic is what I like to call the **robot invasion**, which started back in 2011 on the cusp of the content marketing explosion.

The trend you see to the right is in line with the Pew Research Center's 2014 State of News Media report, which found that in 2013, 82% of Americans said they got news on a desktop or laptop, with 35% reporting they get news in this way "frequently."

With the migration of readers from print to digital, the robot invasion was inevitable; as businesses searched for a method to reach their digital audience, web publishers became inundated with pitches.

Most top-tier writers receive

100, 250, or 500 pitches a week

for an average of 5 story spots.

METHODOLOGY



It is our responsibility to improve the noise: value ratio of our industry, before our pile of email waste rises well above an editor's ability to tolerate it — and our industry as a whole becomes spam.

Over a three-month-long period, we surveyed over 500 digital writers, editors, and publishers to discover **what they want, and don't want, from content creation and pitching.**

Using feedback we previously heard from publishers, we crafted a survey with over 20 questions and open-ended responses to address their pain points and find potential solutions.

“Many [PR professionals] have a misunderstanding when it comes to the difference between advertorial and guest posts.” - Gigaom guest post policy

“Too many submissions we get are clearly just pitches for a company, attempting to masquerade as thought pieces, a press release dressed as a guest post.” - TechCrunch guest post policy

“Over time [guest blogging] has become a more and more spammy practice.” - Matt Cutts, head of Google's Webspam team

CREATING IDEAS



70% of publishers prefer to collaborate on ideas, while only 30% want to receive a finished asset.

“Collaborative projects are great. It is great to come in and feel like we can mold a story to authentically match our brand.” - Urbanspoon

Instead of mass pitching your campaign to mid-to-low-tier publishers, you want to start collaborating with the highest-authority publishers who have the largest reach. By publishing your exclusive with these writers, you **increase the odds of having a cascade of high-to-mid-tier publishers pick up your story from an authoritative source.**

The best way to begin collaborating is to pick a list of 5 publishers your client wants to be seen on. Have your creative team generate 3-5 ideas for each publisher. You want these ideas to resonate with a broad audience on an emotional level, and be tangentially related to your client.

Once your client approves the ideas, your media relations team should pitch the selected set of ideas to each publisher. The goal is to give the writer ownership over the idea by allowing them to choose their favorite idea that fits their beat.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH



**39% of publishers
want content that has
exclusive research.**

"The perfect piece of content includes exclusive data or a study." - HuffingtonPost.com

"The perfect piece of content requires a bit of research upfront. But if someone does that, I'm 100% more likely to pay attention to their emails, and all future emails." - LifeHacker.com

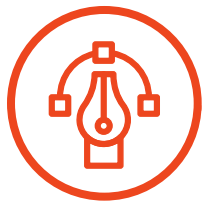
"Focus on human interest. Suggest a way to simply explain complex research." - Examiner.com

When pitching high-authority publishers, you don't want to just collect data that has been published elsewhere and compile it into a pretty graphic. **Pitching something like that isn't breaking news** - "27% of publishers want breaking news - but rehashing old data isn't the way to give it to them."

Instead, use survey tools like SurveyMonkey and mTurk to collect exclusive data for your campaign.

If you do the heavy lifting of collecting the research, and in turn give the writer an opportunity to break a story, you'll be a step ahead at building a genuine relationship. Soon, the writer will be coming to you for story ideas for your client.

FORMATTING CONTENT



19% of publishers requested articles, 13% requested infographics, 12% requested mixed-media pieces, and 11% requested data visualizations.

"Generic press releases aren't the type of content we deal with. We look for something newsworthy, surprising or emotional that will entice a reader to click." - MNN.com

"Exclusive research is exceedingly rare these days. But a well constructed piece of content is not just a new widget." - PopularMechanics.com

"If you can't offer me an infographic, data visualization, or interview opportunity, odds are you can't help me." - USAtoday.com

While articles may have the largest percentage, it's clear that **visualized data is the preferred content format**. In fact, widgets, quizzes, and press releases came in at under 5% each.

When choosing ideas, you want to focus on concepts that will be data-driven, allowing you to present your research in a visually appealing way.

For example, if your client sells smartphones, you don't want a press release on the latest iPhone. Instead, you want to focus on an up and coming trend that is tangentially related to your client's offerings. Anytime you can source information through an API, or scrape it through a public database, you win.

NETWORKING



64% of publishers think it is of some importance that you establish a personal connection before pitching.

"My biggest issue with pitches is that they rarely have anything to do with my particular beat. It's like the person who sends them does not even bother to look up what I cover."

-HuffingtonPost.com

Show you're genuinely interested in a writer by using social networks, blog posts, or other online touch points to engage with that person weeks prior to any pitch.

Engaging with that writer's content exposes you to their beat, and gives you a deeper understanding of the type of content that writer wants to receive. **If you ignore what they cover, they will ignore what you send -- or worse, they will blacklist your agency.**

"Consider that if you repeatedly send out what someone considers junk, they will blackhole you (even if others don't); you'll never come out of it." - TheGuardian.com

"Do some research on my areas of research and my role in the industry."
- zDnet.com

GRAMMAR



Over 85% of respondents would delete a pitch based on spelling/grammar errors, regardless of the content's quality.

"I auto-delete pitches with a misspelling of my name." - ScientificAmerican.com

"No grammar errors." - Yahoo.com

"Use good grammar. Use correct spelling."
- Buzzle.com

If a writer is going to delete your pitch due to grammar, then they're certainly going to delete your content for the same reasons. Be sure you have multiple grammar review points during production process, both prior to and after design.

Your media relations team should partake in a weekly grammar course to make sure they stay on top of their game. There are plenty of free online resources, such as Grammar Girl, Purdue OWL and Syntaxis. Have them draft their pitches in Google Docs, or somewhere where they can take advantage of spellcheck.

THE PITCH



81% of writers want your pitch to be sent through email – but limit your word count, since 85% want a pitch under 200 words.

"Don't cold call journalists because they are almost always not going to appreciate it."
- cNet.com

"Don't pitch via social media." - Forbes.com

"Never phone call. Ever." - HuffingtonPost.com

"Don't call me. Use email." - InfoWorld.com

When it comes to crafting your pitch, you need to deliver it on a channel where publishers want to be reached, otherwise you'll be seen as a spammer.

Although 9% of writers said social media pitches are okay, it's evident that email took the cake with 81%. **Only 5% of publishers want phone calls, and the rest were adamantly against this channel.**

When crafting your pitch, you want to keep it as succinct as possible. Get across that you understand the writer's beat, and how your content builds upon their coverage and offers something new.

THE NOISE



85% of writers said that they open an email based on its subject line, and 42% want a subject line that is descriptive, such as “Content Tile, [Content Format].”

“Make your email subject line really tailored to my interest.” - TheGuardian.com

Your subject line is your call-to-action. Make sure to keep it short and sweet so it doesn't get cut off in a writer's inbox. Our research shows that a subject line between 6-10 words is ideal.

When it comes to sending your pitch, **69% of writers want to receive your pitch in the morning hours.**

It's always a good idea to implement a “pitch freeze” during the holidays, since most writers are away from their desks and will be buried in email upon their return.

“Don't use the words ‘please reply’ in your subject line. Ever.” - PCMag.com

“Write your subject line written in the style of a MailOnline headline.” - DailyMail.co.uk



By implementing this feedback,
you'll give writers exactly what they want:

world class content.

In return, **build mutually beneficial relationships** with the web's leading authorities. Ignore their feedback, and you'll increase the odds that your content will perish in the spam folder.



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