



Online markets welcome new writers

Earn reputable bylines and professional rates by targeting magazine websites

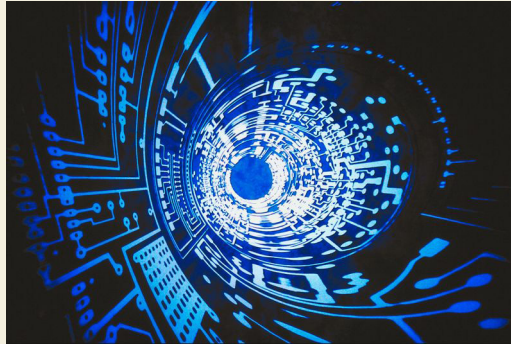
WEbsites that pay pennies per article to anyone who dreams of being published have overshadowed legitimate online publishing opportunities for the past few years. But freelance writers who think the only way to get their articles online is by contributing to so-called “content farms,” like Demand Media and Associated Content, are missing out on a huge opportunity to garner professional pay rates and reputable bylines.

“Any magazine you write for, or wish you were writing for—take a look at what they’re doing online,” says Carol Tice, a Seattle-area freelance writer who regularly blogs about small business for *Entrepreneur*. “Very often they are developing separate and unique content for the Web.”

A new wave of opportunity

In December, CNN Tech blogger Doug Gross published “The 10 biggest tech ‘fails’ of 2010,” and content farms made the list. Content farms (also popularly dubbed content mills) generate mass quantities of articles by contracting individuals to write something—anything—about topics that people commonly search on the Internet. Every day thousands of articles are posted (with no editing or fact-checking) for the sole purpose of getting millions of people to click on them, and thereby generate ad revenue for the farm.

“Creating click-bait junk on the Internet didn’t start in 2010. But it certainly took off in a big way,” Gross writes. “But cranking out by-the-numbers copy, with profit as the only motive, just junks up the Web for everyone.”



The tide appears to be turning on content farms, as readers far and wide are clamoring more and more for *quality*, not *quantity*. In late January, Google announced that it will further fine-tune its efforts to weed out “spammy or low-quality content” turning up in searches.

Yet, even as content farms lose steam, many writers remain baffled by online markets, according to Tice, who mentors would-be freelancers. A common question she fields is how to identify legitimate markets. “The first thing I usually tell people is the way to spot better-paying online freelance markets, in general, [is that] they sell a real thing or real service in the real world,” she says.

That includes print magazines with Web-exclusive articles, as well as trade associations, consulting firms and companies seeking to add value to their products or services through original online content.

Tips for breaking in

Many consumer and trade magazines have online editions or sites that contain original content and have a separate editorial staff. Online editors may be more likely than print editors to work with a new writer because the medium is flexible, and online editors often have more

assignments to offer.

“We publish about 100 news articles a day,” says Orlando Lima, managing editor of the magazine *Complex* and its website. The publication’s target audience is 20-something male consumers “driven by style, sports, music, games, gear and girls”; all sections of the website are open to freelancers. “There are infinitely more opportunities to do freelance work for us on the website than there is in the [print magazine],” Lima says.

Randy B. Hecht, a New York-based freelance journalist, broke into *Smithsonian* this year with a feature-length piece for its website. “My first assignment for Smithsonian.com was a 1,200-word article plus sidebar and photos,” she says. “I won’t say it would be impossible to break into the print magazine with that kind of assignment, but it’s unlikely. This kind of online piece demonstrates more reporting and writing skills than a print [front-of-the-book piece] could.”

Online assignments can also help open a back door to print.

Online assignments can also help open a back door to print assignments, according to Eric Butterman, a Texas-based freelancer who has written for the websites for ESPN and *PCMag*. He recalled sending query after query to one major print publication in particular, to no avail. “Then I was offered assignments from their online side,” he says. “After I had written a few and had my next pitch for the print magazine, I asked my online editor to give me a recommendation. The next pitch I sent to the print side was accepted. I don’t think



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it was chance.”

Links to submission or writers guidelines often can be found on a website’s “contact us” or “about us” page. The name of the online or Web editor is also typically listed on the masthead of the print edition.

Pitching online editors is fundamentally the same as pitching print editors. Read the website, as you would the magazine, to get a sense of its style, tone, format and sections. Make sure you understand how to navigate the site, and study how links are used within articles. When you’re ready to make the pitch, explain why readers will find immediate value in the piece you propose and why you are the ideal person to write it.

Differences between print and Web

One way in which pitching online markets differs is that those editors, due to the nature of their jobs, may be more open to connecting with potential freelancers via social media. “I recently landed my top market, a \$2-a-word market, after I tweeted the editor,” Tice says, adding that she has connected with many editors through the social-networking sites Twitter and LinkedIn.

Perhaps the biggest difference in pitching online markets is that writers can offer more than writing. “Writing for the Web gives you an opportunity to do some things that you couldn’t do in

print, like showcase more of your multimedia skills, if you have them,” says Hecht, whose work has been published online for AARP and GE Healthcare.

If you’re writing a print piece, you’re limited to telling the story with words and whatever images the photo editor selects. If you’re writing an online piece, however, you have the potential to delve deeper into the story by including multimedia or interactive components such as: links to whitepapers, websites and other sources of research used in writing the article; audio or video clips (also called podcasts) of interviews with key sources; digital photos and slideshows; and online reader polls.

“We want everything,” says Lima of multimedia. *Complex’s* website regularly publishes articles with embedded video or music, as well as plenty of photos. Lima said receiving a Web pitch without multimedia elements isn’t necessarily a deal breaker, and many freelancers land assignments for writing only. Still, those who can go that extra mile will have an edge for certain pitches.

“The City Guide is our one section where the writer has to be on the ground and help us secure some images,” he says. “And you will get paid a larger fee if you provide the photos, versus us having one of our staff photographers take the pictures.”

Web writers also have the opportunity to interact with their readers in real

time by responding to comments posted online. That added value and reader engagement is the element of Web writing that Tice loves the most. “A big perk for me, as someone who writes because I like helping people learn things, is I think you can be more useful online,” she says. “Your ability to link to additional resources makes it so easy for people to learn. Your piece is sort of at the center of a circle of information.”

Another benefit of writing for the Web is a short lead time, Hecht notes. “If you have a story that isn’t going to have a long shelf life or that you, for whatever reason, want to get published as quickly as possible,” she says, “a good online outlet may give you the visibility and timeliness that a print magazine wouldn’t be able to deliver.”

Visibility, professional rates, timeliness and respected clips are just a few of the benefits of writing for the Web. And there are new online opportunities every day. According to The Association of Magazine Media, the number of consumer-magazine websites has increased nearly 50 percent since 2006 and continues to grow. So get online and pitch your dream magazine today.

Jessica McCann

Jessica McCann is an award-winning freelance writer and fiction author based in the Phoenix area. Her debut historical novel, *All Different Kinds of Free*, was released in April from Bell Bridge Books. Web: jessicamccann.com.

ONLINE MARKETS

MANY PRINT publications, consumer and trade, publish original online content. Often they have separate editorial teams and submission guidelines. These online markets pay professional-level rates and publish online-exclusive content:

AARP THE MAGAZINE aarp.org/magazine
AIR & SPACE airspacemag.com
BOXOFFICE boxofficemagazine.com

COMPLEX Each channel has its own editorial team. Click the “channel team” menu on the right side; the top name is the editor to pitch. complex.com.

COUNTRY country-magazine.com
DETAILS Paul Katz: paul_katz@condenast.com. details.com.

METROPOLIS metropolismag.com

MILITARY OFFICER moaa.org

NURSING SPECTRUM; NURSEWEEK

nurse.com

REMODELING remodelingmagazine.com

SELF Send a SASE for guidelines. self.com.

SEVENTEEN seventeen.com

SIERRA sierraclub.org/sierra

SMART BUSINESS sbnonline.com

SMITHSONIAN smithsonianmag.com

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED si.com

THE ROOT theroot.com

WINE SPECTATOR winespectator.com