

Tips for Working with Freelancers: In a Little League of Their Own

For the past several years, I've worn two professional hats: the owner of a PR company primarily dedicated to the book industry and small businesses and also a freelance writer for two local magazines. You can say I live on both sides of the fence: pitching and being pitched. Our company, PR by the Book (www.prbythebook.com), has developed a good track record for working with freelance writers, which is in some ways an untapped market when it comes to PR pitching.

Freelance writers are not in the newsroom constantly receiving press releases and phone calls from PR practitioners. Therefore they typically are not as jaded when it comes to receiving pitches because they are not as inundated as those journalists working on staff. They make their living by querying publications with certain pitches that get accepted and then they write the features for that particular editor. Therefore, it's to their benefit to hear about targeted story pitches. *Targeted* is the key word here. If you can tap into this type of journalist, you've got a captive audience. Here are a few tips on how to best build these relationships:

1. It is imperative you know what type of publications the freelancer writes for so you can be as specific and targeted as possible. Don't pitch a book review of a travel book to a freelancer for a sports magazine unless you want to burn a bridge. As always, know your audience. The good news here is that freelancers typically write for a variety of different publications so you've got a better shot with multiple client pitches than you would when pitching to a specific magazine editor. For instance, as a freelancer I write for both a women's magazine and a parenting magazine.
2. Be patient when working with freelancers. The process can be lengthy when it comes to this type of pitching. It looks something like this: publicist pitches freelancer; freelancer likes the story and develops a query to their editor; editor says yes; freelancer does interviews and research and gets the story written; freelancer sends to editor who edits the story, possibly deleting some parts; it runs in an issue several months down the road. Therefore, it can take quite a long time between when you pitch and when it actually runs in print. Be patient and don't become a pest checking in with the freelancer every week. Checking in with a freelancer once a month is plenty.
3. Stay in touch with your freelance contacts, asking them what they are currently working on and if you can help them find sources or research. Freelancers, like most journalists, are extremely busy and appreciate any help that you can offer. Keep your eyes and ears open for experts and resources that might help the freelancer, even if it's of no benefit to you. They will remember how you helped them and will be more willing to help you down the road.
4. If you're pitching a product, keep the description as concise as possible and also provide all the important details a freelancer would need for a story, such as price, where it can be bought, a website for more information and also a jpeg for

- artwork purposes. The more you anticipate what the freelance writer will need, the more time you save him/her...and who doesn't love to save time!
5. Now you need to know where to find freelancers, since we can be quite elusive. Here are a few suggestions:
 - Help a Reporter Out, <http://www.helpareporter.com/>
 - Profnet queries, www.profnet.com
 - The Gift List, www.giftlistmedia.com
 - Cision (formerly Bacons) online database, <http://us.cision.com/>
 - Editorial Freelancers Association- There are around 500 freelance writers in the organization, and it has a very detailed, searchable (including by specialty) Member Directory <http://www.the-efa.org/dir/search.php>
 - Attend conferences where you can meet freelancers face-to-face, such as:
 1. National Publicity Summit put on by Bradley Communications
 2. Book Expo America, www.bookexpoamerica.com
 3. American Society of Journalists & Authors convention
 - Keep on the lookout for other opportunities.
 6. Once you find freelancers, you want to make sure you keep a good database for their contact information and to keep notes as to what they like and dislike. Each one will be very unique so you want to keep yourself up-to-date on what they are looking for and help connect the dots.

I hope you can use these tips to build stronger relationships with this seemingly untapped market of journalists. I feel quite sure it will pay off for you in the long run. Yes, you have to “work it” on your end but I think you’ll be pleased with the results.

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