

It's About the AIL: To Get Articles Published, Start with an "Article Ideas List"

By Vanessa Kitchen

Many would-be article authors labor under the misconception that the way to see your article in print, is to: first write the article, next send it off to one or more editors, and, last, wait with baited breath for your article to either be accepted or rejected. Although this can sometimes be a scenario for getting an article accepted for publication, in fact a better way, one that more frequently yields happy results, is to begin the process with an Article Ideas List, or AIL. By beginning this way, you get to pitch your IDEA first, rather than a whole article, which allows an editor to buy in to your concept, set out requirements for your draft (word count, angle, deadline) and give you a definite commitment that she does in fact wish to publish it!

What exactly does an AIL look like? Well, just as the name suggests, your AIL will list all your ideas for articles, each compiled in a clear, simple and brief format. It should be composed of articles that you want to write, especially if you are embarking on such a project for business reasons. It is easy to get distracted writing articles that fail to illustrate your business expertise, so an AIL keeps you on track, listing only those article ideas that will position you and your firm strategically in the marketplace.

In thinking about the article(s) you want to write, consider what angles each topic could be approached from. Focusing on a topic from a different angle can comprise a different article idea. For example, if you are in sales, you might come up with a few possible angles: "10 Steps to Sales Success," or, conversely, "The Ten

Biggest Mistakes When Trying to Sell." Other angles, less global in scope: "How to Close a Sale," "The Importance of Qualifying Your Prospects" and "Preparing for the Sales Call." As you can see, selling might seem a common or even mundane experience to some, but to the article author, even segregated aspects of selling can become article ideas unto themselves. The bottom line is, the more options you give an editor, the better! An AIL gives editors the option to choose which angle or idea they like best or would be most appropriate for their publication.

Since you will be sending the article ideas list off to at least a few editors, the publications they represent will all have a different focus and a different theme for each issue. An editor may be looking for a particular spot to fill that ties in a theme with other articles, or to fill out a theme for a special section in the publication. Basically, by not giving the editor a completed article, you avoid distracting from the editor's ability to see your basic article idea from an angle that *would* fit into the publication. Also, editors see a list of article ideas as a flexible starting point from which to work with you. With a completed article, editors fear that an author will be less willing to start from scratch with a new angle or change an article considerably to fit the editor's preferences. By providing only a list, such editor fears can be diffused.



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So, how should you structure your AIL? First, come up with 5-10 solid ideas for articles and outline them in your head, or on paper. But don't send that outline to the editor! He or she doesn't want to see exactly what you are going to write about. Instead, take your idea and outline, then convert them into a 3-5 sentence *pitch* to the editor. Come up with a catchy, descriptive title too. Start your article idea with a reason your topic is important. Then perhaps throw in a provocative question or two. Describe how your article will answer those questions, and what it might include or an overview. Here's a sample:

**Blink and You Miss: Over-Promising and Under-Delivering—
The Kiss of Death in a Business
Presentation**

It is easy to think you are being provocative and original in a business presentation, and come off making the audience want to run for the exit from boredom. What entertains, educates, and enthralls an audience? This article outlines tips for a successful speech, including conversational speaking style, simplicity and directness, stories, humor, startling facts, current events, and so on. In short, what to do; and what *not* to do!

After you complete a list of 5-10 such ideas, begin the "weeding out" process. Out of those 5-10 article ideas, choose 3-4 of your strongest ideas to send to an editor. Don't send them all! Remember, you want to give your editors a few options, not overwhelm them! Make sure you do your research on the publications themselves too. If you can find a publication's website, or have access to a good publication directory (check your local library), look up what each publication is looking for in its articles, or features that the editor has planned, and what topics the publication generally spotlights. If you can locate a publication's editorial calendar, you will really reap some knowledge.

Mix and match your article ideas to the publication's focus. If you have a few ideas that deal especially with sales and marketing, choose those for the publications that deal specifically with sales and/or marketing, or that have a section for that topic, or that might be running a feature on sales/marketing in an upcoming issue.

Lastly, most people also mistakenly believe that editors early on will want to see, along with your article ideas list, some sort of biography of the author and/or articles published and/or credentials, samples of their work, etc. But what it really comes down to is that editors DON'T want to know such information first off. At the beginning, they are primarily interested in the article ideas only: if an idea catches their eye, then they may write back saying they are interested, and then ask for some background on the author.

As well, send your article ideas in a simple email. Look up the editor's name, and write, "Dear ---, Here are some article ideas you might be interested in. Feel free to contact me with any questions." Include the article ideas in the body of the email, with the strongest idea first. Make sure to include your contact information in the email, ideally at the end. The editor will then read through your article ideas first, spot one that strikes his or her fancy, and next scroll down to learn who the author is and how to get in touch with them.

As I said earlier, the idea is by far the most important part. Once you've got an editor hooked, all you have to do is reel them in. If the editor responds favorably, you can start working on an article and solicit feedback (if you need it) directly from your new editor. At this point, you are well on your way toward great success as a published article author! That's because when an editor requests an article from you, he/she typically will be asking because there is sincere interest in that idea, and a genuine desire to publish it.

We all have knowledge to share from our particular areas of expertise. If you've been thinking about writing and publishing articles for a long time now, but have had trouble getting started, don't wait any longer. Get to it now, start working on your article ideas list. You'll get yourself published at last!