

Carol Tice:

Hi, everybody. It's Carol Tice here with Linda Formichelli.

Linda Formichelli:

Hey everyone.

Carol Tice:

Who is now not making a loud buzzing noise. Sorry. We had a few little technical weirdo things there. Chat appears to be working. I'm very excited. And I liked how Cynthia took a mini nap when we told her that Linda needed to call back in. Anyway, we have quite a few things to say and to tell you about what we see going on. As usual we have a few initial thoughts and then we will move onto your questions. Linda has a few things she wants to tell you.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Yeah. Awesome. First of all, there are some really, really nice queries going up in the forums, and some really nice starts to queries going up in the forums, and some really nice revisions going up in the forums. So we're really excited to see that.

I did want to mention, though, that once you get an idea approved we'd like you to move onto module two and focus on your query because what we're seeing a lot of is that people were approved to move on but they are posting more ideas for us to critique, and I can understand that, after the class is over you want to write your eight query letters, and it would be nice if they were all Carol and Linda approved, but the thing is we have 100 students and we have five instructors. So we just don't have the bandwidth to critique eight ideas from each student. However, at the end of class if there's time when we're done with all the revisions and everything we're happy to take on more ideas.

But the point of this class is once you have thrown out some ideas and honed it down to your best one, and then we worked with you to come up with a saleable angle, and you've listened to all the modules, and you've seen what everybody else is doing you should have a pretty good idea of what makes a saleable idea, and be able to kind of fly on your own and come up with ideas for your eight queries after class.

Also, we wanted to make sure that students don't start sending their pitches and CCing us on them as part of their eight. In fact, we would rather you didn't even start writing new ones right now until the end of class because it seems like, "Okay, I got my query in, it was approved, I'm done," but there's so much more in the class beyond writing this first pitch. You're learning about letters of introduction this week which also count toward the eight pitches. You might want to write some of those.

And also, after this week the assignments are going to be to revise your query letter and your LOI homework assignments based on the instructors' feedback in that final week, and we have instructed our instructors to do really picky edits at this point where we're

going to make sure your grammar and everything is absolutely perfect because you're going to be sending these out. So they need to be really perfect.

Finally, I wanted to mention an issue we're seeing with a lot of the queries is that students are telling an editor what they're planning on offering, and my saying about that is show, don't tell. An editor is taking a risk by hiring a writer she doesn't know. For example, if she hires you based on the query where you say, "I'm going to interview these people and talk about this thing," if she hires you and allots pages in the magazine to you, and you can't pull through, then she's stuck with empty pages in the magazine, and that's something no editor wants. So you need to show what you're planning on offering by going out and pre-interviewing a couple of people, adding their quotes, adding examples, and actually giving them a little chunk, a little piece of what you're going to offer.

So for example, if you are going to offer you know, ten tips for getting healthy in the summer. I mean, I know that's completely lame, but if you're going to offer that you would mention and flesh out two or three of those exactly as you would in the article with the clever subhead and the quotes and everything else.

And I know it sounds like a lot of work, especially because you're never guaranteed an assignment, but you can do a lot of work, have a good chance of getting an assignment, and when you get one, part of your article is already done. Or you could just kind of send out a sketchy thing where you don't really show what you're going to offer and you basically won't get an assignment. So which one really is the better use of your time?

So I really want to encourage you to flesh things out, do research reporting, and talk to people for this. It doesn't need to be to the extent that it will when you get the article assignment, but you do need to show the editor that you know how to do this stuff.

Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I'm seeing a whole lot of people posting pitch ideas that say, "I will interview experts about this." And you need to understand that when an editor sees that they just move on. That you can't even take the trouble to tell them who, you haven't identified by name a single expert in this, you just need to realize that it comes off as very half-baked when you do that. And you know, yeah, if you can't name one expert, you can't round up a quick quote from them, they have no confidence that you could execute a whole story. You've really got to sell them.

I think most writers really don't understand how terrifying it is and what a big reputation risk it is for an editor to give an assignment to a new writer because yeah, if they have blank pages in the magazine they get fired. They can't ever have blank pages in the magazine. So they have to have a lot of confidence that you can really do this, and the fewer clips you have the more you have to prove that in the query with a lot of detail.

And the other thing is you know, I feel like there's this huge resistance to going out and talking to a person, but we want to draw your attention to this experience that our student, Alex, had, where he was asked to go out and talk to somebody. He had sort of the seed of a good idea, and I said, "Gee, you should go out and find out what the story is here. I bet there's a great angle." He went out, it was about breweries, he went out and talked to somebody for half an hour. It solved all his problems. He came home with multiple angles for multiple potential stories, and I'm putting a link to that right in chat. He was like, "Oh, wow. This is amazing. Now I know what my story is."

We would like to see every student have this experience because honestly, you know, if you're going around with a sort of oogie feeling of like, "Gee, I don't really know if this is a story. I think it might be." If you talk to a person then you can come to an editor and say, "This is real. I talked to this person. It is really a trend. Here's how I'll really prove it." You know, it makes your idea honing process so much easier. Really. Stop putting it off and just go out and find out what's going on.

And for the record, if you have interviewed someone or talked to someone or interacted with some group many years ago you cannot take what you half remember about that and turn it into the basis of an article. We're getting some pitches that are like, "Years ago I worked for this person and I observed some things about them and I thought I would turn it into an article." Now. That doesn't work.

Editors are running on the assumption that the information they are going to get from you is brand new and you just go it. The thing is, it's actually considered unethical to quote or recycle things from years ago because things may have changed. That person may have retracted that statement. They may be a totally different person now. They've gone through rehab, you know? You cannot dig up old information and just use it. So that was something I saw that was troubling.

Anyway, other than that, yeah. Some really fun article ideas are bouncing around. You know, read some of these mode two posts if you need some inspiration and thought, and want to see how to put these together, and get all the good elements they need into the query where it's maybe got a _____ (8:23) opening anecdote that's really interesting, and it's got a nut that explains to us what we will find out in the whole story, and who you're going to talk to, and then why you're the writer to do it. It's got those basic elements and it's got something that is really fresh, and I know everyone is so struggling with this whole what is a new angle. So you should be able to get a lot of great ideas from looking at some of the posts.

Anyway, on to some questions that came in initially.

Linda Formichelli:

Wait.

Carol Tice:

Yes?

Linda Formichelli:

I'm just looking at the chat. Did you mention about the queries that go out after class and how they all need to be of the same quality that we're expecting in the class?

Carol Tice:

I don't think I have. Thank you for reminding me about that.

Linda Formichelli:

I can mention that.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Go ahead.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. So you know, after this is over we have this great refund offer, we're hoping to get some really great case studies, and we want to make sure that each query that goes out in the months after class is well researched, reported, includes interviews and examples, basically just like the one you're learning to do for this class. We want everyone to succeed so that we get these wonderful case studies.

So if we feel that a student is starting to sort of toss out half-baked ideas in pitches just to make it to the end we are going to push back. We want to see eight really awesome queries and we will be commenting on them. And I don't want to sound like a real hard ass, but that's the way it is.

Carol Tice:

And you know when Linda is being a hard ass there's a problem because she's the nice, the good cop in our pair, and she likes to cut everybody a break.

And you know, we're not just doing that because you know, we don't want to give out 100 refunds. Though that would be kind of amazing if everyone did an amazing job and all got jobs off of this. But the thing is, we don't want people to lose track of the point of the exercise which is for you to really dive into marketing and do a lot of really effective marketing in May and get some gigs. Because that's what's going to, you know, make this class really worthwhile for you and make great case studies for us as well.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah.

Carol Tice:

So don't short yourself here.

Linda Formichelli:

And you don't have to get gigs in order to qualify for the refund. We can make a great case study of, you know, "I gained confidence" or "I sent out more pitches than I ever had" or "I'm getting more interest from editors than ever." We're not going to rely on your getting an assignment because actually a month is kind of a short timeline in order to get an assignment. While we would love to see you all getting gigs a month is not a very long time. So we're not going to hold you to getting assignments.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. But you know, yeah. I have already pushed back on a letter of introduction I saw where it was clear that they had not even looked at their website, or if they had, I mean, there was no indication. They were like, "I drove past your office one day and saw your slogan and thought I should write for you." It's like, that's not enough.

We're really trying to make people sort of leap over the fence of the wishy-washy, half-baked kind of stuff that editors get so much of, and really stand out with something strong that shows that you've done your homework, and you understand that company, that publication, and you know, you have a real shot at getting an assignment here.

We don't want this to be like an academic exercise. You know, this is not grad school where they have you do all this ivory tower stuff that has no relevance to getting a real job. We really want you to come out of this with a gig, you know, and/or the ability to get them in the future.

So that's why we lean on you and say, "Go back. Talk to somebody." Because that's what the editor is going to make you do anyway.

Linda Formichelli:

Well, you know, let me tell you...yes. I mean, you know, we have worked with all of these editors in the past on a professional basis, and what you're getting in the forums is only a small piece of what you're going to get when you get an actual assignment, and you can write the most awesome article in the world and you're probably going to get a revision request.

Carol Tice:

Yes. Yes. In our article writing master class we actually provide a file of edit requests we've gotten, and I had one...

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Or articles with the...

Carol Tice:

Yeah. With all the red ink. And I had one where I _____ (12:45) had slaved and turned it in on Christmas break week, and he pops up like at the end of this week and is like, "Well, this great, but you're going to really need to flesh out every point in this further," you know it was just unreal. He wouldn't even give me notes. He was just like, "Yeah, just go rewrite everything."

So you know, we're trying to toughen you up a little bit for the real world of interacting with editors and meeting their demands.

Anyway...

Linda Formichelli:

Actually, you know what? Yeah. I should mention I haven't worked with Emilia personally, but I've written for several editors at Health and it is the same deal with every one.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Right on. Anyway, so you're ready to dive into questions here?

Linda Formichelli:

Sure. Actually, I'd like you to take this one from Emily, the first one on top.

Carol Tice:

Okay. She says, "Do you have any tips or guidelines for figuring out if a business has a decent marketing budget before you send them an LOI or is that something you address afterwards? I'm thinking about small businesses here."

Yeah. You don't want to think about small businesses, really, too much, because in general they won't have a decent marketing budget.

And I don't know if you're in the Den, but if not, Linda and I put together an e-book that's called How to Get Great Freelance Clients, and it goes over a lot of our techniques for qualifying businesses, but a quick one is to use Hoover's or to look in your local business journal's Book of Lists. If you live in any major US city there will be lists, and lists, and lists of the fastest growing private companies, and the largest public companies, the biggest law firms, and lists, and lists, and lists of prospects with their revenue listed.

So yeah. You want to get a sense of whether they're big enough and how big is big enough depends on what you've been making and who you've been pitching so far. You know, if you've been pitching one person small businesses, start pitching people who have, you know, five employees at least, or a million in revenue, and if you've been doing that go to ten million, and if you've been doing that go to a hundred million.

There are a lot of mid-sized businesses out there and they tend to be the sweet spot. Chris Barlow always told me the mid-market is the sweet spot for hiring freelancers. Where they maybe haven't gotten to the point where they have a marketing department but they're definitely doing marketing, making money, need to spend, need to get marketing done.

Because you're ideal clients on the business side have ongoing work. They're not just sort of, you know, one off, write four blog posts for me. You know? You want people with ongoing gigs. So really good question.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. And Patty has a question, I just posted in the chat box, I'd like you to expand on this. It says, "Do you still have to write a query for submission after the LOI?" And I'm not sure what you mean by that because it doesn't technically matter what order you do them in, but for this class you need to write both a query, have it approved, do revisions and so on, and also an LOI. So I'm not sure if you're asking about the order, but the order doesn't matter.

Carol Tice:

Yeah.

Linda Formichelli:

If I'm incorrect on that put it in the chat box and let me know. But Emily has a question, "Regional bridal magazines, though consumer facing, often have their editorial content planned by the staff. I think _____ (16:16) from their advertisers and what submissions they get from area brides. In this case is it a good idea to send an LOI versus a query?"

That's a great question because really whether to send an LOI versus a query, there's no hard and fast line where like, these magazines always get this, and these magazines always get this. There's that kind of middle ground of the smaller regional, custom type publications, and I think in this case it couldn't hurt to send them in LOI with three or four...you still want to put in three or four ideas of what you could write for them, and you know, if they have their media kit available it'll say what they're going to be tackling each month so you can make sure it fits into something that they're going to be doing in the future, but I would say try that. Get your foot in the door. But it is sort of a go with your gut thing.

What do you think, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Okay. Well, Patty said, I'm still confused, but, "After you get a response from an LOI do you still have to query an actual article?"

Linda Formichelli:

Oh. Yes. I get it.

Carol Tice:

I think what she means is like...

Linda Formichelli:

I get it.

Carol Tice:

...you sent an LOI to a publication.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. Well you know, so what you will say is, you know, here are a few ideas, I'd be happy to flesh this out for you if you would like more detail on any of these, and that way you're kind of not writing a whole query without knowing whether they're interested which is a nice perk.

And sometimes an editor will give you an assignment right off of what you wrote, and sometimes they'll say, "Yeah, could you flesh this out or give me an outline on this one? I'd like to see more."

So it really depends on the editor, but yeah, sometimes they will want you to write a more fully fleshed out query letter so they can have a better idea of where you're going.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I mean, it really depends on how they respond to your LOI. They might respond by saying, "Oh, you know, we have a special section coming up about this. Do you have any ideas about that?" Maybe. They may ignore the ideas that you've sent in and ask for ideas on some other thing. They might just assign you something they have up their sleeve and need assigned that has nothing to do with anything you said. Or they might like one of your ideas you called out and say, "Yeah, could you flesh that one out for me? Who would you talk to? What would the drift be?" And then you're writing probably not as elaborate of a full query as you might do otherwise, you know, if you were starting at a consumer pub.

Yeah. Patty, it's just going to really depend on what their response is to your LOI. They might say, yeah, if they vaguely just say, "Yeah, send me an idea," then yeah, you develop a query and send it to them. So yeah. The answer is it depends. Sorry to be vague.

Linda Formichelli:

Awesome. No. That's a good answer. She said in the chat that answers her question. So awesome.

Emily has another good question. "Often in trade magazines and some consumer pubs there aren't specific section editors." I know. That stinks, right? "How do you know who to pitch, editor-in-chief versus senior editor versus associate editor versus assistant editor?"

You know, I can tell you that the only absolute way to be sure who is in charge of handling pitches for a certain department or a certain topic is to call them and ask. That's the number one thing you can do.

But often, especially if it's a big magazine, you're going to call and you're going to get in voice mail hell, and they're not going to call you back. So there are some guidelines for how to determine which editor to pick.

I mean, first of all I should mention, do go on LinkedIn and see if you can figure out who handles what.

Short of that, usually the editor-in-chief, the editorial director, and the editor are too high up the mast head. They're dealing with the entire direction of the publication and aren't really handling freelance pitches. Unless you're talking about a really small magazine with like, three to five people on staff in which case the editor might be. So with the bigger magazines I usually head for the middle of the masthead which is a deputy editor, senior editor, associate editor.

And I would kind of, if I had no other way of figuring it out, I would just kind of pick one at random and send it. And if you're kind of in the ballpark and you have a really great idea, they are willing to pass it onto the right person and let you know.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. That's usually how I end my pitches, is if I'm taking a guess on an editor, it's like, "If you're not the right editor for this feel free to forward this email to whoever is."

One thing she asked though, is assistant editor is not usually somebody I would pitch...sometimes that's like an intern or somebody.

Associate editor, yeah, maybe. But you have to watch out because sometimes regular contributors becomes associate editors just as a perk thing.

Managing editor is always sort of my fallback position if I can't think of anything else. Or look for articles editor or features editor. Those hint, "I take the freelance stuff."

So Sarah has a sort of troubling question. She says, "When I publish stuff I use a pen name and when I pitch for bylined articles I do the same thing," apparently using a pen name. "But when I'm out in the world I use my legal name. There's a paragraph on my resume that talks about stuff written under my pen name but my resume uses my real name. Does this seem okay?"

The bad news is it really doesn't. It's fine for...pen names are for fiction writers and you're going to...unless you have a really legit reason for using the pen name like you're hiding from the violent stalker you had to testify against, or you got married since then and you just kept using your maiden name, those are kind of the only two instances where that'll work.

But the problem is using a pen name as a nonfiction journalist poses a really big ethical question.

Linda Formichelli:

Dilemma. Yeah.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. It's a bad problem. What are you hiding? Why are you pretending to be someone else? You kind of can't pretend to be someone else and report a story and have us believe that your facts are true. So I think you have a problem if you want to move into this area and you know, write for magazines where you need to start using your real name.

But the good news is you don't usually send out your resume to anyone. So you don't have to launch into an elaborate explanation on a resume. But it's troubling to hear that that's how you set it up because it poses...it's going to raise a question in an editor's mind about whether you are who you say you are.

Linda Formichelli:

You know, Sarah is saying she's not pretending, she's using her maiden name to write under, and I actually have a friend who writes under her maiden name, and I think that is done frequently, and what you would normally do is just say, "I write under my maiden name and here are some of my bylined articles." It's very simple. I wouldn't write too much about it.

But yeah, in terms of you going by like a totally different pen name that you've made up like a fiction author, that wouldn't work because it needs to be totally transparent who is the journalist here.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. You can publish under your maiden name. Yeah. She says, "I am just using my maiden name." That's not a pen name. That's your using your maiden name, you just didn't change it when you got married.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. No problem.

Carol Tice:

That's not a problem.

Linda Formichelli:

No problem. You're like, now that you have her the slap down.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. That is not a problem. But we run into people all the time who are like, "My real name is Cindy Jones, but I write under the pen name Rainbow, you know, Sweetness, and now I want to write for magazines," and we're like, that's not going to work. That really poses a problem. So the thing is, you really need to stand behind what you write and kind of be above board with it. But the maiden name thing is completely cool.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. She says, "How do you explain the maiden name thing to people? They are eternally confused." I don't know why an editor should be confused. I mean, "I write under my maiden name, here are some of my clips written under that name just so you know it's still me."

Carol Tice:

Yeah.

Linda Formichelli:

I think it's their problem, Rainbow Sweetness.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. So Charlie has a great question. "What do you put in an LOI if you don't have clips in the publication's market? What if you only have related work experience?"

What if?

Linda Formichelli:

That's awesome.

Carol Tice:

Loads of us are in that boat and yeah, we roll along none the less. I mean, I have written LOIs that just said, "I was a legal secretary in my past and I'm a legal document dork and I just think it's fun to dig into legal issues." I think I got a \$20,000 contract off of that LOI. I didn't have any...I didn't send them any recent legal stuff or anything.

You know, the thing is, much like with a query, the less you have clips the more your LOI has to prove that you're a great writer and you're the writer for them and you understand their style, you understand their tone.

Excuse me.

Linda Formichelli:

For pitching publications and topics where you have some sort of a job or educational background is a great way to actually get around having no clips, because you might not have any clips but, "I have some awesome ideas and I know all about your industry," and that can really get around that problem.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Charlie, I have a method that we call simple addition. You say you don't have clips in that market. So that sounds like you have clips in other things and you have related work experience, and you can put those two together to add up to, "I should write for you." You say, you know, "I have written...I'm a professional writer. I have

written about this type of thing and I have worked in your industry, totally know it inside and out. I'm sure I could do a great job for you." That's a totally legit...

You know, the thing to think of is if you couldn't do that then no one would ever be able to branch out into a new niche. How would you ever break into a new area of writing? It would never, ever happen. Obviously at some point somebody gives somebody a flyer on writing about a topic that they don't have any current clips in and you do that by making the case in other ways. "I have life experience."

I got a bunch of gigs by telling people my dad sold insurance and that I knew the difference between whole life and term life as a result. Like, I wrote for a 50 cent a word online market for a long time off of that that needed for somebody to write about insurance, and you know, most people just, "Insurance?" You know? And I said, "Hey, I have a familiarity with insurance, I kind of grew up with it." And they were like, "Please write for us."

So it's really not as tough as you think.

Linda Formichelli:

You know what? Can I take Michelle's question, skipping this one, and then you can take Sarah's question? Because I think you'd be really good to answer Sarah's question here.

Carol Tice:

Sure.

Linda Formichelli:

And I'll take Michelle's. Michelle says, "In a conversational and casual tone does it not matter so much about proper grammar and punctuation? I would think those would still be important, but I know things are getting sloppier all the time. Is this sloppiness something to emulate in casual social media pitches?"

That is a really interesting question because I think what the key is, and it'll be really apparent to your client, is are you misusing grammar in order, on purpose, in order to make a point and write in a certain style, or are you making grammar mistakes because you just don't know any better which is bad? So I think if you're really strategic about how you do it, for example if you want to do social media writing for a company that caters to young kids in the certain market you want to sound like them. Not to the extent that you're misspelling words and using the letter u for you and stuff like that, but strategically use grammar in such a way to get your point across.

Does that make sense, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I've posted something in chat about this whole I think it's hip to be sloppy trend.

There's only one style that you want to write in, and that is the style of your target. You want to write in the style of your target publication. Conversational and casual does not mean I no longer know how to punctuate a sentence and I'm sending things with small i. Anyway. So just read that post.

It's a real epidemic among really young writers. They're like texting to people or making it look like a text and that comes off super unprofessional.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. But I think if you're strategically, you know, breaking a grammar rule for effect people can appreciate that. They understand that. But if it just looks like you don't know what you're doing that's bad.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. It's something you really have to be careful with because what you're out to prove is that you are a master of the language, not you're a writer. You are a word stylist. Words dance a tune to your command. So you need to make sure that what you're doing, yeah, seems deliberate and works for that particular market that they would find it clever and get it, and it's a really fine line once you start going, "Oh, I'm going to be all creative and super casual." You really have to watch out what you're doing.

To me, sloppiness is never something to emulate, but the thing to know is blog posts are increasingly more like copy writing which breaks grammar rules than article writing. You know, you can write a sentence in a blog post that says, "Anyway." That's a totally acceptable blog post sentence. But it's not an article sentence.

So the answer is to know your market and I personally tend to go conservative on the side of not being sloppy in an attempt to look hip because I think that can really backfire, personally. But if you can play it and make it work, you know, in...

I had a friend who wrote a letter of introduction to a cupcake bakery, like a regional, you know, Cupcake Royale type bakery, and it was super casual, but that totally worked because the tone was like, he's hanging around the counter of the cupcake shop talking to them.

So you know, it really depends on the context and the situation.

So Sarah's question, to back up to it, is, "I want to approach a marketing firm about possible writing work but this is a place that I've worked with in the past for my day job," which it sounds like the continues to hold. "Is there a way to do that so it isn't super awkward or inappropriate?"

I don't think so. I think it is inappropriate. "I don't want to harm my employer with my freelance and I don't want to tell them that I'm starting to branch out and do this." Then I think you can't pitch this agency because it's going to get back to them.

Linda Formichelli:

It's not the agency she's working for now. It's somebody she's worked for in the past, probably in the same industry you're working for now, I'm guessing. Like a competitor or something?

Carol Tice:

It's a place she's worked with in the past for her current day job.

Linda Formichelli:

Oh. You know, yeah. Let us know if we're wrong in this.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Throw in more details if we got that wrong, but I think that you know, and I've heard too many heartbreaking stories of people who are like, "Oh, I kind of want to start freelancing but I don't want my employer to find out," and they find out and they get fired, and then you kind of lose control of your ability to time your exit.

I would think hitting an agency they have worked with in the past who for all you know, like the head of your company is like, best friends with them, and they go have coffee once a week, you know? It's highly likely that's going to leak back to them. So I would find other prospects to pitch. There are many in the sea.

Pardon me, you guys. I'm on like day seven of a cold. I'm almost done. It's going away finally.

_____ (32:53) says, "Can you talk some more about how to know when you're making an LOI more about you than them? I did a draft that I thought was talking about them and was surprised that the feedback was it was more about me."

I think I know the LOI we're talking about here. As I recall it just didn't show research into what they needed. It was just sort of, "You need someone who is a great writer and I am so hire me." And when you're getting into that tone, I caution people about getting into what I call bossy cow mode where you're saying, "You need a writer who understands this industry and I do and you need this and you need that."

Instead of telling them what they need look at their marketing materials, look at their website and find out what they need. Say, "Oh, I see you're doing a lot of, you know, blog posting for lawyers. I've done that. Here's a clip."

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Or, "You don't have any case studies on your website, you know, case studies are great for this reason."

Carol Tice:

Yeah. It's really a different thing.

So a sort of related question, “Can you outline the difference between a cover letter and an LOI?”

Well yeah, a cover letter is like, “Hi, I’m so and so, I’m enclosing my resume and a few clips so you can get to know me because I’m forced to write this cover letter because I’m applying to an online job ad that put me in some automatic system where I’m required to do this.” I can’t think of the last time I sent a cover letter because cover letters don’t sell and they don’t convert and they’re not very interesting.

An LOI has personality, it reveals your research in the company, it talks about why you are a fit for what they need based on what you can observe they do and/or are neglecting to do. It’s a sales piece that takes some real thought and research.

Does that clarify? Let me look here.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Debbie, can I answer Debbie’s question?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Go ahead.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Debbie said, “What are your thoughts on interviewing an expert who has been quoted a lot recently in the media even if there are other experts available? Is it better to go after the same person or find a fresh voice?”

And I think it really depends on what field you are pitching in or what exact publications you’re pitching. So if you’re writing for a health magazine and this guy has appeared in every health magazine you probably don’t want him and want to find somebody else who hasn’t been overexposed, but if he has appeared in every health magazine but you are recasting this as an idea for a lifestyle magazine then I think it would be fine to use that person again.

But finding a fresh voice...yeah. Go ahead.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I agree. You know, if they’re not overexposed to that market then that’s cool.

And sometimes there’s topics where there’s sort of a guy who is the guy that you kind of just have to talk to. It’s sort of hard to get out of it. You know, I used to do a lot of college and careers, and there was one guy who wrote all of these books about Bureau of Labor Statistics Forecast on Careers and stuff, and he just was kind of the guy who was deep into their data, and I used him a lot, and I would just say, “Hey, I really think it’s this guy again,” and they’re be like, “Okay.” Because sometimes there sort of is a top expert, and then you feel like you didn’t hit the top experts if you didn’t talk to that guy.

But if you ever have a question just ask. Just say, "Do you think this guy is overexposed or not?" I talk to my editors about sourcing all the time, and you know what? The one time I didn't boy did I get bit in the butt because I had forgotten that this senior care company I was talking to, there had been a big scandal and a big investigation about them, and they had paid a fine. I had blanked out the whole thing and I had to kill their interview and couldn't use them, and so I wasted a lot of time. So feel free to talk to editors about sourcing because it will save you time.

And sometimes editors have real particular opinions about experts they think are full of it and they don't want in the magazine, or experts they think are brilliant geniuses. So you know, feel free to pick their brains.

So _____ (37:23) says, "Is an LOI appropriate to send when trying to get case study work?"

Yeah. Certainly. It's probably the number one way people get case study work unless it's from a referral.

Just wanted to grab that one.

Yeah. Rachel says, "Even Oprah has her go to experts." Yeah. We're all sick of them and feel they're overexposed but she just keeps having, you know, Dr. Oz and Dr. Phil on because she thinks they are the go to people.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. So let me get Debbie's question. Or, not Debbie's. Sorry. We just did Debbie's. _____ (37:56) in the Netherlands. "If you mention the five tips you want to add in a box out do you need to flesh those out too or are just mentioning the tips in the box out enough?"

Yeah. So if you're talking about a sidebar, so you have this fully fleshed out research query and you say, "I also propose doing a sidebar on X," you could definitely just list, you know, do a quick list of the tips. You don't really need to flesh out the sidebar information.

And Tori has a good question. "If I don't have a clip can I close my LOI with, 'Can I send you some ideas?' even though my ideas probably won't fit their schedule?"

And here's the thing about the LOIs that we're recommending you do, if you're talking about publications here, is that you're actually going to do what we call a query-LOI hybrid where you're not just writing, "Hey, here's all about me and how I can help you," but you're actually quickly outlining a few ideas that you would like to write for them, and they don't need to be heavily researched or interviewed or anything like that, but one thing editors are looking for is writers who can come up with really good ideas for them because they can't sitting in their own little box with their editors all day long be coming

up with fresh ideas all the time. So the writer who can come up with ideas is gold to an editor and you want to show that you have what it takes by sending them a few.

Also, I've interviewed editors on the traditional LOI where you just write about yourself, "Here I am, do you have any assignments?" And they unanimously said they really don't like getting those because it's just a writer reaching out and saying, "Hey, give me work," without really offering any benefit to them. So we really want you to come up with a few ideas for your query.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Be problem solvers for them and honestly, they will love you so much because you know, they do get a lot of writers who don't have a lot of ideas and just want to get assigned and they're just sort of laying around trying to, you know, suck their blood. "Give me an idea and I'll write about it." You know? So you can really stand out by being like, "Hey, I've got a few quick ideas for you."

They are more than ever...you know, ten years ago it was a different story. A lot more stuff was editorially driven. Now everyone has been laid off and like, they're so reliant on freelancers to develop ideas for them. Yes, they have an editorial calendar so they know, "Oh, I need a package of five stories about bathroom trends for this bathroom show we're going to cover," but what are those five ideas? They have no idea. They are dying for somebody to tell them.

So many times I have had editors come to me and say, "Oh my God. Can you develop five ideas for me about this?" And if you can you're getting a big lump of work.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Yeah. And ten years ago I used to write these generic LOIs that were just, "Hey, I'm awesome. Hire me." And I remember one time I sent out 24 of those and I got eight assignments, but those days are long gone. I mean, it's probably even more than ten years ago.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I just think it is more competitive and ideas are the coin of the realm. You know, they are the key to the door. You just want to develop a lot, a lot of ideas. If you, you know, wonder why we're so obnoxious in these forums going, "You should refine this idea a little more, do a little more research, figure out where the angle really is," it's because if you can do that you're going to make a lot of money. You're going to get a lot of assignments.

So I see Rachel has like a related cover letter question here. "Can LOIs be used in place of a cover letter or when trying to procure B2B or B2C copy writing work?"

Once again we return to this cover letter idea. You know, aspire to not send cover letters because that means under the cover letter is your resume which is also boring and doesn't sell you very well. You know, the reason we're here in Pitch Clinic is to

teach you to stop responding to job ads and sending cover letter and resumes and being in a pile with 1,000 other writers where your odds of getting hired are tiny, and finding your own prospects and sending them an LOI that is so much more fun, interesting, and snappy, and gives you a real shot at getting a gig.

Do you understand Cynthia's question?

Linda Formichelli:

No. I think that's for a previous call. But Leanne's question I would like you to take because you're really good at that entertainment stuff and I totally am not.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. My past life as a secretary at the _____ (42:26) Agency and MGM back when it was MGM. So really date me. But yeah, I have written a tiny bit for Hollywood Reporter and Daily Variety and stuff.

Leanne says, "For entertainment news sites is it still advisable to pitch ideas? Most ideas will be old by the time the editor reads the email."

This is a huge question. I just want to stop and really expound on this because this is a big problem a lot of the writers are having. There is a problem as a freelance writer that you can't really get breaking news assigned to you and with magazines you know, that breaking news is going to go out of date before it comes out. Even for Entertainment Weekly, you know?

Breaking news is written by staffers and not just in entertainment. In business, in every beat because there isn't time to yeah, get a pitch and assign it and wait for it to come in. Like, they're turning to one of their staffers and saying, "Write this up and post it on the website by four PM today because we need to be on record with this."

So you can't get breaking news ideas assigned. You have to give them something else. Something a little bit more nonpareil and with a different approach. You have to spin that story forward. You have to realize it's part of a trend that you could explain where it is just one example of the trend. You have to, you know, be a little bit cleverer with how you develop that idea.

You need to be looking at not news that happened today that will be old by the time the editor reads it, you need to be researching what happened a year ago, in the past, in six months from now it will be the anniversary of it, and I could pitch that idea now and write it now and when it comes out it will hit that anniversary of, you know, it's been a year since the major earthquake, or the celebrity flameout that happened, or his rehab stint, or you know, you have to be developing more feature style ideas where they aren't completely reliant on very perishable, immediate news.

Linda, do you have other thoughts?

Linda Formichelli:

No. This is totally outside my wheelhouse.

Carol Tice:

Okay.

Linda Formichelli:

I'm so glad we have such a good mix of me and you and the three editors. I mean, I feel like we can cover anything between us. So that's awesome.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. It's true. Between all of us we've done about every weird thing you can think of.

But I mean, to me that's not really an entertainment question. That's a question for any magazine and for any paper. You know, if you already have a relationship with them and you're writing for them online you might get a piece of breaking news, and if you enjoy doing one day turnarounds maybe you could get into that niche, but it's not the kind of thing you can get cold. It's just not going to happen.

So you know, go back and listen to our story idea lab and listen to how we develop ideas that are more nonpareil and yet they're fresh. That's that incredible sweet spot where I've spotted a trend, and it hasn't been written about a ton yet, and it's newsy, and yet it will not go out of date in three months.

So it's a tough spot.

Linda Formichelli:

Let me take Vanessa's from Belgium, and below that we have Cynthia from Spain. This is pretty cool.

Vanessa says, "I'm so excited by this module. One of my friends regularly works for trade pubs and she loves it. It's something I really want to crack but my friend is from a farmer town and she has lots of knowledge on her sector, agriculture, to begin with. I looked through trade pubs and it just seems to me like I have nothing to offer them. How can I convince an editor that I'm awesome at research and can interview really well even though I don't know their sector at all yet?"

So there's a couple things you can do with that. The first thing is you actually knock their socks off with a really awesome query LOI or even a full query if you feel you have to where you come up with ideas that show that you can figure out and explain their industry. You might have to do a little bit more legwork and research, but that's okay.

The other thing you can do is if you have any kind of background in anything, any expertise that crosses industries, for example marketing, finance, law, HR, anything like that, trade magazines on almost any industry want articles on those things. So for example, I have a little bit of background on marketing and I really enjoy writing about

marketing. So I've written about marketing for trades as diverse as the Federal Credit Union, Pizza Today, and In-plant Graphics. I don't know anything about the pizza industry, I don't know anything about the printing industry. I don't know anything about credit unions. But my knowledge of marketing helped me come up with ideas that would work for them and then I went out and talked to people in that industry to kind of fill the gaps and get the quotes and get the advice and things like that.

So there are a lot of ways to get around not having any experience in the industry, and I hope one of those applies to you.

Carol Tice:

Yes. Sales, I think, is the big one that you left out.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Yeah. Sales, marketing, whatever.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. There are some basic things that a lot of different industries, you know, always need to know about how to manage their labor, how to motivate their workers, how to be more productive in their business. So yeah, if you have any kind of background in any of that kind of stuff that can be sort of a way in the door.

And you know, the other thing is to just read it and speak their lingo. I was a staffer at a trade pub, and like the first thing I ever asked them was, "What's an SKU?" Which is a stock keeping unit, you know, decipher their jargon and just, you know, show them that you are willing to take the time to sort of understand how their industry works because the thing is, trade pubs cannot get anyone to write about the oil and gas industry or...like there's a lot of really arcane trade pubs and they're always advertising. They can never find anyone.

So if you even just are fascinated by their industry personally and think it's a dynamic, you know, in a sector under a lot of pressure and you're just interested in following what happens, that could even be enough.

So Cynthia says...

Linda Formichelli:

Carol, I just want to let you know...

Carol Tice:

Go head.

Linda Formichelli:

I went into the question box and copied all the new questions that had been left there and they're all at the bottom of the file, just so you know.

Carol Tice:

Oh. So they are. Okay.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah.

Carol Tice:

So Cynthia said, "When concluding an LOI with, 'May I send clips?' what happens if we don't have industry appropriate clips?" Well I think we hit that about simple additions.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. It doesn't matter.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. "Are trade pubs easier to work for making it worth writing a sample article to show as a clip?"

I'm never a fan of writing sample, made up articles. You want to try to find something you can write for a real client.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah.

Carol Tice:

Sample articles you self-write don't prove anything is the problem. They don't prove you can please an editor or get published. You know, I think I'd rather see you write for a local paper and write up some four paragraph thing and have a daily clip.

"Can clips be a link to a blog or website or should they be a Word doc or PDF?"

Great question. They should never, ever be an attachment. Don't ever send an editor you do not already have a relationship with an attachment of any kind. It will make them delete your email immediately.

I used to actually watch this happen at the business journal when I was a staffer. People would write, you know, something generic in the subject line like 'article idea' and they'd see it would have an attachment and it was a name they didn't know and they would just go, delete, delete, delete. They would just go down the..."Here's a photo you wanted" with no idea of who it is, what story it's for, delete, delete, delete.

The thing is when you work in publishing you get one virus in the system, the computers are all networked together, and you're not putting out the paper. So it's a huge, huge concern. They're not going to open any attachments.

So yes, you want to link them to where those clips _____ (50:51).

Linda Formichelli:

But you know what? Let me mention, you know, if you mention at the end of your query, "I have clips available if you want to see them," if they ask for them then you can send them and then the question is what format, and I know this sounds really counterintuitive, but what's really worked for me is sending them the Word file of my original article before it got edited by the editor and published, and at first I was _____ (51:17) PDFs of the final product _____ (51:20). "This is a copy of my final draft and I want you to see what my writing is like before the editor _____ (51:30) on it," and they loved it because they could see this writer turns in _____ (51:36) because what happens is a lot of times editors don't trust these published clips because they don't know how much of it _____ (51:43) and how much an editor had to rework this piece until it got in this published format. They have no way of knowing. So that's a little tip that I've used and it's worked pretty well, and it's good if you're lazy like me.

Carol Tice:

Rachel says, "So Carol, you're saying _____ (52:00) are out?"

Oh. You mean...if you mean sample articles you just write to create a sample, yeah. I just don't recommend doing that.

Linda Formichelli:

Well, they don't...clips show us more than your writing. They know you can write but the clip shows I know how to get published, I know how to work with an editor, I know how to do revisions. There's so much more a clip shows than just that you're a good writer and if you write the article yourself without any sort of input from an editor and turn it in it doesn't really show what they want to see.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Sarah was just saying she's discovered Weebly for her website. Unfortunately I have yet to ever see a site built on Weebly that looks professional. It's not a...really kind of not a pro platform. Sorry to tell you.

So _____ (52:52) says, "Please clarify the situations in which a hybrid LOI and a business based LOI would be used."

Well, a business LOI is when you are pitching a business for copy writing. So you're learning about the business and saying, "Yeah, gee, I notice you don't have any current case studies," or you know, you're looking for sort of missing pieces of their marketing you might be able to supply, "Your blog has been abandoned." So that's sort of the drift of a business pitch LOI.

The hybrid is usually for a trade publication where it is a magazine but it's a trade magazine so it's hard to know what ideas they want and you just kind of call out a few quick ideas to show them you have a brain, but you're not going to send them a fully fleshed out query because the odds are just too long that you're going to you know, hit...you're most likely wasting your time with it.

Linda Formichelli:

Cora's question in the UK. Man, we are very international today.

Carol Tice:

I know.

Linda Formichelli:

Cora says, "Do you always get a contract for a successful pitch or are you usually happy with a confirmation on email? I recently pitched an article to a mag, they accepted, I did the work, and the day before I filed my copy they said they didn't need it after all. For this client I let it go because I get a lot of work from them and sometimes I think it's worth losing the commission for the sake of future commissions, but how about mags you've not worked with before? Some offer a kill fee, usually half, but not sure if that's just in the UK."

You know, there's something Carol always says, is that you want to get a contract from an editor only if you want to get paid. Is that what you usually say?

Carol Tice:

That's what I say. Yeah. People say to me, "Gee, do I need a contract?" And I say, "Only if you want money."

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I mean...

Carol Tice:

You know, you just have no legal leg to stand on. You let it go because there's nothing else to do. You have no contract to enforce. So there's kind of nothing else to do but suck it up.

Linda Formichelli:

And I know sometimes you want to let it slide for an editor you've worked with before, but take it from me, these editors and magazines are not looking out for you at all. They will have absolutely no problem with not paying you or you know, not giving you a kill fee if you need one or whatever if there's no contract. They have absolutely no qualms about doing that.

And Carol, I feel like you wrote a blog post on this just on how...the one about sleaze bag clients getting you pregnant, is that about this?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Maybe.

Linda Formichelli:

You know what I mean? It's just, they get you all excited, you start writing, and then they drop the bomb on you because you don't have a contract. So you really want to get a contract every single time because an email confirmation says, "Yes, do the work," but a contract says, "Here's what I'm going to pay you, here's when I'm going to pay you, here's what rights I'm buying, here's what happens if we don't need the article after all," which is what happened in your case. I mean, not only should you get the full fee, you should at the very least get a kill fee. So I hope that this was a learning experience and that you should get a contract from every client every time.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Payment terms, when you will be paid, is like the number one cause of writer starvation because yeah, you just get a quick, "Okay," on email, and you start writing, and then you turn it in, and then you find out that they pay on publication, and they've decided to hold yours for an issue three months from now, and you know, it just goes on and on and you end up getting paid 18 months from now, and nobody can live that way.

So that's why you want more of a full contract where you really understand. Like, what rights did you just give away here? Do you still have some rights? Could you resell this? You know, there's a lot of stuff that's left up in the air when you kind of just get a quick yes on email.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Although if you didn't get a contract, in America at least, if you don't get a contract then you're automatically selling First North American Serial Rights which means they get the first right to publish it and after that the rights revert back to you.

Carol Tice:

Interesting. Well, Michelle has a kind of complex question here. "When you do a pre-interview for a query can you use the information in quotes and then attribute them to the source for a new query idea you think up after the fact or do you need to clear that with the source first?"

I usually find that sources are thrilled to appear in many magazines and I haven't found it a problem. Sometimes I'll suggest to them, "You know, I feel like I could also spin this for another idea, you know, is that okay with you?" And they're always like, "Yeah. Absolutely."

It says, "Would your answer change if the new query ideas are closely related to what you said you would pitch but just for a different slant or nags than what you initially told the source?" I don't know. I don't know what this question is trying to tell me.

The thing to know about reusing it is that you can't send the exact same quotes and information to another publication. You can't reuse the same quotes. So it would have to be different quotes and a different kind of train of thought.

So Patty says, "If we're writing our queries in May and you feel one isn't up to par will we need to send out a different letter to qualify?"

Yeah. If you send one and it's got that whole, "I will talk to experts," kind of attitude, it really doesn't have anything fleshed out in it, it's just not going to count because it's not, you know, really a query. It's kind of more of a joke.

Linda Formichelli:

Carol's a hard ass.

Carol Tice:

Sorry. But yeah. We want you to really do it.

Linda Formichelli:

And you know, can I say something? Can I just say something?

Carol Tice:

Yeah.

Linda Formichelli:

I probably said that on one of our previous calls, but you are...number one, these things get much, much, much easier the more you do them, and number two, your goal as a writer is to not have to query anymore. Once you have a stable of editors who are coming to you with assignments you don't have to write these pitches anymore. So do not feel like, "Oh my God, I have to do this for the rest of my life and it's so hard."

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Hopefully you don't.

Showanda says, "What is a good rule of thumb when writing an LOI that allows us to impart some personality but still keep it professional?"

I thought that that was a good rule of thumb, what you just said. You want to impart some personality. I don't like the word professional because I think that tends to be like business letter stiff. Remember that the correct tone for the LOI you're writing is the tone of the publication, and then you want to add a little of your personality so they're getting to know you, and you're showing that you can write in their tone. So if their tone is really casual and funny that's what your tone is going to be. If their tone is academic and erudite that's what your tone is going to be.

So I hope that makes sense.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Tori says, "In the hybrid format," so the hybrid LOI, "how long should each idea be? Is a paragraph large enough?"

Yeah. I always recommend, you know, having a really killer headline that you would have in bold, and then underneath that just having a few sentences describing your idea, and that's it. It doesn't need to be anything...

Wow. That's a giant spider.

Carol Tice:

No. Tell that spider it cannot attack while we are coaching here.

Linda Formichelli:

No. It's a fly. Never mind. I need glasses. I was like, "Oh my God. Get me out of here."

Yeah. So just a few sentences to a paragraph. You don't need to overdo it. Just give them as much information as you need to to get the idea across. That's it.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I agree.

So Showanda says she's heard that you know, "You should list services on your website that you've done and some you haven't done yet. Should the same mindset be used when writing an LOI when you're trying to pitch a service you haven't done before?"

If you mean should you pretend you have done it, no. I don't think so. No. Use simple addition. Tell them what you have done and why that makes you qualified to do their thing.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I think...and it's not too much of a leap for them to see that if you can write a really good sales page or a really good article that you could probably do a really good case study and a really good blog post and so on. I mean, a lot of it is you know, pretty similar.

Carol Tice:

Right.

Linda Formichelli:

Cynthia says, "Speaking of insurance, what are some well-paying trade markets worth looking into?"

Wow. It's so all over the board. I mean, there are just so many different industries that have trade magazines. What would you say, like Carol, like legal, financial?

Carol Tice:

There's a ton. Every industry you can think of usually has more than one. When I wrote full time about home improvement retailing we were one of three trade publications.

Linda Formichelli:

She wants to know which ones are well-paying, which industries are the best paying, and I'm like...

Carol Tice:

I don't know that any have a particular rep that they pay better than the other ones. They all pay pretty darn well. It's more a question of finding the markets you could get in with in trades because of what you know.

Ah, _____ (1:02:17) has a good question. "Do we need to wait for approval of our query draft before we can write the LOI?"

No.

And, "Do we have to write both a hybrid and a business one?"

No. Pick one format based on who you want to pitch and write one.

Cynthia says, "How acceptable as an international traveling writer is it to request payment via PayPal and not a check?"

I don't know why you would ever request payment via PayPal because they charge you a lot on there. You know, why not go for ACH? But I don't know, I'm not an international traveling writer. I wish. But no.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I can understand where she's coming from because when I get checks, I just got a check from Amazon Australia, and it's like, they're probably going to charge me 20 bucks to cash this check.

Carol Tice:

Yeah.

Linda Formichelli:

You know? So I don't know the answer to that.

Carol Tice:

But I mean, the issue isn't any different from meeting the needs of any international client you have that's paying you across borders. The fact that you are traveling isn't what's relevant. It's like, I'm in the US and I have a client in New Zealand or Canada, you know, or the UK, all of which I've had. It's the same issue. You know, sometimes I have them do ACH, do a bank transfer, and yeah, they sock you with a fee for that, but it's still better than doing PayPal.

You know, there are PayPal substitutes that I think are more flexible, charge lower rates. You know, you really have to work it out with your client. Some clients just don't do PayPal and some only do PayPal. To me, I guess I do whatever makes it work with the client if I want to work with them.

So Jason says, "I have a great interview with a top immigration attorney who gave me a couple of ideas about the upcoming Supreme Court case on marriage equality. The rub is I haven't been able to find any of the rather specific type of couple I need to serve as real people."

Really? This attorney can't give you someone who is in the case? They don't have any connections in the community?

"I want to be pitching LGBT publications, national news magazines, can those serve as my eight query letters?"

That is all one idea. It can be one of your eight. If people are wondering, you cannot send the same idea to eight places and have that be your eight queries. We're looking for eight different queries.

But you know, in general people who tell me they can't find real people sources, I just want to say that I'm skeptical that you can't find them. I have had to find some of the most bizarre things imaginable. I know Linda has too. And you have to...it's really about a mentality that you're going to be an unstoppable force of nature and keep going until you have that source. Ask everyone you can think of. You know, call...

Linda Formichelli:

Look for forums online.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Call some LGBT agencies and tell them you're trying to make this story happen. They will help you. They know people. It's one big little community and they will help you. And the attorney should know resources that should help you.

Linda Formichelli:

Jason, if you're in the chat let us know what kind of couple you're looking for. Maybe we'll have more of a...

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Try and source it in the class even.

Linda Formichelli:

So I answered Showanda in a chat but I want to say it here. She says, "Is it unrealistic to send _____ (1:05:50) should it be more or less?"

And I can't tell you how many is the right amount because it's different for everybody depending on your hit rate and how much time you have, but _____ (1:06:01), the more marketing you can do the better, and whatever time you have to work that is not filled with working on a paying assignment should be spent marketing, and most of that marketing should be reaching out to and directly contacting prospects as opposed to, for example, like doing social media or checking out the job boards or whatever. So the more you can do the better. Five to ten LOIs is good, 20 is better, 30 is better.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I think if you're doing business prospects where you're just going to their site, you're spending ten minutes seeing the missing piece, you're putting that letter together, you know, you have some stock language you're probably swapping into those, you could certainly send more than ten of those in a week.

Doing a publication is a little harder because you're studying more issues and I don't know if it's realistic to send tons, but I mean, I know people who've sent 50 or 100 in a real short time frame, or 200 or 300. You know, if you can just get in a groove and sit and do business analysis and you know, crank out that custom response.

Excuse me.

You should be able to send quite a few of those out.

So Rachel says, "I have a book coming out next month." Well, congrats on that.

Linda Formichelli:

Awesome.

Carol Tice:

I'm wondering if you're here on chat and you can tell us what the book is about. She says, "I'd like that to be a key part of my reasons to give me gigs. What is the best way to introduce and sell that angle in my LOI?"

I mean, I think it's just part of your bio line. Remember that most LOIs are all about them and then there's a line about you, "I am a Seattle based freelancer writer focused on business." I'd just be adding that, you know, "I am the author of the newly released book Blah." You know? I mean, it just strengthens your credentials, but the question is are you going to be pitching ideas that relate to the same topic as your book or is it unrelated or are you pitching that you want to excerpt your book for them or...I guess I'm not fully understanding.

Linda Formichelli:

So Debbie says, "Is it too late to ask for payment terms if you forgot to ask in the initial conversation?"

No. You definitely want to get that nailed down before you start writing. So if it's a little bit later that's fine as long as you get it nailed down.

Carol Tice:

Okay. Rachel says her book is called New Jersey Fresh: Four Seasons from Farm to Table. Are you self-publishing or this is a coffee table book that some big, you know, food publisher is putting out or...you know, the thing is I think self-published books don't impress people all that much. She says, "I would be pitching food stories." Yeah. You know, I would just put it in your tag line and put a link to it. I guess Rachel has to go.

One question I want to answer out loud that I didn't chat is, "Can you do four queries and four LOIs to be part of the eight?"

Yes. You are totally free to do a combination.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Mix it up however you want.

Carol Tice:

"Can the pitch we're working on for the query letter be one of the eight?"

Yes.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. That'll be one.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Absolutely. And your LOI as well. So I guess that's really kind of two down.

Linda Formichelli:

Correct.

Carol Tice:

So it's not that scary. I feel like we're talking to a lot of people who are kind of freaking out a lot about this bit. Really, it shouldn't be that scary.

Linda Formichelli:

It'll get easier.

Showanda says, "For the travel and real estate industries or travel agencies and real estate agencies good business to target with an LOI?"

What do you think, Carol? You've done those.

Carol Tice:

Well, these are both industries that are changing a lot, travel agencies in particular. You know, I'd be looking hard at who is a successful travel agent now. I mean, look for travel agents that are doing marketing. You know? That's how you'd know they're still spending money and making money. They're mostly part of big franchise networks. So I'm just not sure. Their marketing may be kind of driven by the franchise.

Real estate agencies it's very local and individual. You really need to research to see what they're doing, look at their website, see are they running a blog. Some of them are in real estate now.

Linda Formichelli:

Debbie says, "Should we CC you on pitches if we're not trying to get a refund?"

No. Then you don't have to but you can if you want.

Carol Tice:

Have we done it?

Linda Formichelli:

You know what? Let's look in the questions. And you know what? If anybody posted something in the chat and we missed it, repost it because it's moving so fast sometimes that we miss them. But let me go into the Q&A. Yes. We have a couple more questions. Hold on a second. Let me piece them into the thing.

Carol Tice:

While you're doing that, Cynthia said, "How do you know they're spending money on marketing?"

You open your local paper and you see an ad by them. I actually got an incredible marketing piece from a realtor just recently that she no doubt spent good money having written and designed, and it was like a market report on the island I live on, and how many houses sold last year, and for what prices, and like, she put together this whole...and it was like, laminated. It was like a heavy duty piece. Like, that's someone you could pitch to see if they need a writer. They're clearly spending, you know?

Cynthia says, "Any way to see online if you are geographically _____ (1:11:50)?"

Yeah. Look at their website. Often they'll say, you know, "I appeared in this, or look at my ad in this place."

Bob says, "I got good feedback on my first query. Once that's done would you be able to review that pitch before I send it out?"

I'm not sure. As we said, when we get into the rewrite phase you know, and we have more time we may be able to go back and look at other ideas for people who've already got a green lit idea.

Oh, Kat has a good question. "On an LOI is it still acceptable to use the person's first name in the greeting if you're approaching a business?"

In my world because I'm an old bag it was never acceptable to use a person's first name but maybe that's the German in me, you know, you're waiting for someone to extend the use of the informal form. Those of you in the Netherlands and all who are listening may relate to this answer.

But I let people say, "Call me Bill," and then I do, and I've found you can never go wrong with that, but I know lots of people do first name now. But look at the tone of their site.

Linda Formichelli:

So I just pasted another couple of questions in.

Jason has a doozy. He says...so we asked him about the story he was looking for a couple for, and he says he's been looking all over the place. "My initial story was for a specific webpage for gay dads involving binational couples with kids forced to move overseas to stay together."

So yes.

Carol Tice:

You need to talk to some international gay rights lawyers. They're the people who know those people.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. You should check with Immigration Equality, HRC, _____ (1:13:38), Help a Reporter Out, got a lot more stories out of it which is awesome, very smart of you, but having trouble with this particular, very specific situation.

Carol Tice:

Well here's a question, "Is it acceptable to query an editor you already have a relationship with for this course?"

I guess we would have no way of knowing. If you're willing to write a fully fleshed out query letter to an editor you already have a relationship with, I guess we'll give you credit. I don't know why you would. If you already have a relationship with them I don't know why you would do that.

Linda Formichelli:

True. Yeah.

Carol Tice:

You can usually just drop them a couple lines and get an assignment.

Linda Formichelli:

That's true. I mean, if you do already have a relationship with an editor you've worked with before you can often say, "Hey, I found this news thing, I was wondering if I could write on this for you," and she might ask you a few questions, but I mean, a lot of times you don't have to write a fully fleshed out query.

But let me say, you know, I've written for a lot of the women in health magazines, and no matter how long I wrote for them I was always expected to write the fully fleshed out query except for Family Circle. Everybody else was like, "Query. Query. Query." Which is why I didn't rely on them for 100 percent of my income. You know?

Carol Tice:

So Debbie says, "Is it too late for payment for terms if you forgot to ask in the initial conversation?"

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I answered that one already.

Carol Tice:

Oh. You did? Yeah. Never too late.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. But you can answer it. Yeah.

Carol Tice:

It's never too late to ask.

Linda Formichelli:

Get it nailed down. Get it nailed down.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I forget lots of things in my initial conversations which is why a lot of them end with, "Where should I contact you after I remember what it is I forgot to ask you in this initial conversation?" None of us can remember it all off the top. So just because you didn't have it in that initial moment means nothing in my world.

Let me just look in chat.

Linda Formichelli:

So did we get any...

Carol Tice:

It popped me out of chat just for fun.

Ah, "Does PayPal limit you to withdraw only \$500 a month of your earnings?"

No. Not mine, anyway.

Linda Formichelli:

No. I've taken out thousands and thousands at one point, up to like, _____ (1:15:34) thousand dollars at once.

Carol Tice:

God. I've had clients pay me, yeah, like three grand or something at a time.

Linda Formichelli:

So Debbie said...oh. Go ahead. Want me to go?

Carol Tice:

No. Go ahead.

Linda Formichelli:

Debbie says, "If you get a response from an LOI asking for four to five pitches for blog posts would you do a fully fleshed out pitch for each idea in that case or a shorter version?"

If they're asking for four to five I would definitely give them the shorter version of each one and then say, you know, "If you want any more information on any of these I'd be happy to flesh them out for you." But you do not have to write five huge queries for a blog post.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I don't know. That PayPal thing may be international, just take out 500 every day until you have _____ (1:16:16) if they have some kind of limit because it's international. I know there is some international weirdness that happens. Like you know, I'm always recommending people get FreshBooks to use their PayPal business payments and avoid paying the three percent, but I gather it does not work internationally always. It is definitely a challenge.

Linda Formichelli:

Bob has a question here. Did you get this one? Did you get this one from Bob? "I got good feedback and directions from you on my first query. I think I have a good idea." You got that one? "But need to do more research."

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I said if we have time at the end.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Sorry. Sometimes I'm in the chat and sometimes I'm in the question box and sometimes I'm in between them.

Carol Tice:

I know. Okay. I think we did it. And in record time for this class. This class is awesome, by the way. We love...

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. We're having so much fun. I hope you guys are too.

Carol Tice:

We are loving the level of engagement here and that you're, you know, really wanting to get this done, and it's awesome. And I think for once we don't have a like catalog of questions we didn't get to that we're going to have to post in the forum. So that's awesome. And that's for the questions, everybody, and we will...

Linda Formichelli:

Thank you.

Carol Tice:

...see you back on the thing. And really, if you are stuck with ideas post germs of ideas. Let us help you with them. And then if I can make a comment, listen to what we tell you and do it instead of freaking out that you got some feedback that you needed to work on it more and starting all over again. We've seen a bunch of that and you know...oh. Go ahead.

Linda Formichelli:

I'm sorry. Go ahead.

She has one more question. "I know the eight queries and LOIs have to be different in idea and info, but can they be sent to some of the same publications?"

Yes.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I mean, we don't know how often you want to hit one editor with ideas. If you want to be a pest. But that's your business. But as long as it's eight different ideas. Really the key is developing different pitches in a short time. That is going to be an incredible skill. I'm so excited that we're like, putting that on people and making it happen because that will stand you in good stead for a long time.

All right, folks. See you back on the forum.

Linda Formichelli:

Bye everyone. Thank you. Bye.