

Becoming Better Writer

Don Bates

Instructor in Writing and Clinical Assistant Professor
New York University

@batesdon1 Sabrina Kidwai, APR

Senior Manager, Public Relations
ASAE

@packersgirl



Session Logistics

Think Like a Journalist

- Understand journalistic process, ethics, standards
- Research for better content
- Understand the “So What” factor
- Structure NRs/pitches to fit different channels (TV, radio, print, online)
- Value and write “catchy” headlines
- Use visuals

Sample of Bad Pitch

Hi Julie,

I'm writing to discuss my client, Denver-based film production company [Havey Productions](#) and inquire about your opportunities for byline articles. At this time, is *Associations Now* accepting submissions for byline articles? If so, I'd love to submit the following for your review...

Founded by Jim Havey in 1979, Havey Pro specializes in creating emotionally rich, top-quality films that inspire audiences to act. In addition to documentary filmmaking, they are experts at films for clients in the non-profit and philanthropic sectors.

We have surveyed a cross section of our non-profit clients on the topic of "Successful Film Production for Non-Profits," and along with Jim Havey's own thoughts on best practices for film production, we would like to propose a service-oriented byline article written by Jim Havey that gets your audience thinking about how to maximize their investment in film to support their development and marketing goals.

Topics that we would like to cover in this article include:

- The case for using film as part of your development and marketing activities if you aren't already doing it
- Developing a strategy for your film project
- Establishing a budget for a film
- How to select the right production partner
- Managing internal resources: who do you need on your team to produce a film on-time, on-brand and on-budget?
- Reinforcing your brand through the use of film
- How to measure ROI for your film projects
- A discussion of some of the inevitable challenges that you will encounter when you produce a film

(More information that I cut out here)

Look forward to all thoughts you may have.

Another bad sample

Good morning,

Today, the Devin Davis Mortgage Company announced that it is guaranteeing timely loan closings to qualified borrowers with its “Purchase Guaranteed Close” program. Further, if the loan is not closed within the agreed upon date, Davis guarantees a \$1,000 credit to the borrower at the time of closing.

According to Ellie Mae’s latest [Origination Insight Report](#), the average closing time for first mortgages in June 2013 was 47 days, a three-day increase from the previous month. In an effort to overcome this industry challenge of on-time closing fulfillment, Churchill’s “Purchase Guaranteed Close” program ensures the agreed-upon close date is met.

To speak with someone at Devin Davis directly regarding this, or for other news, please contact me.

Thank you,

Name withheld

Example of a good pitch

Hi Sam--

I liked your recent article on association websites in CEO Update. I have an article idea for another association-related technology story you may be interested.

Cloud computing is dramatically changing the way **associations** use technology. But let's face it, there are a lot of cloud computing providers out there, and they all have their own definitions of the cloud, service standards, etc. **So, how does an association executive know how to choose the right cloud provider?**

I'd like to offer you an interview with cloud **expert** and **25-year IT industry veteran** Archer Prewitt, **founder and CEO** of SIVA Information Technology. **He's a former association CIO**, and he could **unbiased, vendor-neutral** information on exactly **what associations need to know** when selecting a cloud provider.

Archer can answer **key questions that associations considering the Cloud often have**, such as--he includes a list here.

At your convenience, can I schedule an appointment for you to speak with Archer? If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time.

Contact information at the end

Bates Pitch Template

Use personal salutation [NOT DEAR EDITOR OR REPORTER]:

Dear Mr. or Ms. [NAME]:

2. Use direct lead and make the “ask”:

I invite you to interview* Ms. Subject, [PROFESSIONAL TITLE/I.D.]. She is a/the [CITE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTIC].

3. Summarize what Ms. Subject wants to discuss:

Ms. Subject would like to discuss/is concerned/believes/thinks/etc. [CITE PROBLEM, CHALLENGE, VIEW]

4. Amplify Ms. Subject’s concern with a few incisive specifics:

More specifically, she thinks [ADD RUN-IN OR BULLETED ITEMS].

5. Clarify attachments/enclosures if you use:

Attached [or enclosed] is/are [DESCRIBE DOCUMENTS RELATED TO YOUR REQUEST, INVITATION – E.G., SURVEY REPORT OR SPEECH].

6. Call for action:

I will call you [TIME, DATE – E.G., NEXT MONDAY, NEXT WEEK, FRIDAY] to discuss this interview.

7. Close:

Sincerely [INCLUDE 24/7 CONTACT INFORMATION WITH NAME/TITLE/ETC.]

* **Examples of other “asks”:** to cover event, tour facility, test product, visit offices, present award, speak at conference.

Find Newsworthy Stories

- Audit/deconstruct possibilities
- Survey top managers, human resources
- Organize findings/coverage in Gantt chart
- Invite employees to suggest ideas, request in newsletters/bulletins
- Assign non-PR stringers, guide them, reward them
- Hold weekly editorial meetings

Tell Good Stories

- Personalize real people, real events
- Support organizational mission
- Integrate other characters
- Include strong quotes based on interviews, not made up
- Use expressive visuals
- Examples of great storytelling

Volvo Trucks Commercial



Another Great Story



Include Dramatic Elements

- Use current news, trends, public issues
- Emphasize big picture, FYA not FYI
- Focus on audience impact
- Include informative (not gratuitous) quotes
- Reference C-suite speeches, reports
- Reference other companies if appropriate
- Add pull quotes, callouts, internet links, photos, videos, podcasts

Build Better Writing Habits

- Empower yourself and the writing function.
- Write for action, make things happen
- Create circle of mentors
- Add value to organization's investment
- Become a word worker
- Use your writing to help management
- Take charge of your role and function
- Read/write, write/read
- Understand and cultivate social media

Takeaways

- Use current news, trends, issues
- Be strategic thinker, writer
- Be word worker
- Know what makes your organization best, only, first, special
- Connect writing to outside world
- Keep “So What” factor top-of-mind
- Take charge of role, function

THANK YOU

Final Questions?

LEARNING

RESEARCH

IDEAS

RESOURCES

ADVOCACY

RESOURCES

EDUCATION