



# 8 ESSENTIAL TIPS

## A Former Healthcare Editor's Guide to Earned Media

**You've written a great article about a timely healthcare topic, sent it to one of your favorite publications, and are anxiously waiting to hear if the piece has been accepted. You wait. And you wait. And you wait. Crickets.**

Sound familiar? Most people who have attempted to pitch a bylined article are well-acquainted with this form of rejection. Even the most seasoned PR professionals, who interact with editors every day, have experienced it.

In fact, it's becoming harder and harder to place contributed pieces. Many publications no longer accept them, and if they do, their editors are dealing with fewer resources and ever-expanding workloads. Most editors barely have time to skim contributed pieces, let alone read them thoroughly.

How do I know? Because I've been in their shoes.

Prior to joining healthcare consultancy Sage Growth Partners, I spent several years as a writer, editor, and editorial director at a large healthcare publishing company. There, I oversaw content and strategy for

publications such as *Managed Healthcare Executive*, *Physicians Practice Journal*, and *Drug Topics*—many of the same publications for which I now capture earned media for clients.

Since I made the leap to Sage Growth Partners more than three years ago, I've experienced the thrill and challenges of pitching content firsthand. I've also seen how valuable a successful pitch can be for clients. Capturing earned media is decidedly worth the effort.

To help your company successfully capture earned media and experience its many benefits, I've assembled this list of eight tips based on my experiences on both the editorial side and the pitching side.

### KEY BENEFITS OF EARNED MEDIA

Earned media is one of the most effective ways for a company to increase brand awareness, establish thought leadership, enhance credibility, and show how their solution solves industry problems.

# 8 TIPS FOR GETTING PUBLISHED

## 1

### ASK YOURSELF THE “TWO KEY QUESTIONS” PRIOR TO SUBMITTING ANY PIECE

When reviewing contributed pieces, editors often consider two key questions:

- Is this content valuable to my readers?
- Is this content overly promotional?

If the editor answers “yes” to question #1 and “no” to question #2, it’s likely that they will publish your piece.

Editors weigh many factors when determining whether content is valuable. These include whether it is timely, relevant, compelling, and well-written.

They also refuse any piece that is overly promotional—even a hint of self-promotion can lead to rejection. That’s why, at Sage, we usually recommend that clients don’t include their company name within the contributed article. Instead, we add an author bio to the end of the piece that includes the company name, description, and a hyperlink to the company website.

Your thought leadership will be promotion enough, and will lead readers to your company bio or website on merit alone.

## 2

### INCLUDE NEW AND COMPELLING DATA

Incorporating new, interesting, and credible data helps contributed pieces stand out to editors.

There are a few different ways to incorporate data. One of the most successful methods is by working with an experienced market research partner like Sage to conduct an independent survey on your behalf.

For example, a patient engagement company might contract with Sage to survey 100 hospital and health system leaders on their top patient engagement needs and challenges. The survey responses would yield trends and insights that the patient engagement company could use to support and ground their article.

Another option is to incorporate relevant ROI, outcomes, or other data from within your company that relates to your piece. For example, we recently:

- Used a predictive analytics client’s solution to forecast healthcare trends. Then, we wrote, pitched, and placed an article on their behalf that featured key findings.
- Helped a patient safety client calculate the annual savings hospitals could incur by making safety improvements. We used the findings to ground an article we wrote, pitched, and ultimately placed in a leading industry publication.

### SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Ensure the introduction has a compelling and enticing hook
- ☐ Add subheads to help break up the article
- ☐ Check spelling and grammar
- ☐ Avoid use of passive voice
- ☐ Ask yourself the “Two Key Questions”
- ☐ Have two strong writers edit and proof the piece

## 3

### SELECT THE RIGHT AUTHOR

When reviewing your piece, editors will carefully consider the author’s credentials and may even reject your piece if the author isn’t the right fit.

Select an author whose credentials match the content. For example, for a clinical piece, find a physician or other clinician in your organization to author it; for an article about pharmacy trends, find a pharmacist; for a behavioral health article, find a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other individual with similar credentials. Many publications prefer a single author, so try to limit your piece to one.

## 4

## FOLLOW THE RULES

Publications have different rules regarding contributed pieces. Here are three important rules to follow:

- **Submission requirements.** Some publications require submissions via electronic forms on their websites. Others request that you send e-mails to a designated inbox. If you can't find submission directions on the publication's site, track down an editor's e-mail address with a site search and e-mail that editor. Even better: Find an editor who has written about a similar topic recently, then create a personalized pitch for them (for more on this, see tip #6 below).
- **Word count.** Many publications limit the number of words in contributed pieces. If you can't find specific guidelines, we recommend a word count of 700 to 900 words.

- **Post-publication requirements.** If your piece is published, check with the editor regarding post-publication rules. While it's a great idea to promote the coverage on your website, most publications require that you publish only the title and first few sentences on your site. Then, you must link to the full piece on the publication's website.

## CRITICAL MISSTEP

One of the fastest ways to sour a relationship with an editor or publication is to fail to follow their post-publication requirements. When in doubt, ask.

## 5

## MAKE IT EASY FOR THE EDITOR

As noted, editors are extremely busy and receive numerous pitches each week. The easier you can make it for them to publish your piece (i.e., the less editing they will have to do), the better.

Prior to submitting your article, make sure it adheres to the publication's style and tone by reviewing their recent articles and matching the style of your piece to theirs.

Here are a few key style considerations:

- First-person vs. third-person narrative
- Use of serial commas
- Preference of "healthcare" vs. "health care"
- Hyperlinks vs. footnotes

Tailor the title and description of your article to fit your pitching target. The title should speak as directly to that publication's readers as possible. For example, for a managed care-focused publication, include a reference to managed care executives. For a general healthcare publication, include a broader reference to healthcare leaders or hospital executives.

## 6

## ENGAGE IN PUBLICATION-BASED PITCHING

When you're ready to begin pitching your article, focus on personalization. Editors receive numerous pitches per week, so it's important to help them connect to your pitch.

We recommend crafting a short and compelling subject line for your email, writing a brief and personalized note, and attaching your piece.

In your note:

- Reference and compliment a recent article that the editor wrote or published on a similar topic to your contributed piece. Then, explain how your piece expands and relates to that topic.
- Note why your piece is relevant to the publication's readers.
- Explain that you are happy to make any modifications or edits necessary.

## 7

**DON'T GIVE UP EASILY**

If you submit a piece to an editor and don't hear back, be sure to follow up. Editors are busy, and you may have caught them on a rough day.

A good rule of thumb is to follow up once or twice by email, and then with a quick phone call. We've placed numerous pieces as a result of a second or third follow up.

If you receive a rejection note or if you don't hear back from an editor within two weeks, try pitching your piece to another publication. Just be sure to follow the tips outlined in #4 and #5 first.

## 8

**BUILD CONNECTIONS**

Once an editor has published one of your pieces, send a short thank you email. Then, continue building a relationship with the editor by contacting them every couple of months. This outreach should include a mix of promotional and general outreach.

Contact the editor when you have a new contributed piece to pitch or relevant news to share, but also reach out regularly with compliments when the editor publishes interesting articles or special coverage.

This non-promotional outreach will help foster a long-lasting industry connection that will benefit your organization over time.

Not every piece you publish will be picked up by the media, but following these tips will ensure your time and effort isn't wasted. If a piece isn't picked up, publish it as a blog on your own site. And, when you receive rejections, ask editors for more information on why they rejected the

piece. Then, apply those lessons learned to your next article and pitch. Over time, you'll build more connections with editors and experience greater earned media success. And if you lack the time or confidence to do it yourself, earned media experts like Sage can be a resource.



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Aubrey Westgate is Managing Account Director — B2B Sector, at Sage Growth Partners. A marketing and communications professional specializing in content strategy, planning, and creation, she combines years of content strategy and development experience in healthcare B2B publishing with a strategic focus on elevating brand awareness and demand generation. Prior to joining Sage Growth Partners, she held a variety of editorial positions, including Senior Editor of Physicians Practice Journal, Executive Editor of Managed Healthcare Executive, and Editorial Director of Managed Healthcare Executive and Drug Topics.