

How to make editors vomit...

I'll tell you how in a second. A more important question is, "If you're trying to put your kids through college by churning out magazine articles, and hoping to sell a couple of reprints from every original piece that you got in print, why in the world would you even put "editor" and "vomit" in the same hemisphere?

But that's exactly what I did. Worse yet, that editor used me and the heinous article idea for years to show new writers what not to do if they wanted to make a penny by appearing on his pages!

This must have been 40 years ago (surely before you were born). Even then I was the world's worst sailor because I got seasick in bathtubs.

So you can imagine my delight when I read about a new medicine about to be released that stopped motion sickness dead in its tracks—if the secondary effects didn't kill you first.

In those days I wrote about anything that interested me, then I matched it to publications likewise pervasively affected. I figured there must be a zillion flatlanders with my affliction, so I smelled a windfall in sales from a zesty article about the newest motion sickness medications, fattened with anything I could find about how effective earlier "potions" already on sale were.

Then the Internet was probably used for fishing. The first research you did was in the library, where I sniffed around for several hours, first to see who else had beaten me to the idea and was already in print. If there weren't too many of them and they had usable facts, that was a blessing. It was a time-honored tradition to build (or borrow) from your competitors' printed material.

Nothing in print! I could hear the cash register clanging. So I took to the telephone to find "experts," some self-declared, who were on the front line of action to get the needed quotes and cutting-edge, state-of-the-art facts that editors so loved (as long as you paid the dime, yes dime, to do the phoning.)

Most of us who worked magazines, with newspaper spinoffs, took the same path: a good magazine sale, two or three magazine spin-offs with different slants, some newspaper simultaneous submissions, maybe even a book if the topic was electric. (Most weren't, and books took forever to write. Anyway, spending months wading through seasickness was a no-go for me.)

Somewhere I had gathered enough checkable truths and found several related ideas for by-product shorts or follow-up pieces. The linchpin in this big-money-making scheme was an electric one-page query letter that made the editor virtually beg me to have it to her in three days (that never happened). But if she said, "Let me see it," that was tantamount to a sale, and usually the first firm step to several offshoot pick-ups. (I could call my daughters and tell them to buy their textbooks.)

So I wrote up a dandy, hot-in-the-hands one-page query and sent it to the first editor of the six or so on my marketing list. I spent time on that list. Who were most interested in preventing motion sickness? In-flight magazine editors. The biggest lines paid the most. Off went the gilded query...

Usually it would take a week or two for the reply. (There was no rush because the stamps were only three cents.) But this reply had wings. He couldn't wait. I could almost feel the big bucks in my hands! He was probably holding up the next issue so he could slip it in.

I can almost remember reading his reply word for word: "Is this a joke? An article about motion sickness in an in-flight

magazine? It almost makes me vomit just thinking about it. Rest assured that if any of our passengers got past the first paragraph the pilot would hear a chorus of retching clear up to the cockpit." And that was it. No thank you, no best wishes. I guess it was a no. He didn't even suggest that I send it to his competition!

There was a point there but it took several shocked days for me to start laughing!

When you draw up your marketing list you have to think: why would the editor of those publications want to share your spine-tingling prose and gripping revelations with their readers?

So if there's even the faintest whiff of nausea in the air, you'd best just save your 3-cent (or 49-cent) stamp!

P.S. But I did sell it to two general-interest magazines and one newspaper. I don't think the anti-*mareo* medicine worked either. I kept my eye out for it, for obvious reasons, but it seemed to have faded, as did my million-dollar windfall from anti-seasickness articles.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett