

WHY WRITERS SHOULD CONSIDER PHOTOGRAPHY

Take a look at any magazine and you'll see that it is full of glossy, colourful pictures. Some magazines have more photographs than words. If you aspire to be a freelance writer and want to sell your words to a magazine, or if you've had some success to date but want to build upon that success, then I believe you should consider adding photography to your list of skills. Why? Because it makes good business sense.

A freelance writer is a business looking for customers: magazines or publishers. Magazines and publishers are looking for suppliers: freelance writers and freelance photographers. Now, think about this relationship from an editor's perspective. If a freelance writer submits an article called *How To Forage For Food* and the editor likes it, the editor has two options:

- To look for suitable photos from a photographic agency or some other picture source,
- To hire a freelance photographer to go out and take some suitable images.

What happens if the editor's photographic budget doesn't

cover the fee the photographic agency requires for the photos the editor wants to use? That time searching for suitable images has been wasted. Commissioning a freelance photographer to take some photographs takes time too. What happens if the freelance photographer doesn't provide the exact photos the editor was looking for, or the weather wasn't right on the day? That's more time wasted. Time editors don't have. (Who does?)

I spent many years writing a regular column for a county magazine, and during a meeting with the editor, she said:

“My dream supplier is someone who can provide the words and pictures. Every page in my magazine needs a words-and-picture package because every page is illustrated with photos. If a writer sends me an article I want to use, but it doesn't have any photos, I then have to spend time trying to find suitable images. At particularly busy times, if I have a page to fill and I have a choice between a well-written article without pictures or a good article that needs some editing but comes with photographs, I will always go with the good article with pictures. As an editor, my skill is editing text. I can edit a good article into a great article in a couple of minutes. Finding the right photographs can take two or three hours.”

There you have it. Straight from the horse's mouth. (Not that the editor looked anything like a horse, I hasten to add.) Writers who can provide editors with a complete words-and-picture package are making the editor's life easier. So why shouldn't that writer be you? If you have a camera go and dig it out from the back of the cupboard because soon it's going to be earning you some cash. And if you don't have a camera, consider investing in one because you could recover its cost with your first sale.

Letters & Fillers Market

Magazines love reader-interactivity, and a great way to do this is to invite readers to send in letters where they can comment on articles they've read in previous issues, or simply share something that has happened in their own lives. In many magazines, the readers' letter page often has a club-like feel to it, as if they are friends gathering together to share news over a coffee. Photographs, nowadays, accompany many of these letters, and some magazines will pay extra for those letters with photos.

Many of the better paying opportunities are in the women's weekly magazines, so here's an example of some of the words-and-picture opportunities I've found in one issue of one such magazine:

- **The Readers' Letter Page** - every letter is accompanied by a photograph. The photograph is often a humorous one with the reader in a funny situation, or perhaps a reader's child in a cute pose. The magazine paid these readers £100 (\$120) for every piece used. This is where you need to understand that if you want your letter published in this section then you must include a photograph too.
- **Readers' Top Tips Page** - This page has 12 useful household tips, sent in by readers. Seven have photographs accompanying them, five are words only. The magazine paid £30 (\$35) for word-only tips, but £60 (\$75) for tips accompanied by a photograph. See? Supplying photos means the earning potential is greater.
- **Readers' Special Moments** - a double-page spread where readers share those special days in their lives: marriages, anniversaries, thrilling holidays or

fun days out. Every story has a photograph, for which the magazine paid £40 (\$50). So, no photograph means you don't stand a chance of selling your words to this slot.

- Another letters page is devoted to the silly things in life. Again, every letter is illustrated with a photograph and they paid £100 (\$125) for the Letter of the Week, and £50 (\$60) for all of the other letters used, plus another £25 (\$30) for every photograph used.

None of the photographs on these pages has been taken by professional photographers in a photographic studio. They've all been taken by the readers on their mobile phones, or possibly with a small compact camera. Many are the type of photos share with family and friends on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They're just ordinary photos, but they're earning the writer extra money.

Illustrated Articles

A writer who provides illustrated articles can improve their fortunes in two ways:

- Some magazines will pay extra for the photographs, in addition to the words. Sometimes, this extra money can make writing the article worth the effort in the first place. For example, one magazine used to pay £30 (\$35) for 1,000 words, which isn't much! This is not a market I would normally consider. However, they also paid £25 (\$30) for every photograph published and they often used eight images per article. Whilst a 1,000-word article would earn the writer £30 (\$35), a 1,000-word illustrated article would earn £230

(\$280). Being able to offer photographs can turn a poor market into a useful market worth writing for.

- Some magazines won't pay extra for photographs, but they only accept complete words-and-picture packages. Therefore, being able to provide photos opens up these new markets to you. Who doesn't want more customers? And while they don't pay anything extra for photographs, their rates of pay tend to be higher than those markets that will just buy the words from you. So that mobile phone in your pocket could be the key to new magazine markets.

Illustrated articles are more interesting to the reader. Often, it is the photographs that grab the reader's interest first, as they flick through the pages. Those images complement the words, while also adding extra detail. A travel feature needs photographs showing readers the locations and attractions that can be experienced at these destinations. A cookery magazine needs a photograph of the finished dish to accompany the recipe. A gardening article needs photographs to show the different plants and flowers used in a design. Look at any article in any magazine and imagine the photos were not there. Suddenly, the page looks drab and boring.

Step-by-Step Features

Have you ever followed a step-by-step article? Photographs are used to explain a technical aspect of the process, or to show the reader what something should look like before they move onto the next stage. Photographs give the readers confidence that they are following the instructions properly. They do not need to be stunningly beautiful images, worthy of a posh art gallery; they simply need to be in focus and show a specific aspect of the project.

While step-by-step features are popular in certain types of magazines (particularly craft, DIY and gardening titles), they can appear anywhere, if you have the right idea. I sold an article showing readers how to clean up their garden fishpond in ten easy steps. One of the photographs used was of a dirty pile of slimy sludge that I'd cleared out from the bottom of the garden pond. It certainly wasn't a beautiful image, but it illustrated the step in the article, which is why the magazine bought it. The feature was 800-words long and had twelve photos. They paid £100 (\$125) for the words and another £240 (\$300) for the photographs.

Without photographs, a writer will have difficulty selling a step-by-step feature because editors can't get the photos from anywhere else unless they commission a photographer to tackle the step-by-step process and take the photos. If you're going to create a step-by-step article, you might as well take the photographs yourself.

Non-Fiction Books

When you've sold several articles on one particular topic, you might want to think about turning the information in those features into a book. Publishers look more favourably on writers whose work has already been published in magazine format, so if your camera has opened up new magazine markets, it could also lead to bigger projects, such as non-fiction books.

One of my markets is providing walking route descriptions for some of the walking magazines, and this includes supplying photographs of the views and interesting sights walkers can see on route. I had an idea for a walking book and approached a publisher with a proposal. Having studied the publisher's series I was targeting, I noticed all of their books in this particular series had two photographs per walking route. So I made a point in my book proposal that I could supply a

selection of photographs, enabling them to select at least two for each route.

I also included photocopies of my published walking routes, all of which included photographs. This gave the publishers an idea of the photos I could provide, whilst also demonstrating that I was used to taking photographs to complement my words. The book was commissioned and during a conversation the publisher advised me that had they needed to source the images from elsewhere, the cost would have to have been deducted from *my* advance. So, not only did photos help me to secure the contract, but they also saved me money.

Research Material

As writers, we're forever being told to carry a notebook and pen with us at all times to jot down ideas as they come to us. (I guarantee you will forget an idea if you don't write it down.) However, in addition to a notebook and pen, every writer should also carry a camera at all times. These days, that's easy; most mobile phones have built-in cameras, and few of us seem capable of going anywhere without our phones.

Cameras make fantastic research tools. Think of them as pictorial notebooks. Want to make a note of the castle you're visiting? Does it have a drawbridge? How many arrow slots are in each tower? What colour are the stone walls? All you need to do is take a few photographs and you'll be able to answer all of these questions at any time in the future. Photographs are capable of triggering memories, which is why cameras make brilliant research tools. Take a photo of a fish and chip shop on the coast and your nostrils will soon be twitching at the smell of vinegar on hot, fluffy, just-out-of-the-frier chips. (Go on, admit it. You can smell them right now, can't you?)

The Digital Benefits

Digital photography has many benefits:

- **Instantaneous.** Take a photo on a digital camera and it's on the LCD screen within seconds. This means that when you take a photo, if it doesn't look right, you can delete it and take another, better photo.
- **Cost.** Digital photos are much cheaper than the rolls of film that used to contain 24 or 36 frames. Film forced photographers to think carefully about capturing the photo in the first place. That's not to say that we can be slapdash with the composition of our photos; we can't. For professional photographers, thinking carefully about composition is vital, but digital cameras allow us to experiment to find the right composition we're looking for, at no extra cost. All we're limited by is the size of our memory card (which is capable of holding hundreds, if not thousands, of photographs). That's brilliant for photos we want to take for research purposes. But it also offers flexibility. I often take two photos of a scene: one with the camera held horizontally (often called landscape) and one with the camera rotated vertically (known as portrait). A landscape photo might be used in a magazine as a double-page spread (across two pages), whilst a portrait photo might be used on one page, or even the front cover of the magazine. Digital means that taking two photos of the same scene doesn't cost anything extra (except some space on your memory card or computer hard drive).
- **Copies.** With digital, it is easier making copies.

Download the photos to your computer and then back them up to another disk in case your main computer fails. This also means when you send photos to editors, you send them a copy, not the original. With film, you either sent the original, or you paid extra to get another copy made.

So, as you can see, every writer with a camera has more opportunities to sell their words, which increases the amount of money they can earn as a freelance writer. The only outlay is at the start when you buy the camera and a couple of memory cards. If you're serious about your writing, these items are tax-deductible. They are legitimate business expenses that you can claim against any profits you make from your writing. Find some good markets, though, and you'll find the camera repays itself many, many times over.