Time to Move Beyond Member Bylined Content?

Presented by
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• *International Educator* was a quarterly magazine that transformed into a bimonthly magazine

• The quarterly publication was solely written by volunteers and was frequently published late or not at all

• Member-written articles limited the number of member voices in the magazine

• Transitioning to a bimonthly publication required hiring professional writers to maintain a consistent publication schedule
Challenges to Making the Transformation

• Needed to secure buy-in from association leadership
• Needed to secure budgeting to ensure funds to hire freelance writers
• Needed to educate members that professionally written content did not take away from volunteer engagement opportunities (and would increase the number of member voices in each article)
• Needed to educate members that attracting advertisers with professionally written articles was not “bad,” but rather, beneficial
The Results!

- The magazine increased the credibility of the association as a leader in the field
- In three reader surveys over eight years, readers consistently rated the quality of the writing excellent/good (rated in the mid 90% range in each survey)
- *International Educator* was rated #1 among all competitive publications in reader surveys.
- More content was published on a greater variety of topics, which served the entire profession better
- Advertising increased dramatically in part because the quality of the publication was better
- More advertising allowed us to develop supplements on specific content areas to better serve subsets of the membership that previously felt overlooked
- More members wanted to “be in the magazine,” increasing overall membership engagement and enhancing the value of the magazine as a member benefit
- The publication was *always* sent on time (never late!)
Advantages of Using Freelance Writers

• Better Content
• Increased Ability to be Strategic about Editorial Planning
• A More Streamlined Editorial Process
• Faster and Easier Editing
• A Smooth Production Schedule (professionals adhere to deadlines better than volunteers)
• More member voices included in the pages of the magazine
Disadvantages of Relying Solely on Volunteer Writers

- Deadlines are hard to meet because they are volunteering and this is not a priority
- Writing quality is typically not as good
- Editing takes longer due to writing quality
- Back and forth with editing requires more work because often volunteer writers can be sensitive to the editing process
- Difficult to strategically plan editorial content because deadlines may not be met in time
- Publication schedule can be difficult to maintain or enforce due to reliance on volunteers to meet critical deadlines
- Fewer members voices are included in the magazine
• Using freelance writers does not mean that members can’t contribute writing. It means that writing by volunteers can be strategically placed in the right sections of the magazine and can serve as evergreen material.
Breakdown of Professional Vs. Volunteer Writers

**Freelancers**
- Feature articles
- Columns

**Volunteers**
- Opinion Pieces
- Narrative Pieces
- Submissions of short items: photos, short vignettes
- Book reviews

*Some exceptional member writers might be able to do relevant columns*
Tips On Using Freelancers to Supplement Content in Your Magazine

• If you don’t have a dedicated budget for freelancers, start small.
• Find whatever you have left over to assign a short article vs a large feature.
• In the next budget cycle, plan to make the case to develop or increase a freelance budget for the following year.
• To make your case, create a list of articles you would like to have in the magazine that can only be written by a professional because it requires multiple interviews, which is a skill volunteers normally don’t have.
• Make the case that you want to increase the credibility of the magazine by better representing the entire profession. Freelancers interview multiple professionals. This is better than having a volunteer writer writing from a single perspective.
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