

# Bread and Butter Markets

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If you really want to boost your writing career, and see your name in dozens of high-paying markets (and on dozens of checks), start hunting up your own selection of "bread and butter" magazines. There are literally hundreds of opportunities awaiting you.

## Bread and Butter Markets

When I teach freelance writing, one of my first assignments is to ask students to choose a potential market for the article they plan to develop in my class. And every time, at least two thirds of my students choose a major women's magazine that can be found at every supermarket checkout counter. I call it "The Redbook Syndrome" -- the natural inclination to aim for a publication with which the writer is probably most familiar, and which, of course, is top of the line in terms of pay and popularity.

Unfortunately, Redbook and its checkout-stand cousins are far beyond the reach of most first-time freelancers (and, indeed, most of the rest of us). Selling an article to a major women's magazine is a goal many of us harbor -- but such sales are the equivalent of cake to the average freelancer. It's delicious and rich, but not something you'll be able to enjoy that often, and definitely not likely to sustain your writing career.

Instead, I urge writers to look beyond the checkout counters, and seek out the hundreds of more specialized, less well-known publications that are literally the bread and butter of the savvy freelancer's career. These magazines can be found in a number of places; some, you'll discover just by wandering over to the magazine rack in your local supermarket, or better, the racks of a major bookstore. Others can be found in places where you may shop for the supplies that fuel your special interests or hobbies: the pet shop, the sporting goods store, the Christian bookstore, the hobby or fabric store. Still others are available to members of specific groups, such as publications put out by insurance companies like AAA.

When my students declare their intention of writing for a major women's magazine, my next question is "what makes you think that you can break into such a magazine?" The answer is often a rather vague "Well, it's for women, and I'm a woman, so I have a lot in common with the readers..."

While this is hardly enough to get an editor's attention, determining your area of "commonality" with a magazine's readers is a good place to start in your quest to identify those bread-and-butter magazines that might be right for you. You can start in one of two ways: either by scanning the magazine shelves and selecting publications that look interesting, or by identifying your areas of interest, experience and expertise and then going hunting for magazines that match.

Either way, the point is finding a match, or more likely, many matches. The beauty of the special-interest marketplace is that most of us have many areas of interest and experience. Are you a parent? Do you own a cat or a dog, or a bird or a ferret? Do you love to ski, or look forward to taking to the road in your RV every summer? Do you knit or crochet, or build birdhouses in your garage? Are you drawn to your craft store's scrapbooking aisle like a moth to the flame? Are people beginning to wonder if your digital camera has been grafted to your hand? Does your bookshelf groan under the weight of several dozen books on the Civil War?

One of the most common complaints I hear from new freelancers is "I can't think of anything to write about." If you were able to answer "yes" to any of the questions above, however -- or, better yet, if my short list prompted you to start coming up with a list of your own ("No, I don't knit, but I do make my own lace; I'd rather die than own an RV but I love my motorboat...") -- then you'll never have to worry about a shortage of ideas. And that means you'll never lack for articles.

Nor will you necessarily need a portfolio jammed with clips to break into these markets. In most cases, your personal experience or expertise is of more interest to an editor than your writing ability. As the editor of Reptiles notes in their guidelines, "experience is much preferred over an author who simply scans a book or does some brief research on the Internet before churning out an article." The editor of Organic Gardening seeks writers who have developed techniques

that work in their own gardens, and who have "the capacity to clearly describe what you've learned to other gardeners in a simple but engaging manner."

"But I'm not an expert," you might be thinking now. "Sure, I like to dabble in my hobby, but lots of other people are far better at it than I am!" Don't let that stop you! I've made a total of two quilts in my life, one of which was at least a foot narrower at the bottom than the top -- yet I've sold three articles to quilt magazines (and resold one of those articles several times). I'm just an "ordinary" pet owner, but I've sold dozens of articles to cat magazines. On the basis of running my own business as a writer, I've managed to sell articles to Entrepreneur and several of their subsidiary publications. I've even managed to sell an article to a Victorian decorating publication based, not on my nonexistent knowledge of Victoriana, but on my interest in the history of Christmas decor.

Don't let this confession lull you into the belief that you don't need any knowledge of a subject to pitch an article to these publications. Most special-interest magazines target an experienced audience. While most pet magazines, for example, do carry articles of interest to first-time pet owners, the majority of their readers have owned pets for many years. Thus, even if you are a relative beginner, you need to seek out topics and ideas that will appeal to readers who may, in fact, be far more experienced than you are.

Start by reviewing several copies of a publication that interests you, or at least try to review its back issue index. Determine what types of articles are offered in every issue. For example, a pet magazine is likely to offer at least one training article, one health article, one breed article, and one general care article per issue. That gives you an insight into the types of features it needs most often -- which is generally the best place to break in. Take a look, as well, at the types of seasonal material that a publication features; most magazines need to cover specific types of topics at different times of the year. A craft magazine, for example, might look for articles on easy crafts for kids for a summer issue, but would prefer articles on crafting gifts or seasonal decorations for its fall and winter issues.

If this still hasn't sparked a glimmer of inspiration, try one of these techniques for breaking in:

- 1) Ask yourself what questions you'd like to see answered on a topic. Is there a particular garden problem that has been plaguing you? Chances are, it is plaguing others -- so go interview an expert at your local nursery, get the answer, and write it up.
  
- 2) Identify unusual experiences that have happened to you. While no pet magazine wants to hear yet another account of "my first puppy," if that first puppy had an unusual behavior problem or health condition, this might be the source of a good article. For example, when one of my cats was diagnosed with high blood pressure, I realized that very few cat owners even knew that this condition existed -- which led to an award-winning article!
  
- 3) Combine areas of expertise. So you're a parent -- and you love to ski. How about developing an article for a parenting magazine on how to introduce your children to the sport of skiing? Or an article for a ski magazine on child safety tips?
  
- 4) Combine your interests with your travels. When you take a vacation, look for people or places that relate to some other area of interest. Perhaps you love quilts, and stumble across a unique, little-known quilt museum, or an artisan who creates her own fabrics using local materials or patterns. Such gems of discovery may serve several markets: You might be able to sell such a piece to a quilt magazine, a travel publication, and a regional publication that covers the area you visited.
  
- 5) Seek out experts in the field.

Even if you don't consider yourself an expert, you can always interview someone who is. And with the advantage of the Internet, you no longer have to limit your interviews to "local" experts -- you can easily locate, and speak with, experts

around the world. Editors always love expert interviews!

So the next time you're in the local supermarket or bookstore, put down that *Woman's Day* and step away from the checkout counter. If you really want to boost your writing career, and see your name in dozens of high-paying markets (and on dozens of checks), start hunting up your own selection of "bread and butter" magazines. There are literally hundreds of opportunities awaiting you.

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Moira Allen, editor of [Writing-World.com](http://Writing-World.com), has published more than 350 articles and columns and seven books, including *How to Write for Magazines*, *Starting Your Career as a Freelance Writer*, *The Writer's Guide to Queries, Pitches and Proposals*, and *Writing.com: Creative Internet Strategies to Advance Your Writing Career*. Allen has served as columnist and contributing editor for *The Writer* and has written for *Writer's Digest*, *Byline*, and various other writing publications. In addition to [Writing-World.com](http://Writing-World.com), Allen hosts the travel website [TimeTravel-Britain.com](http://TimeTravel-Britain.com), [The Pet Loss Support Page](http://The Pet Loss Support Page), and the photography website [AllenImages.net](http://AllenImages.net). She can be contacted at editors "at" [writing-world.com](http://writing-world.com). Copyright © 2006 Moira Allen