

Finding Sample Magazines - Without Breaking the Bank

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Saturday, 21 February 2009
Last Updated Sunday, 22 February 2009

For little or no money, hone in on the right publisher for your articles. Being familiar with what kind of articles a magazine publishes is critical for successful submissions, but buying magazines or subscriptions can get costly.

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I'm always amused by magazine guidelines that ask a writer to read "five or six back issues before submitting." Such requests must be issued by editors who are desperate to fob off their back issues, at \$3 to \$5 a piece. Unfortunately, trying to obtain even ONE sample issue of every magazine you'd like to write for, or would like to learn more about, can be prohibitively expensive. Many publications charge more for a sample copy than you'd pay for the same magazine on the newsstand, and even those that ask only for postage may require you to shell out \$2 or \$3 in stamps.

There are alternatives, however. Here are some ways that you can locate sample copies without paying a penny (and some ways that will cost you a little, but not a lot).

- 1) Go through your Writer's Market* and pick out all the publications that offer a free sample copy. You may be surprised at how many charge nothing at all (not even postage). If possible, request these samples via e-mail.
- 2) Visit the library. Most libraries have extensive magazine sections, and you can either browse back issues there or check them out and take them home. Many libraries can also order other publications for you through inter-library loan, though this can often take weeks.
- 3) Check your library for a "magazine exchange" corner. Many libraries allow patrons to drop off unwanted magazines, and on some days you can find lots of interesting titles. Check the dates, though; a pile of magazines from the 1980's is not going to help you determine what a publication is covering today.
- 4) Visit magazine websites. Many publications archive older articles online, which will give you an excellent idea of the type of material that is published. You may also be able to find the magazine's guidelines online; if you don't see a button that says "submission guidelines" (or "authors" or "contributors"), look under "About Us" or "Contact Us."
- 5) Check the magazine piles at your doctor's or dentist's office. If you find something that interests you, ask the receptionist if you can "borrow" it -- or bring along some unwanted magazines of your own to exchange. (Some offices also offer free publications; I've found free regional baby magazines at women's clinics.)
- 6) Keep your eyes open when visiting bookstores or specialty stores. I've just sold an article to several editions of a country crafts/collectibles magazine I found in a craft boutique.
- 7) Respond to "free issue" offers. Many publications solicit subscribers by sending out offers for a free issue. (I've just received offers for a free issue of Britain's "Realm" magazine and Scottish Life; needless to say, I've said "yes" to both.) If you don't want the subscription, just write "cancel" on the invoice when it arrives.
- 8) Look for trial offers online. Many magazine sites have "free trial offers" on their websites (though they can be hard to

find -- I found Southern Living's offer for two free issues only after clicking on their "free newsletter" link).

9) Look for free trial offers through magazine subscription sites. Enews.com, for example, offers a trial period of up to three issues on all its subscriptions. However, to place the order in the first place, you'll have to provide credit card information; you then have 90 days to cancel the subscription through the online customer service section before your card is charged.

10) Look for magazines on sites that offer "free stuff". One such site is FreeSiteX -- however, every link that I clicked on led to something other than the magazine being advertised. Another is Free2Try. Try searching on "free magazines" for more free sites. MagsNow.com, for example, offers three free "promo" copies of various publications for any paid subscription.

11) Use airline mileage credits to pay for subscriptions. If you tend to accumulate only small amounts of frequent flyer miles (not enough to add up to free travel), find out if your program offers magazine subscriptions. Many do, and it's a great way to use up a few hundred miles here and there. Your program will often send out such an offer when your miles are about to expire.

12) Contact individual magazines and find out if they provide a free sample copy, even if they don't have one advertised. Approach them as if you were a would-be subscriber, not a writer!

13) Exchange magazines with friends, relatives, and writing buddies.

14) Ask for gift subscriptions to magazines that particularly interest you.

15) Once you've begun to write for a publication (even if you've just sold them a single article), ask to be added to their complimentary copy list.

And now some not-quite-free methods:

1) Sign up for a "gift subscription" to a publication that interests you. Often, gift subscriptions are less expensive than regular subscriptions; I've found them at 2/3 to 1/2 the cost. If necessary, have your subscription mailed to someone else, as the publication may not fill a gift order that is to be sent to the payee's own address.

2) Go through the Writer's Market *again, this time looking for publications that will send a sample copy for the cost of postage. Note the number of stamps required, and figure out exactly how much they add up to; otherwise, you might be unpleasantly surprised.

3) Search newsstands and stores like Barnes and Noble for interesting publications that you haven't found elsewhere. It's generally less expensive to buy a copy in a store than to request it by mail.

4) Here's a tip sent in by reader Connie Payton: "I frequent the thrift stores in my area, and some flea markets and antique shops -- many of them offer magazines, some recent, some back issues for as low as 25¢ or 5 for \$1. It is the only way to go on my limited budget."

Finally, don't hesitate to order a sample copy of a publication that looks like a valuable potential market. There is no substitute for actually being able to see a publication before you write for it -- so if you have to pay, do so. Remember that the cost of sample copies is a business expense, and can be deducted from your taxes.

Now all you need to do is figure out where to store all those sample magazines...

Magazine Sites: Free2Try

<http://www.free2try.com>

MagsNow.com

<http://www.magsnow.com>

ArkRoyal.com

<http://www.100-free-magazines.com/list-all.html>

List of sites that offer free magazine trials. Or, type a magazine title into the search box and you'll find the offers made by several different subscription sites.

FreeWell.com

http://www.freewell.com/free/Free_Magazines/

Lists many free magazine offers, but when you follow the link, it's often not obvious how you get them.

ABaseforMagazines.com

<http://www.abaseformagazines.com/>

Another site where you can sign up for a 90-day free trial of various publications.

* Editor's note: 2008 Writer's Market is available at Amazon.com

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Moira Allen, editor of 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, Allen hosts the travel website *TimeTravel-Britain.com*, *The Pet Loss Support Page*, and the photography website *AllenImages.net*. She can be contacted at editors "at"writing-world.com.