

There's a lot of misconceptions about being a freelancer. People think it's someone trying to scrape by while they wait for a staff job. Others think it's for flakes. Those things can be true, but the really strong freelancer is neither of these things. The strong freelancer is as savvy a businessperson as they are a writer. To be only the latter won't get you half as far. You also have to realize that the phone will have as much to do with your success as anything you write. If you take that to heart now, you will see the kind of success you deserve instead of wondering why others have the career you want.

Let me start by taking you through the dance of going from article pitch to sale (or, sadly, a rejection). This can often take as many as four weeks which is why this class is five weeks—so that we can go through the entire process and learn from student experience. This will be incredibly valuable, even opening up your eyes to writing articles in areas you previously didn't consider. To begin, what is a pitch? It's a mini version of your article, showing enough of your style and what you intend to do to hopefully warrant being assigned an article. But since this is sent through email most of the time (which it should be), the email itself must be crafted as well as the pitch pasted in it. Here's an example of an emailed pitch I sold for four-figures. I'm going to point out its weaknesses and strengths after I'm done.

Subject: Men's Fitness Writer Wonders: Can Your Readers Throw a Knuckler?

Hi _____,

My name is Eric Butterman and I'm a contributor to Men's Fitness and Ramp. There's a fun piece I had in mind today that made me think, "If I saw this on the cover of a magazine I would definitely buy the issue." See if your readers could get into this:

"The Achievables" - Let's face it: there are some sporting accomplishments that might never be us. We might never dunk, or finish a marathon, or throw a fastball 90mph -- but does that mean there's nothing amazing in sports that we could achieve? Absolutely not. There are a few spectacular feats that every person with two arms, legs and a heart has a shot at.

Thanks,

Eric Butterman

[Address Here](#)

[Phone Here](#)

What changes would I make to it now? First off, my subject line is too long. It should just say something like, "Men's Fitness Writer Curious..." Next, I'd call myself a writer instead of a contributor. I just happen to like the sound of it better. I'd back off "there's a fun piece" and just get into the pitch. I'd also have sources that I'll use—adds a lot more authenticity to your pitch because it shows you're already thinking of the inner workings. Most articles need sources! I also don't attach anything because editors fear viruses and often won't open attachments from people they don't know. They can't read your great email if they don't open it up!

Now let's take you through the rest of the process. Let's assume that the editor never contacts you after you email the pitch. Do you give up? Nope, you're just getting started. I like to follow up with a phone call two days after I send a pitch. Yep, you read right—two days! This way I haven't gotten in their face right away but I also am fresh in their mind. Just because they didn't get back to you doesn't mean they didn't read the email. They're busy people, it happens. I'll call them and usually a conversation will go something like this:

Editor: This is Jen Jennerson

Me: Hey, it's Eric Butterman. How's it going?

Editor: Good.

Me: I just wanted to check in because I sent you an email about inner city scuba divers and wanted to see if you had a chance to look it over.

Editor: Didn't have a chance.

Me: I just thought it would be really good for the readership because it shows how these students turned their lives around by using a sport you wouldn't expect. I also have a great source in scuba diving instructor Ron Myers—he's involved in the program and he has some great stories.

Editor: Sounds good. Let me try to get to it this week.

Me: Sounds good. Thanks, Jen.

End of phone conversation.

Now you may not think that was an important conversation but it's huge—if you miss this part you will not gain nearly as much from the class as you need to.

Let's break down the conversation. First, I don't start into my pitch, I ask the editor how they are. These are people, not robots, treat them like people! Second, I get into the email and after they say they haven't read it, I don't get alarmed. I use it as an opportunity to do a re-pitch, a mini version of the pitch, with enthusiasm in my voice (very important), reiterating why I feel it's right for the readership and bring up that magical thing called a source. After they say they'll get to it, I don't keep them. We hang up and I've established two things: 1) I stay on top of things 2) I don't waste their time with a long drawn out conversation.

A writer who is both on the ball and not a nuisance? You just gave the editor that much more reason to work with you, because those are the qualities they look for in a freelancer.

So now let's say they don't get back to you again. How long do you wait? Now you've got to give it some time. I say usually around 12 days. This allows you to remain

somewhat fresh in their heads, you're giving them space and you don't seem desperate. This time when you call, it's a much quicker conversation:

Editor: This is Jen Jennerson

Me: Hi, it's Eric Butterman. How's it going?

Editor: Good.

Me: I just wanted to check in about the pitch I sent you on inner city scuba divers. Did you have a chance to look it over?

Editor: Didn't have a chance. I'm definitely getting to it though.

Me: Sounds good. Just thought it would be a really good piece for the readership.

Here you're not re-pitching but you definitely want to still show that enthusiasm. Many an assignment has come after this call. Again, it shows I understand an editor needs time but I remain on top of things.

If after this you still don't hear anything, give it another two weeks before calling back. This is your final call and is almost identical to the previous one. If you don't hear back after this then it's time to move on. But, that's a whole lot different than just emailing a pitch, not hearing anything and giving up, isn't it?

So when to make the follow-up call? I like Tuesday-Thursday between 10:30 and 12:30 and then again during 2:30-4:30. This way you're not catching someone just when they arrive to work, when they're getting ready for lunch or just coming back from it, or just on their way out the door. Also, Monday they're swamped from what they left behind for the weekend and Friday they want to get out for the weekend. Not a good time to call. Hopefully you now see that having a successful career isn't about luck—it's about a clear strategy and an understanding of what your clients respond to.