

45 Super Publication Ideas In Only 45 Minutes

(PLUS 22 Bonuses)

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1. **Advertising Sales.** Learn as much as possible about a potential advertiser's business before you pick up the phone or walk into his or her office. Every minute you spend researching the advertisers' business is worth an hour of you telling them about your business.

If possible, give your sales staff the opportunity to share what they know about particular clients with your non-sales staff. In some cases, your editorial staffers may have information worth sharing with your advertising staff. Make learning and sharing information about your advertisers part of your total business culture.

—Darrell Dodds

2. **Read Good Writing.** There is no better way to improve your own writing.

—Jim Jennings

3. **Editorial Management.** Turn news releases into customers. Everyone likes to read about new products. All publications receive news releases daily on newly released products, and giving space to these products costs money. Why not contact the company and offer to promote its product in your magazine?

We offer a "Spotlight on the News" section that provides a couple of paragraphs and a picture of new products. It has had a positive impact on securing new accounts when advertisers receive value-added benefits from advertising in our publication.

—Karen Pickering

4. **Internet Management.** Plan in detail exactly what you want your web site to be and do — both now and a few years from now; don't just toss a site together because everyone else has one. If you

already have a site, pretend you don't and think of what you would want a web site to do for your publication.

Do you want to offer lots of content? Perhaps a lot of interactivity? Or do you just want to make sure people can find your publication online and get contact and subscription information?

Avoid temporary web sites that will hold a place until the real site is done — that temporary site might be up for years.

—Christy West

5. **Advertising Sales:** To promote a special section or a theme issue, send your advertising prospects an oversize four-color postcard with an attention getting graphic on one side and brief sales copy on the other side. This direct-mail device won't work unless the concept is clever and the execution brilliant. But when done well, these cards will be worth the time and money invested.

—Darrell Dodds

6. **Avoiding Costly Errors.** Always carefully proof all headlines in both editorial and ads. That's where most misspelled words end up because headlines are usually skipped over by proofreaders.

—Jim Jennings

7. **Local Free Publicity.** See if local newspapers or magazines would like to tell their readers about your publishing business. Create an awareness for your publication. Local publications in most cities and towns often do special features on local businesses. Any publicity helps and also gives a feeling to readers that you are a viable part of the community.

—Karen Pickering

8. **Internet Programs.** Get a user-friendly, well-supported software program for managing your web pages. You don't have to have an outside company handle your day-to-day web site management (although you might find it more efficient and rewarding to have an outside company set up your web site in the first place). Many programs are very easy to use and they just need a little time up front for design and setup. If you don't know the program, take a training class shortly before you need to use it.
—Christy West
9. **Gourmet Editorial.** While preparing your editorial content, think of planning a gourmet meal for special friends. This analogy is simplistic, but serves a useful purpose. For example, offer an appetizer at the beginning of your publication that is light, visually stimulating and sets the tone for what's to follow. Then offer your readers a hearty entrée surrounded by complimentary side dishes. Then finish with a beautifully rich dessert.
Flip through your publication and ask yourself if you're offering a balanced fare. Or are you loading up with too many sweets or offering only a diet of meat and potatoes? Magazines, like good meals, depend on pacing, lots of variety and visual presentation.
—Darrell Dodds
10. **Editorial Ideas.** Always keep pen and paper handy. When you think of a good column topic, headline or lead, write it down. You'd be surprised how quickly these things disappear from your mind.
—Jim Jennings
11. **Youth Promotion.** Encourage youngsters to write for your publication and devote a page or two to youth activities in your area. Get a local youngster to gather the material, write an article and raise the money to produce that page in the magazine. They learn about the publication industry and may see a possible career opportunity. Besides teaching a young person responsibility, you're giving him or her an opportunity to work in a field that may become a career.
—Karen Pickering
12. **Internet Analysis.** Test, test and test (your web site and e-newsletters) again. Use family, friends, co-workers — particularly those who aren't as computer savvy as you are. They are much more likely to reflect the typical computer user than you, the creator.
Watch them use your site and be ready for some surprises. No matter how much you believe that you can think like a web dummy, if you know how it works, you aren't one.
—Christy West
13. **Editorial Planning.** Keep an editorial planning board in the area where you and your editorial staff meet to discuss future issues. An erasable piece of 4-by-8-foot Formica or similar material works well. It makes it easier to focus on upcoming issues and can be updated as necessary. Color-coding for writers, editors and photographers can help everyone see at a glance what is expected of them and is much more dramatic than a printed editorial assignment sheet.
—Darrell Dodds

14. **Day-To-Day Management.** Make lists of what you need to get done each day. I get great satisfaction from marking things off the list as they are accomplished.
—Jim Jennings
15. **Grant Money.** See what local grants are available for educational writing opportunities. As an example, we have a very good writer who teaches our community about healthy horsekeeping. “Horses For Clean Water” is an organization in our region that receives grant money for educating the public about proper care of horse property and respecting the environment. The articles we receive from her are very well written and have been a real asset to the magazine. She has also received great exposure and response through these articles.
—Karen Pickering
16. **Expanding Internet Traffic.** If you want your site to be a place where loyal readers visit regularly, give them reasons to come back to your site on a regular basis. Offer updated news, downloads, tips, tools, toys, tricks, talk, whatever, and make the updated content prominent on the home page. Give them a reason to recommend that others visit your web site as well.
—Christy West
17. **Publication Staffing.** Hire people who are difficult to please. In my experience, people who are too easily satisfied rarely reach for the stars. When interviewing candidates for a position, regardless of the job, look for people who believe their best work is ahead of them and not behind them. When viewing a candidate’s portfolio, press clippings, photographs or design work, pay more attention to the passion they have for what they are showing you than the actual work itself.
—Darrell Dodds
18. **Interviewing Techniques.** Always tape record all of your interviews, whether on the phone or in person.
—Jim Jennings
19. **Publication Administration.** Join a professional organization with similar business professionals in order to share ideas and concerns. I am involved with a group of professionals through a local college. Our “Business Link” meetings are funded by the state, which pays a facilitator who is a successful business person to guide our meetings and show us how to successfully run a business. The conversations and homework have proved invaluable to our magazine. Knowing how to do every aspect of a small business is a real challenge, and this group has proved to be a place to ask for help and offer help to others.
—Karen Pickering
20. **Internet Simplicity.** Make subscriptions, site registration and e-newsletter interfaces as easy, quick and painless as possible. This might seem like a no-brainer, but consider the following information from one of Jakob Nielsen’s (called “the guru of web usability” by Internet magazine and “one of the top ten minds in small business” by Fortune Small Business) Alertbox columns:
“Our test users experienced unprecedented high levels of task completion in their attempts to subscribe and unsubscribe to the newsletters in the study: 78

percent for subscribing and 92 percent for unsubscribing. When you consider that most usability studies find success rates around 50 to 60 percent for other areas of web design, the success rates for newsletter usability are incredibly high, even though they are still lower than anything we would deem to be a truly great user experience.

“Given these success rates, a newsletter with 50,000 subscribers could add an estimated 14,000 subscribers on average if everybody could operate its subscription interface correctly.”

—Christy West

21. **Publication Staffing.** Hire people who are optimistic and not pessimistic. Since life tends to be a series of self-fulfilling prophecies, those who expect success usually are the ones who achieve it. Those who spend too much time worrying about their future rarely have a good one.

—Darrell Dodds

22. **Interviewing Tricks.** As your subject talks into your tape recorder, make notes about further questions you think of. Don't interrupt him to ask questions. If you do, he may forget some of what he would have otherwise said.

—Jim Jennings

23. **Build On Your Events Calendar.** People really like to review your publication to see what's happening in a particular area. It encourages people to look for your magazine every month to see what's happening and offers another value-added benefit to advertising with your publication. We

have expanded this to our web site and are teaching readers to enter their own events for posting.

—Karen Pickering

24. **Internet Opportunities.** E-newsletters can make or break your relationship with your subscribers. The Alertbox column that I mentioned before (# 20) noted that people have highly emotional reactions to newsletters. “The positive emotional aspect of newsletters is that they can create much more of a bond between user and company than a web site can,” Nielsen stated. “The negative aspect is that usability problems have much stronger impact on the customer relationship than they normally do.”

It's best to avoid those strong negative emotions by making it very easy for recipients to subscribe, unsubscribe and modify their e-newsletter settings. If you make them very angry, they won't come back and will tell others about their negative experience (even if it was an interface concern that you think a monkey could have used correctly). (see # 12).

—Christy West

25. **Publication Staffing.** Hire people who love magazines, especially those who actually subscribe to them. Good writers become that way by being voracious readers, and most good photographers improve their skills and sense of style by studying other photographers. Good production artists — well, they steal from everybody. Over the years, I've found good magazine people border on obsession when it comes to crafting exciting, fulfilling publications.

—Darrell Dodds

26. **Editorial Travel.** When traveling to do a story, always try to get more than one story per trip. That reduces the traveling cost.
—*Jim Jennings*
27. **Internet Editorial.** Offer expanded versions of articles on your web site. The cost of putting the expanded article online is much less than paying for more pages in print. It also encourages people to visit your web site and is a great way to provide additional information to a different group of readers.
—*Karen Pickering*
28. **Internet Promotions.** Spam volume is increasing exponentially every day, which makes it ever harder to write e-mail promotions that will actually get read. Think hard on the subject line and first paragraph of any e-mail promotion in particular before sending it — if it's too flashy or vague, it's likely to get dumped before it gets opened.
—*Christy West*
29. **Personnel Management.** Hire people who know more about their job than you do — then let them do it. Nothing will demoralize your staff more than telling them how smart you are or how things were done in the good old days. They won't believe you anyway, so why waste their time and your karma.
—*Darrell Dodds*
30. **Marketing Opportunities.** Develop special issue and use the theme from those issues to promote additional advertising sales in that issue.
—*Jim Jennings*
31. **Low-Cost Marketing Efforts.** Send a thank you to your clients, as a little appreciation goes a long way. We send these periodically in our advertising billing statements. Today's businesses are continually trying to stay ahead of their competition. This is a simple action that costs very little but goes a long way in selling clients on your publication.
—*Karen Pickering*
32. **Internet Feedback.** Actively solicit your web visitors' feedback and input for magazine content. You'll get a lot of ideas for free, and people love to think they are involved in their favorite magazine's content (and will tell their friends!). Keep a convenient file for these ideas — update it whenever you get a new one and pull it out when it's time to plan issue content.
—*Christy West*
33. **Personnel Management.** Use educational, job-related training as a reward for your better performers. Too often, managers think of training as a last resort to help employees who are not meeting expectations. Let your staff know that training is budgeted but make it their responsibility. People get more out of seminars if the training is their idea rather than the manager's idea. Dollar for dollar, training is the best investment you can make in your staff and in yourself.
—*Darrell Dodds*
34. **Marketing Your Name.** Don't hesitate to help sponsor some events when you can afford it. That keeps your name out in front of the people.
—*Jim Jennings*

35. **Training Pays.** Attend seminars and take classes to keep your skills sharp. It's hard to budget the time when you're busy, but learning sharpens the brain and stimulates new ideas. It's also a great way to meet potential clients!
—*Karen Pickering*
36. **Internet Goofs.** If you happen to make an electronic mistake that all of your site visitors and e-newsletter recipients see, apologize just as publicly (and be professional about it). You'll gain back more than the ground you lost with the mistake if you handle it well — people do remember these kinds of things.
—*Christy West*
37. **Personal Management.** Make sure your workspace reflects the heart and soul of your business. It is easy to get so focused on the bottom line that work environments are ignored. Framed photographs, illustrations and even framed letters from readers can do much to remind everyone that creativity is your most important commodity. Plaques, trophies and certificates of achievement are nice and have their place. But well-presented examples of your staff's best work will be motivating and will tell office visitors what you value most.
—*Darrell Dodds*
38. **Weekly Staff Meetings.** Meet with at least the leaders on your staff every week, and have someone from each different area of the business give a report. That way everyone knows what everyone else is involved in.
—*Jim Jennings*
39. **Marketing Bonuses.** Print additional copies of your magazine for mailers and promotional uses. We do an annual mailing to national ad accounts and ad prospects that gets our publication in front of key people. Getting in the door is hard, but they need to see the publication to make a decision about advertising. Each issue has a theme and we send the extra copies to a particular group of people.
—*Karen Pickering*
40. **Event Planning.** When planning editorial coverage of a conference or event, have at least three key unrelated questions in mind that you'd like to get answers to from attendees. Use attendance at an event to gather information for a roundup article with three or four people from different areas of the country with special knowledge of each subject that has nothing to do with what is happening at the conference.
—*Frank Lessiter*
41. **Internet Routines.** It takes time out of every day, but try to respond to your web site and e-newsletter emails quickly and helpfully. Even if someone doesn't like what you have to say, they will be happier to find that out within a couple of days of sending the message than having to wait a week or a month.
—*Christy West*
42. **Personnel Management.** Find things to praise and not to punish. It's a manager's nature to dwell on what's wrong rather than on what's right. But criticism will never improve a person's performance as much as sincere appreciation for good effort, even if the final outcome isn't ideal.

Recognize good work whenever possible but make sure everyone on your staff knows what your definition of good work is. Most people don't like shooting at a moving target.

—Darrell Dodds

43. **Google Everything.** I believe Google is the best search engine on the Web, and it is a great research tool.

—Jim Jennings

44. **Hiring And Staffing.** Use a personnel service to hire people for additional projects. Since the agency runs the ads and does the initial interview, you get a person who has been prescreened before making a commitment. This allows

you to “try before you buy.” If you don't need the person after the project is completed, it's easy to let them go. The understanding is always based on the fact that this is a temporary relationship.

—Karen Pickering

45. **Booking Internet Subscriptions.** Don't forget the subscription push on your web site home page. It's very easy to get caught up in all the features that you want to offer your web site visitors and forget this important detail. But what is your web site for if it is not to inform prospective subscribers about your publication and get them to buy it?

—Christy West

And Now...Bonus Time!!!

45. **Offer Photography Expectations.** Let your subjects know what is expected of them. If you are responsible for photographing a training piece, a breeder profile or a personality and lifestyle piece, let people know exactly what you're going to be doing, and why, prior to your arrival. Send a letter outlining your photographic guidelines regarding appropriate dress, tack, condition of arena, etc. If possible, visit the facility the evening before you shoot to go over last minute details and to make sure they've understood and prepared accordingly. If they haven't, this gives them time to do so.

—Darrell Dodds

47. **Internet Bonuses.** Be sure you have a web site. People searching the web might happen on to your site, and you can use it to tell them about your magazine. It might get you some new subscriptions.

—Jim Jennings

48. **Find A Mentor.** We all need someone who we can bounce ideas off and look to for advice. The person needs to be truly concerned about your success. It's a caring position that is a privilege and has wonderful rewards. It allows someone to give back to a community they've served and worked in. It's necessary to have a guide on your journey to success.

—Karen Pickering

49. **Internet Staffing.** If at all possible, find someone on your staff (or bring in an intern) who is really excited about doing web site work. As with everything, an employee who is highly interested in working with this medium will turn out a much nicer product for you than one who is more interested in news gathering, for example, and got the web site project dumped on him or her. Since this is a technical endeavor, not everyone is interested in exploiting it to its fullest potential. Find the person who is if you want to get a solid return on your site investment.
- Christy West
50. **Photography And Travel.** Use travel time to familiarize yourself with your gear. Cameras are becoming more complex with every model, especially digital cameras. Technical manuals can be difficult to grasp at first, but they contain a wealth of information and belong in your camera bag for review and in case of emergencies or mental meltdowns. Use downtime in airports or on the plane to review them until you thoroughly understand every function.
- Check your camera equipment carefully before you turn in for the night at the motel. If you discover that your batteries are dead or you forgot bring film, you still have time to get it together before the sun rises.
- Darrell Dodds
51. **Internet Bonuses.** Create a “subscriber only” area on your web site. Treat it as a bonus for your subscribers by providing extra stories, leaders lists, etc., that are accessible only to them.
- Jim Jennings
52. **Computer Management.** Develop a good relationship with a computer repair person. Nothing can slow you down more than a computer crash or hiccup when there is no one around to help. It costs more upfront, but in the long run this person can save you many hours of wasted frustration.
- As a small business, we try and save money and do things ourselves. I call it being penny wise and pound foolish. I lost the pages for an entire issue just before production due to a failed hard drive. My computer guy was able to retrieve the data and save a week’s hard work.
- Karen Pickering
53. **Powerful Internet Copy.** Keep your story leads short and powerful, and do the same with promotional and informational copy about your publication. We live in an age of instant gratification, and if I can’t find what I’m looking for on a web site in pretty short order, I find a site that delivers the information more quickly. Most readers also hate to waste their time wading through unnecessary words.
- Christy West
54. **Planning Event Photography.** When covering an event, first walk around the venue with a small notepad while leaving your camera behind. Notice lighting conditions, obstacles that could interfere with a clean shot and elements within backgrounds that might frame a rider or otherwise provide shape or texture to a photograph. This exercise will give you more confidence and prepare you for the work ahead.
- Darrell Dodds

55. **Work With Printers.** Establish a good working relationship with your printer. You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar. In other words, your printer is more likely to want to work with you on a problem if you're not a problem to work with.
—*Jim Jennings*
56. **Know Your Mission.** Stay focused on the mission of your magazine. Special opportunities are always coming up and many things can distract you from your initial goals. Solidify one project before taking on another and make sure that it is aligned with your mission.
—*Karen Pickering*
57. **Internet Advertising.** Pop-up ads are all the rage in some circles, but many readers hate them with unbridled passion. Consider doing pop-under ads instead if you have to have an additional window for advertising and subscription pushes.
—*Christy West*
58. **Photography Thank Yous.** After a successful photo shoot, make a 4- by-6-inch personalized postcard featuring one of your subject's photos on one side and a handwritten note on the other, thanking them for their time and cooperation. Purchase pre-gummed photo postcards in most camera stores or order them online. These cards make a lasting impression and often lead to photo sales. They also create a willing and supportive customer should you need to use them or their farm in the future.
—*Darrell Dodds*
59. **Editorial Accuracy.** Have someone read all your articles when you have finished writing them and before you set type. Writers are often so familiar with the stories they're working on that they read over the same mistake several times without ever seeing it.
—*Jim Jennings*
60. **No Means No.** Learn the meaning of the word "no." If your staff is small, you can't attend everything. If you go to a specific event, make sure you have a goal in mind before arriving at the event. A lot of work can be done by phone and e-mail. I always prioritize events based on the needs of my clients first. People may ask for your participation, but only you can set the boundaries. Make a list of pros and cons beforehand.
—*Karen Pickering*
61. **Internet.** Let go of the desire to completely control the way your web site looks because you can't do it. Different operating systems, different browsers and even different versions of the same browser will display things differently, from fonts to tables to borders to spacing. Images are constant, but not much else is absolutely guaranteed to appear the same to everyone.
—*Christy West*
62. **Digital Photography.** Don't make the switch from conventional film to digital unless you are fully committed at all staff levels to make the transition. The learning curve is steep, the pitfalls many and the expenses high. Establish a realistic budget for new equipment and for training.
There is a wealth of information about digital photography on the web. Check out some of the best professional web sites,

especially those with forums frequented by photojournalists. These forums are free and offer a lot of real world advice about everything from storage to color management. My favorite forums can be found at www.robgalbreath.com, www.dpreview.com and www.fredmiranda.com, but there are many others.

—Darrell Dodds

63. **Editorial Content.** Work with an up-and-coming horse trainer to supply your publication with “how to” articles. Most of these professionals need publicity and don’t necessarily have the budget to do much advertising. It’s a nice compromise and can really help both parties without a large outlay of cash.

—Karen Pickering

64. **Internet Performance.** In most cases, putting a date last modified or updated on a page is a mistake. If it’s updated several times a day, that would be OK. But invariably, life and work get in the way and conspire to keep you from updating your pages as often as you’d like. The next thing you know, you check on your page and it’s been 6 months since you touched it — which doesn’t do much to convince new visitors that you’re on top of things.

—Christy West

65. **Marketing Sponsorships.** If you want to promote a particular article and you’re over your editorial budget, get someone to sponsor the page or article. I do this with my cover stories. If an organization doesn’t have the budget to purchase a cover story, they may know someone who would be willing to sponsor the promotion for them.

—Karen Pickering

66. **Want 60 More Tips?** If you weren’t at last year’s meeting, we offered another 60 valuable publishing tips like these from four other panelists. These can be downloaded at the American Horse Publications web site (www.american-horsepubs.org) or give me your business card and I’ll mail you a copy.

—Frank Lessiter

67. **Think BIG.** Never hesitate to ask for that big advertising contract or go after that national account. The smaller, regional publications have a lot to offer the national companies. We reach deeper into the horse community and get the copies out there. People won’t always buy a magazine, but they will pick up one if it’s FREE.

It’s a numbers game. The more an advertiser gets seen, the more possibility for response to the ad. People always want to read the local and regional news to see what’s happening in their area! The worst thing that big, potential ad client can do is say NO!

—Karen Pickering