

# 45

## More Super Ideas in Only 45 Minutes

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1. **Make your website about your customers instead of just about your publication.** You have lots of different customers with different needs. To help them accomplish what they have in mind when they visit your site, forget how you are organized, and focus on helping them get in, find what they want and get out quickly by:
  - Making it obvious which buttons to click and where it will be taking them.
  - Each link should be made up of as few words as possible
    - Mary Watts
  
2. **Compete up, not down.** There is never a limit to how low you can go in quality and price. So if you try to compete with the lowest price, there will always be someone who handles a lower price than you do. It is not a lucrative way of doing business. Compete up and sell quality. Be the best in your specialty and be rewarded for that.
  - Claudia Spanjaard
  
3. **Promotions.** Don't let an opportunity to get your name out be missed because of money. Find a partner who is in your same shoes to share in the expenses. For example, each year, our publication co-hosts a party with two other publications during a major equestrian event. Alone, the costs would be prohibitive to supply food and bar service for a few hundred people. But, when sharing the bill with two other publications, it allows us the opportunity to get our name out during a high-profile event, whereas we would not have been able to do so. As long as all parties have the same message to put forth, or goals in mind, it can work beautifully.
  - Brian Sosby
  
4. **Be approachable.** Imagine that you are explaining the message of your story face-to-face to your reader in the barn aisle. Or, go to a staff member and explain the idea to them. Getting a message (especially a technical or

difficult-to-explain one) across to readers effectively will go much more smoothly once you've bounced it off someone else. It's the whole "learn by teaching" phenomenon. By having a clear, consistent, and approachable style, you will become a writer that a reader trusts.

➤ Stephanie Church

5. **Just keep experimenting – keep your Site “fresh”, new and give them a reason to come back. Test ideas and listen to your user's feedback.** There are truly thousands of improvements, big and small; you can make to improve your site. Some are obvious and should be made immediately and many of them cost nothing to implement. Nevertheless, you should focus on changing one thing at a time. Adding a new service or taking down one that is not used or is clumsy. Then watch and listen to the feedback. They will let you know how it is working...or not.
  - Mary Watts
  
6. **Focus on long term goals.** Use short term goals only as a means to an end, never as a final goal. Write down for yourself what your final goal is. Use this as a starting point to work backwards in how to achieve this. Write down all the steps until you reach today. What is the first step today to reach your final goal? For example your final goal is to make more money [imagine that]. How can you make more money? Sell more magazines. How can you sell more magazines? To get more customers. How can you get more customers? Etc.
  - Claudia Spanjaard
  
7. **Advertising.** Offer a “New Products Page” or place to help secure new advertising. Our publication has a page dedicated each month to new products. We print a small description and photo of the new product along with contact information, such as a website and phone number to learn more. This

page is a great resource for offering a one-time promotion, and in turn, it turns out to be a good source for generating new advertisers.

➤ Brian Sosby

**8. Look for opportunities to cross-promote.**

Let's say there's an association newsletter or magazine that reaches a good cross section of horse owners in a particular area, and they are looking for occasional content. Target them with specific stories you think their readers might enjoy--or if they approach you, have an open mind about allowing them to use a story in their publication. Ask them to include information on how to find your magazine. Work out a way that if the article they run is freelance-written, your writer gets paid an additional stipend. In the meantime, see if circulation can work out a reasonable subscription rate for those members for a limited time and have that rate published with the story in the association publication.

➤ Stephanie Church

**9. Planning...."If you don't know where you're going, any road will do."** – Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Planning involves everything that happens before a visitor reaches your site. It includes steps that you take to get traffic to your site --- the creation of the elements for the clickstream and the storyboard of your site that guide visitors once they are there.

➤ Mary Watts

**10. Technically advanced.** Be technically advanced. Be up-to-date. It will give you efficiency advantages, a competitive edge over your competitors and it will show your business relations that you want to lead the field/be on top. Don't implement everything that is new, but keep track of the possibilities and use what is suitable for you.

➤ Claudia Spanjaard

**11. Offer a free e-newsletter.** If you have the computer power and server capabilities, offer a weekly or monthly e-newsletter (whichever is more cost and time efficient). This is a place where you can share news items and other editorial pieces that can't make it into the pages of your print publication. It is also a great place to sell banner advertising. This is also opportunity for cross promotion. Your print publication can promote the e-newsletter and vice versa. Be sure to know your statistics – such as how many people the e-newsletter will reach. Advertisers will want to know this information up front.

➤ Brian Sosby

**12. Offer bonus material to the reader.**

Another way to create loyal readers is to offer them additional information in addition to that which they picked up with the magazine. Create a "for more information..." box that consistently reminds them about what more they can find online or wherever else you know they can find useful, legitimate material. Perhaps there's a useful free newsletter you know they could receive if they visit a particular site.

➤ Stephanie Church

**13. Consider a Web site "facelift" every year.**

If you don't keep re-inventing and improving yourself – your competition will look better than you.

➤ Mary Watts

**14. First impression: the cover.** The cover of your magazine or publication is extremely important. It is the first impression that customers have of you and it shows what kind of "person" your publication is. Take the covers of all your publications and tape them to the wall, next to each other. See for yourself what impression you make on customers. And determine whether the covers show a certain line, for example always a horse portrait, or a horse and rider coming towards you, etc.

➤ Claudia Spanjaard

**15. Use a 12- or 18-month rolling editorial calendar.** Knowing what is coming around the bend is a great tool in planning your editorial. It can provide a snapshot of the big topics you will cover, and allow you to plan better. It is also a great way to share with advertisers what is forthcoming, allowing them to plan in their budgets for specific issues they won't want to miss out on.

➤ Brian Sosby

**16. Offer prompt responses to reader questions about editorial content.** You might find that you get questions and comments from readers at the most inopportune times (read: major deadline). Try to get back to them in a timely fashion, however, because your response reflects your magazine's devotion to its readers. If you cannot offer them a helpful response, endeavor to find someone who can help them and let the reader know within a few days that you're on it.

➤ Stephanie Church

**17. 5 Elements for a successful Web site:**

Your site should delight visitors and inspire them to go deeper into the web site.

- Usability- important
- Good programming – necessary
- Persuasive copy and design – critical
- Business objectives balanced with customer needs – invaluable
- Customer satisfaction and profit – priceless

➤ Mary Watts

**18. Keep your identity.** Make sure that all your publications for a certain project show the same identity, from the magazine to the brochure to bring in subscribers. You can make variations on the theme, but always use the same basic layout or for example always use the same 'main' photo.

➤ Claudia Spanjaard

**19. Staffing.** It is important to surround yourself with a staff that has passion. Passion for their work and has a belief in the mission of your publication. Why hire someone who is satisfied with mediocrity? Be sure to hire staff members who are excited about their contributions. It is also important to hire staff that work well together as a team. Why hire someone who is a great employee but cannot take the time to work well with others?

Be sure to let your staff, or assistant, know how important they are to the overall picture. It is critical to let your staff know exactly how much you appreciate them. In doing so, you build self-esteem and can enhance their commitment to their work. For employees that have proven themselves, be sure to allow them a sense of autonomy. Give them a project and let them have their hand in directing its development. I have learned that micro-managing your staff is a sure way to undermine their sense of contribution.

➤ Brian Sosby

**20. Make potential readers (and current subscribers) remember you.** When hitting the trade shows, hand out a gadget or item that is something the reader or potential reader is likely to keep or use. It shows ingenuity-- wouldn't you want to check out the site of a magazine that gives away cool and useful stuff? Canvas bags and hats are good for a following that you already have. Horse-head shaped carabineers were popular items that our magazine gave, and I see them a lot out in public on people's key chains. Don't underestimate the value of pens, hoofpicks, keychains, sweat scrapers, and other printable things that won't necessarily get thrown to the back of a closet.

➤ Stephanie Church

**21. Help their eyes FIND what they are looking for.**

**Headings** are extremely important, they are the points of reference on your web page.

**Pull Quotes** can be more than graphic fillers. They help capture a visitor's attention and illuminate your key points  
**Highlighting Text** helps the visitors skim your text and identify key phrases in your message.

**Embedded Links** Text hyper links give your visitors quick access to the content they want without forcing them to figure out your navigation system

➤ Mary Watts

**22. Keep your employees happy.**

Employees do the work and they have contact with the customers. Their mood reflects on how they handle customers. Have regular one-on-one meetings with your employees, for example every two months, to show your interest. Happy employees will also talk positively about their job and the company they work for. Keep your employees posted on developments, positive and negative, for more involvement. Happy employees are loyal employees

➤ Claudia Spanjaard

**23. Be Kind!**

It sounds simple, even silly perhaps. But a little kindness can go a very long way. If you are working for a publication that has little budget to spend on freelance writers and photographers, that bit of kindness can oftentimes turn a "no" into a "yes." No one likes a grouch, and almost everyone likes to deal with people who make them feel good and treat them with courtesy, respect and a kind disposition.

➤ Brian Sosby

**24. Horse people like to know they're saving money.** Work out agreements with advertisers so that a coupon is included in the magazine that gives the reader money off on a popular seasonal item like a flymask. Or if there are barn supply stores where you have single-copy sales, work out something with an advertiser such that if a potential reader buys however many tubes of dewormer, they get a copy of your magazine and a pair of gloves or some other useful item around the barn.

➤ Stephanie Church

**25. KISS your customers if you want them back.** "Keep It Simple, Stupid"

Designing for simplicity is anything but simple. Here are some tips:

- Limit page load time – the best sites load in 10 secs
- Make clear, strong text immediately available - visitors look first for the relevant text and go from there
- Avoid scrolling if you possibly can – use vertical scrolling only and never horizontal
- Make sure that your search functions give fast and accurate results. Perhaps use Google internally to search.
- Earn respect by attention to detail. Visitors are looking for a reason not to trust you. Check for typos, grammatical errors, screen error messages images that don't open and browser compatibility problems.

➤ Mary Watts

**26. Break these rules when necessary.**

Adapt to the situation, temporarily if possible, but always keep your long term goals in sight.

➤ Claudia Spanjaard

**27. Communication is Key.** We're all in the business of communicating, but with deadlines looming and the rush of getting a magazine out the door, sometimes we forget to communicate well with each other. Make sure everyone is on the same page in every phase of the production process and that each knows their role in putting the publication together. Know what each member of the team is working on. This can help things flow more smoothly and prevent backlogs in the production cycle. This doesn't just mean communication among editorial staff, but also includes any design, production, advertising and circulation staff. Each department should be working toward the same goals.

➤ Brian Sosby

**28. Get out there.** You might have an incredible pool of sources from which to pull for your editorial content, and the community might recognize your name as a legitimate and trustworthy writer. But if you do most of your interviews over the phone, as with any business, face time helps tremendously in terms of keeping bonds with these sources strong. Make a visit to an area where you have many contacts or target a conference or convention where some of them will gather. It might make the difference between whether or not you get the return phone call when a big story breaks in the future.

➤ Stephanie Church

**29. Poll your visitors with questions about the site, your publication, its content, anything.**

This encourages your subscribers, site visitors to interact with you. It tells them that you are interested in what they have to say. Great Customer Service.

➤ Mary Watts

**30. Get your online presence in shape.** Use it as a tool to inform possible readers about your publication before they are subscribers, make it easy to subscribe,

make it into a research tool for interested readers by providing links to sources and "how" stories about how a report was done, background info etcetera (e.g. National Geographic). Keep it up to date. Make sure the layout tells the same story as the paper publication: guard your identity.

Make absolutely sure that it is compatible with the browsers and operating systems out there: We use Macs, and if a website is not built for Macs, they can forget about us doing business with them, because it shows a disregard for clients.

➤ Claudia Spanjaard

**31. Think Outside the Box.** When it comes time to plan the editorial calendar or the advertising sections of the magazine, use input from a variety of staff. The advertising staff can have great ideas on editorial content and the editorial staff might have suggestions for the advertising staff. Allow staff to think outside the box of their own department and give input into other facets of the publication. It not only promotes an overall feeling of contribution towards the whole project, it also allows the staff to work together and generate new and innovative ideas—ones that might not have been considered initially.

➤ Brian Sosby

**32. Ask your sources what they think.** This might seem obvious, but it can be overlooked in our busy lives. Keep your finger on the pulse of the particular sector of the industry that you cover. Do this by periodically shooting off e-mails or making phone calls to see if some of your tried-and-true sources have heard of anything going on that's particularly interesting. Often, you will hear about topics that are just below the radar and can begin making phone calls and asking questions so you can get the story when it's fresh.

➤ Stephanie Church

**33. Register, Register, Register.** Most sites have some kind of form(s) Sign-up, subscriptions, lead generators, contest registration, etc. BUT:

- Again, keep them simple, short and convenient
- Offer drop downs for "States"
- When they have been completed make the SUBMIT pleasing
- Ask for only the information you need
- Be up front about how you will and will not be using their information – Privacy Statement is IMPORTANT

➤ Mary Watts

**34. Keep your customers.** It is a lot easier to keep clients than to get new ones: so if you have special offers for new subscribers, a discount on some product or whatever, also offer this to your loyal subscribers of who knows how long ago. They will be pleasantly surprised. How often have you been a subscriber for ten years, and you saw these great offers to new subscribers without you being able to benefit too? Have special gifts for your loyal subscribers and advertise this in your publication.

Also make it possible to subscribe for a short period of time: A special "Olympic Games Subscription" for example.

➤ Claudia Spanjaard

**35. Develop Theme Issue.** When planning your feature well or other columns in an issue, it can be beneficial to tie them together with a theme. Theme issues are a great way to help your advertisers focus in on various companies and markets and tap into specific ad sales.

➤ Brian Sosby

**36. Don't burn your sources.** If you have one iota of doubt about something from a source in a story, either leave it out or call the source back for clarification. They will appreciate you

erring on the safe side to taking their reputation and yours down in one fell swoop. If a source says something's off the record, respect that. In the case that you find it is crucial information that would really serve your readers, go back to the question later and ask them if there's another way you could obtain that information on the record from them or someone else, and explain why it would be useful. If they don't budge, respect that.

➤ Stephanie Church

**37. Email is a POWERFUL tool...when used correctly.**

- Talk to the right person – Rifle targeting
- Say the right thing – Clear message
- Say it in the right way – Persuasive text
- Say it at the right time -- Don't over do it – you will lose them
- COLLECT those e-mail addresses through registration.

➤ Mary Watts

**38. Pay the right photographers well.**

Seriously, you get what you pay for, so spend your money wisely and make sure your freelancers can survive. You have a responsibility here. It is also in the interest of the publisher to have a loyal pool of freelancers to rely on. If you are loyal and good to your freelancers they will be loyal to you and you'll be able to count on them. You get back what you give.

➤ Claudia Spanjaard

**39. Maintain Good Relationships with your Vendors.**

Be sure to maintain good relationships with all of your vendors – designers, freelancers, printers. Send them an e-mail to let them know that you appreciate the work they are doing for you. When something goes wrong, pick up the phone and let them know when something isn't up to your standard.

➤ Brian Sosby

**40. Give students a chance.** There are a lot of hopeful journalism students out there looking for ways to build their portfolio and get their foot in the door of equine publishing. Often they have fresh ideas and enthusiasm that eclipses any lack of experience they might have. If you are a publication just starting out and you don't have a small budget for freelancers, don't hesitate to assign some young writers to step out and do some pieces for you. It helps you get your feet on the ground as a new publication and it builds their writing samples. You might also find that you have a good candidate for hire down the road.

➤ Stephanie Church

**41. 4 Basic Types of Traffic - Do you know who is visiting your site?**

- To-die-for perfect visitors, the ones who know exactly what they want, loyal visitors and come to you looking for all of your features and services
- The sort-of-know-what-they-want visitors, those who have identified a strongly felt need, but still in the process of deciding.
- The window shoppers, who aren't sure what they want, but might stay a while if they see something.
- The lost, who aren't really prospects, visitors. They are there by mistake.

➤ Mary Watts

**42. Never underestimate your readers.**

Don't think your readers are too dumb to notice mistakes or changes. They may not have the professional knowledge to explain precisely what is wrong, but they will notice in comparison to your competition.

➤ Claudia Spanjaard

**43. Know Your Freelancers Well.**

Knowing the talents of your freelance writers can help you match article topics to an individual, allowing you to get a well-written article that will match the original vision for the topic. For instance, if you have a writer that is very technical in nature, he or she might not be well-suited for a personality profile that needs a lot of feeling put into it, and vice versa. However, if you can find freelance writers that are versatile in their writing talents, even better. This same principle applies for photographers. Knowing what each photographer is most talented in (i.e. dressage images versus reining, artistic vs. technical, competition only versus candid, etc.) can save you time and effort when looking for a specific image. In addition, keeping in touch with your photographers and knowing what they have been shooting or what they will be shooting next can help you know who to go to when your needs match.

➤ Brian Sosby

**44. Give your readers something no other publication can.**

When you are writing a story that you know a lot of other publications might be running, take a step back and look at what your publication can offer that others can't. Do you have sources that can give you an angle that you know no one else will think of running? These are the stories that will give you some of the most feedback. Example: I was writing a story about a horse being exhumed for a criminal investigation, and we have a particularly scientific audience. So I decided not to just write it from the sidelines—I took my readers into the grave by talking to the forensic anthropologist and discussing what she found and what could possibly be drawn from the evidence.

➤ Stephanie Church

45. **Browse-to-Buy.** If you are selling product online, then get to know the “browse-to-buy” metric. It is a measurement of how many visitors are browsing a product versus buying it. No other medium allows you this measurement. Use your site stats and compare them to your sales stats.
- Mary Watts

The  
End