

Simultaneous multiple submissions

Selling Your Work · By Simon Townsend · 2 min read

SMS (simultaneous multiple submissions)

Regarding simultaneous multiple submissions. This is where a freelance journalist sends off the same article to more than one publication at the same time.

I don't like SMS because it means you are not writing for THE ONE TARGET PUBLICATION and meeting its needs and wants.

Is SMS ethical? Is it wise? Is it professional?

Well first of all, editors HATE it. Editors have more good articles offered to them than they can publish. It's easy for them to toss a submission into the wastepaper bin if they become aware that it is simultaneously being "shopped around".

Freelancers would not face this dilemma of whether to send SMS if all editors responded promptly. Editors should, on the day they receive your submission, let you know whether they are going to publish it.

However, all successful and talented freelancers can tell you horror stories of editors who sit on submissions for months before responding, or, as often happens, never responding.

Editors will say it's unethical of a freelancer to send SMS. But ask those same editors if it is unethical to not give a speedy response and you'd have to listen to a long litany of whinges about how busy and over-worked they are.

So, who's in the "right"? Is the freelancer right in wanting to increase his/her chances and wanting to save time by sending SMS? Or is the overworked editor right?

It doesn't matter who's RIGHT.

What matters is NOT making professional enemies.

If all editors hate SMS so much that they're willing to toss away good articles rather than deal with journalists who sends SMS, then why would you get into SMS?

And by the way, look at it from the editor's point of view.

Sometimes publications have been highly embarrassed by freelancers who send SMS. What happens occasionally is this . . .

An editor of a weekly national publication likes a submission and without telling the freelancer whacks the story at the last moment into his publication and sends off a cheque. Meanwhile, another editor of a COMPETING weekly national publication also likes that same submission and also publishes and pays.

Both editors are unaware that this article has been part of sending SMS. The two publications come out on the same day, with the same "exclusive story", and the embarrassed editors get into trouble from THEIR bosses, and the freelance journalist concerned is black-listed.

In my 46 year career I have never ever sent SMS and I never would.

I always advise students to not take the chance. Instead, go the harder route and do a lot of telephoning editors and following up to establish whether there's any interest.

If not, communicate by mail, email or fax that you're withdrawing the article and move on to the next publication.

However, students are often so impatient (and impatience is a good quality in this business) that they send SMS anyway.

What should YOU do?

Email me and let me know your decision.

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