



Dream of Travel Writing

Don't Create "Ideas" Out of Nowhere: How to Always Find Them When You Need Them

Thank you all for joining us today. We're going to be talking about how to create ideas when you need them because they don't really come from nowhere. Good ideas, in fact almost all ideas that really are salable to magazines are based on something and we're going to look at different ways to find them.

So today we're going to be talking specifically about this concept of becoming an idea machine, right, we're talking about idea generation today. This is really very close to my heart because, it's honestly the biggest issue that I see people struggling with in their travel writing careers. Whether they come from a journalism background and they just feel like their ideas for travel aren't quite right, like they know how to generate ideas in other sectors, but they're not sure what's a good travel idea. I'm not sure if she's on the call today, but there was someone in our Pitchapalooza class who has a science writing background, oh there she is Marilyn, and was saying you know, "I tend to be so detail oriented and I stick to the facts and things like that, and that's not really how it works in travel" but in fact, it is. I think that once you understand really what ways there are to come up with ideas for travel articles and how to use them, then that can really push past a lot of different things that hold people up.

Then we're going to talk about three ways to generate new ideas from the past content of a magazine that you're looking to pitch. Then we'll look for ways to create ideas from other pre-existing sources, so not necessarily the magazine you're looking at pitching, but other magazines, conversations that you overhear, things like that.

You know I'm going to get to this in a future slide, but ideas are really the lifeblood of this job and so for myself, I've been a magazine editor, I've worked as the primary news gatherer for an online magazine about Italy and I've worked as the contributing editor, so I had to write several articles a month for all sorts of different magazines. The way that I do that successfully is by showing editors that I just have ideas whenever they need them, all sorts of ideas, they can pick and choose which one they like best, but I always have more. That's something really key to succeeding as a travel writer, whether you're writing for blogs.

The same is true with people that I've written for their blogs on a regular basis. You know, I had one site that I wrote to for several years and she would come to me and say "Hey we're doing this new thing. Do you have any ideas?" and I would send her ten. That way I always got to be the one leading the charge on all of the new series and things like that, because I always had ideas to give her.

Before we get started about talking about specific tactics, I want to just circle back for a second on what I was touching on just now when I was talking about my own background,



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about why is it so important for us to come up with ideas, right? Isn't what we're selling actually the words that we're typing, and not the kernel that then becomes that longer article? When I was doing some research to see if there were some idea generating tactics that I didn't already know about for this call, I was reading some things by Carol Tice. She has a blog called *Make a Living Writing* and she also runs the *Freelance Writing Den*, and she has a journalism background that's very interesting.

She didn't go to journalism school, in fact, I don't think she even graduated from college, I think maybe not even high school. She's very self-taught. She really started out working in newsrooms and so she got on on-the-job training on how to be a journalist and she's been very successful and in fact she's a regular writer for *Forbes Entrepreneur*. What she said on the topic of idea generation is that "If you're not developing article ideas, you're just not serious about earning well as a writer." I think that's so true because I think most of the time that I talk to people who aren't very happy with their income, or who feel like they're stuck or they're stalling out, and I say "What are you pitching or who are you pitching or how are you pitching?" The things that I hear or the ideas that they ask me to work on with them or the queries they ask me to look at, tend to be the same ideas, not even a whole trip or something, but just the same idea rehashed and not sliced into different ways, or not matched better to the magazine. They get really stuck on what they think is an idea without coming up with lots of ideas.

Here's the issue with not having lots of ideas. There are two really dreaded idea snafus that I want to bring up. So the first one, I've seen both of these happen many many times, but I'm going to give you some specific examples. So the first one is when the editor gets back to you and says, a good rejection right, the kind of rejection we all want to get. The rejection where they don't just reject your article, but they give you a chance to pitch them more things, they give you more information to help you better fit your pitch. So then you know it could be that they've already got something similar, that they've covered the topic too recently, and then at the end they say can you send me some other ideas? We talked about this a lot at the idea-fest and even at the Pitchapalooza, and in the workshop that I gave recently in DC, but a lot of times I talk to people who have said they've gotten a lot of rejections, but they're good rejections. They were rejections where the editor asked them to send them more ideas and then they don't send more ideas. If this has happened to you in the past, put it in the chat box, only I see it, not everybody can see it. I just want to know how pervasive this issue is. How many times has an editor said no to you, but said something akin to, but send us more pitches? Tell me if you've actually sent them more pitches. Because even I'm guilty of this.



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I remember when I was first starting to pitch a lot of magazines and I was just pitching big national newsstand magazines, you know because why not? I was pitching destination weddings and honeymoons, I was pitching you know every day with Rachel Ray, I was pitching all these big magazines. I cannot tell you like how many of those editors got back to me, even just on the first email, to say no for a valid reason and to ask for more pitches. I was really surprised because these were very very large magazines. So let me see over here, it looks like that just happened to somebody very recently, somebody said yes and no, that's happened a few times, I probably follow a path a few times and the other ones I just don't, I have definitely dropped the ball in this area. You know it's not anything to feel bad about. It quite honestly happens to everybody, but the way to get around this, is the techniques we're going to talk about later, but also a little bit of fear.

I think that we tend to, when you get rejected, just psychologically you're put in a very vulnerable place. So then the idea of coming up with more ideas, that also might get rejected, feels very hard. So you get this you know sort of sense in your stomach, this sense of dread that these ideas have to be perfect because this is going to be my last chance. And because they didn't like that last idea, so how can I make sure they like my next idea? You get a little bit of anxiety about it. You know, to that point, what I say is that you don't, not only just that this idea not have to perfect, but if you continue to give them ideas of the caliber of the first idea that caused the editor to write to you and ask for more ideas, they're not just going to stop responding to your emails because they clearly liked something about you. They also know that it's not always the next idea or even the one after that. Sometimes it's the fourth or fifth idea that finally makes it through. The people that get published in big big magazines, I'm talking like *Smithsonian*, *Travel & Leisure*, sort of big magazines, aren't just the ones that are the best writers or even the ones with the best ideas. They're the ones that just keep pitching and don't feel bad about sending more ideas.

I've used this example a couple of different times. I like it because it was the first sort of major, or you know like dollar a word sort of newsstand assignment I got. I had gone on a trip to Turkey and we unexpectedly had the opportunity to visit this tea plantation and also to go to where they take the tea and they dry it and they ferment it, then to see it packaged. So I really saw tea from plant to tea bag and I thought "my God this is like I've got to do something with this story" and I didn't know where to start and I looked up tea magazines. I found one that was a newsstand magazine that focused on tea and I checked and they had a section that was travel oriented. They often did it as a round-up, but there were a couple instances in the past where they had gone to plantations in India and China and done a first-person story. So I pitched and the first time I pitched to the editor@ email address and I heard nothing. This is also a great story about why to never pitch to the editor@ email address. Then I got a hold of the editor-in-chief's direct email and I sent it to her and she wrote me back in like a number of minutes, you know very very quickly. She essentially said you know



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this sounds great but it's just not a fit for our audience, it's just too exotic. Then I immediately turned around, not that day or that afternoon, but maybe the next afternoon, and I found out it was the anniversary of the Boston Tea Party and I pitched her a standard round-up on Boston. She had already assigned it. So now I'm on my second rejection, right? But again, like the first rejection was maybe something a little outside of what she would cover. The second rejection was good enough that they already assigned the article. So I pitched her another one and that one got assigned. So you never know and it's not like you have to be rejected differently each time or something like that. It really is a function that everyone in this business knows, that you just keep working at it until you find the right fit.

The other idea conundrum that we can get into that's very sad, and again, pop into the chat box and let me know if this has happened to you. Have you had a magazine that you really wanted to pitch an idea to, and you sat on it and you sat on it, and you didn't send it and then one day you open up the magazine and you see that idea there? I had this happen to me with *AFAR*, and as you may have heard me say before, there's various reasons you know to pitch or not to pitch *AFAR*. Yeah I see some people in the chat box say this has totally happened to them. When I had this happen to me with *AFAR*—oh no, it just happened last week to somebody—well, pitch that idea somewhere else, because that means it's a good idea. I had this happen with *AFAR* around Indian food. So *AFAR* has this section called feast, which some of you may be familiar with, which includes sort of some background and a recipe about a particular type of food. My husband is from India and I go there quite frequently so I wanted to pitch something around Indian food, because they want it to be something that you have a connection to, but it has to be outside the US or mostly outside of the US. So I had been wanting to and I had been kind of sitting on it and I might have even had it drafted and one day I opened up *AFAR*, at the airport on the way to India in fact, and there was this big huge extra-long street feast column about street food in Bombay and I was just kicking myself. And like, as several of you have said, it really hurts right? It sucks because you think oh well I should've pitched that idea, but here's the thing. I get questions a lot, usually in live workshops that we're doing, about idea stealing.

I think there's become this fear, this kind of pervasive thing that you're afraid that an editor will just take your idea and use it without having you write it by having somebody else write it. I have a story about that that goes with another slide that we'll talk about later. I think what people often don't realize, what we're going to talk about later on the call, is that ideas, like there's no new ideas is an expression that people say all the time, but I think a more apt way of saying it is that an idea is just a kernel, and the actual resulting article can be all sorts of different things. But that idea, that starting point, it's very easy for a lot of people to have the same idea.



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For instance, I was in California a little while back in Silicon Valley, which is actually where I'm from and my husband also has a lot of family there because you know the stereotype, he's Indian and everyone works in computers so they all work at Google, it's actually true. And so, I was there and just in conversations with friends of ours that were you know recent transplants to the Bay area overheard or had tons of conversations about housing prices. It's like Trump today. It was the only thing on anybody's minds, the only thing anybody could talk about. If they didn't have a personal story, they had a story from a friend or they had just managed to buy a house doing something amazing, or they couldn't buy a house no matter what they did. It was all anybody was talking about. And then I went to stay at the home of a friend of mine who was kind of a struggling journalist, not travel, I guess I would call her a bit more of a generalist and she had moved from New York where she was a broadcast journalist to California for her husband's job, and she was just struggling to find you know her footing with freelancing and things like that. She had got an assignment on exactly this, on the difficulty of the housing market, with Courts, which is a sort of general interest online news network. And she was complaining that the editor had sent it back to her for rewrites several times and we were working on her piece.

The thing is that she was clinging so tightly to her version of this idea about the issues with the housing prices and so, to show her that the idea could be written a totally different way, more in line with what the editor was looking for, I just took these conversations that I had had with other friends, and some other statistics that I knew from growing up there, and I wrote her article. The exact same ideas, the same points, everything, but with completely different interviews, completely different facts, but making the same point. To show her that you can still do the same idea, but with a totally different take on it, like what the editor was looking for. And so when you have this, "oh that was my idea" sadness, it totally sucks, but the thing is that, anybody could have had that idea and done it. The editor could have had that idea and assigned it to somebody or whatever, but what actually matters is the execution. So we're going to look at how you can take an idea that already exists in another magazine and execute it a little bit differently even for the same magazine, if not for a different magazine.

Alright so let's move on and look at three ways to generate article ideas from a magazine. So I'm using the term magazine-first here as opposed to idea-first because this is kind of how I classify different ways of generating article ideas. So either you have gone on a trip and you have seen a neat restaurant where they're doing something innovative and then you think "ok I have to find a place to write an article about this" and that's idea-first. So that means that you've thought of something and now you're trying to find a home for it. The flip side of that is if you for instance, in your sort of back pocket magazine idea file, know AFAR has a section called One Great Block, which I'm not actually too sure that they have anymore, so don't go too crazy with this, but if you know that they have a section called One Great Block where they take a neighborhood in an international city and it doesn't have to be something



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too big or important in terms of the city, but it's typically not in the US, and it's a block that has an interesting mix of shops and restaurants and cafes, and things like that. On the same street where you've seen this restaurant, you've seen several other things because you have in your head the idea of AFAR's One Great Block, you're now going magazine-first because you know that AFAR has this column, so you're looking at your trips through the lens of what that magazine looks like. So if you have any questions about magazine-first versus idea-first, I know I talk about it pretty often, but drop those in the chat box so I can clarify as we go forward.

Here are three types of magazine-first ideas. Now this is my favorite for two reasons. Fill-in-the-City we've called it, ok? These are some of the easiest ones to start working on if you are not really familiar with shaping your ideas. So if for instance, you have heard from me or from editors, or you're just not getting responses to your pitches. Like you're not getting a negative response, you're just not getting any response. It probably means that your ideas aren't being fit snugly into what the magazine is looking for. So a very common anecdote or antidote, I always have trouble with those two words. A very common antidote for that issue, is to start writing your pitches based very specifically on the formats that magazines use so that you get used to the types of articles that magazines are looking for.

This one about fill-in-the-city is one of the absolute easiest because you don't even need to think too hard about the article idea. You just look at everywhere you've been in the last year and check if the magazine has covered it and pitch it. Then when you write up the piece, all you have to do is follow the rubric for that story. In this case I have two airline magazines that I want to show you that have, each of them, three different fill-in-the-city article sections. The ones that I'm giving you here are very specifically you know things to do in a particular city. The one that I mentioned earlier, AFAR's One Great Block is another example. It's not necessarily billed as a city guide, but it does end up being a city guide. There's also very often in the front of the book, in the beginning of the magazine, a lot of these short sections that are essentially based in the same fill-in-the-city concept. I know a lot of the other major magazines, whether airlines, American Way, or Travel & Leisure have sections particularly in their food area that are essentially about the transformation of a city's food scene. So, it's fill-in-the-city because you're choosing Baltimore. But then you might be talking about the growth of the urban bee culture in Baltimore or something like that.

In this case, if we look at *B Inspired*, which is the Brussels Airway magazine, they've got three of varying lengths here. So the first one is going to be specifically about, and I'm going to close my chat box for a second so I can read these. This first one is going to be specifically about a town in Belgium. So in this case, it's a very simple exercise of "hey I went to Belgium. Let me look at this magazine. Have they in the past covered these cities that I've



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gone to? No? Great! Let me just pitch them the city and exactly the things that I cover in this section." Done. Very easy pitch. Very easy idea.

The next one is a bit more onerous. It's called "Barrio", which is a bit funny for Brussels Airways, but there you have it. So this one is more of a standard city guide. It's listing bars, restaurants, museums, shops, and a little bit about each of those.

The third one that Brussels Airways has, "The Big City Guide" as they call it, it's a travel story in first-person. So it's essentially, if you look at these, these are really good examples of the three different types of fill-in-the-city articles that you're generally going to see. One is more about why to go to a certain place now and little bit about what you do there. The next one is a very standard third-person city guide, more of a round-up style. The last one is a first-person, with some sidebars where you're talking about a particular trip that you've been on.

Now I want to look also at Delta because Delta has as well, and they're so long and interesting, I tried to slam them into this slide and I apologize if they're hard to read. Delta also has some very standard fill-in-the-city type things here, but they're a bit different than the ones that Brussels Airways has so I want to show you these.

The first one is very very short and it's in their front of book section, which is called "Wheels Up" and it's called "Trending". If you notice, the ones that they have on here are sort of not traditional city guide cities in a way. Like Mexico City perhaps, but it's a bit having a renaissance. Oakland is a very sort of newly hip and worth traveling to and no longer dangerous city. Ottawa is getting a lot of revitalization in part because of anniversaries and some other things, but this is the kind of thing where you're doing a short front of book thing that is specifically about why you should travel to a city right now because it has improved. Something has changed, because there's a new reason to go and to go before everyone else goes.

Now the next one is a column that a lot of you might be familiar with. There's another version of this that is you know, the "Three Perfect Days" in United or "48 hours in" in The Independent. This is more of the itinerary style fill-in-the-city article. In this case, in Delta's "1 City 5 Ways" they take one city and then they talk about five different ways to experience it for different types of travelers. So it could be a foodie, a historian, the family traveler, the multi-generational traveler, the girlfriend getaway, you know something like that. For this, you know it's useful whenever you're doing the fill-in-the-city pieces to check the types of cities that they've done in the past. So as opposed to the "Trending" one that we looked at



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earlier, where they're doing less standard tourist cities, in "1 City 5 Ways" they tend to do bigger cities.

Then the last one that they have in Delta is something that I'm seeing more and more of. So this is also going to be a third-person reported feature, but it's a really deep dive into one city's culture. This is becoming a lot more common, especially in the airline magazines I'm seeing these. But also more generally, where they are really giving credence to the experiential travel boom right now and showing people not just sort of how to experience the city as a local, but offering visitors the opportunity to understand the landscape like a local would. So in this case, they've got typically three out of four different sections that they focus on. So either it's a Q&A with the city's governor, or I think that's supposed to be mayor. A Q&A with the mayor, a business focus, a travel focus, or a sports focus. So again, you know I've shown the types of cities that they've mentioned here and they're pretty big, but they're not necessarily the same as like a Rio or a Seoul.

So the second way that you can take something that's already in a magazine and create new ideas right on top of that is a technique I like to call "just like blank, but with blank" and so what this means is that you look at an article that has been done previously and you can this is sort of similar to what we're talking about with the city ones, but you can use it on all sorts of different articles. So say you're looking at a trending front of book section and I'll go back to that example I used earlier about the bee culture in Baltimore. In that case, they're looking at urban agriculture which is you know cultivating bees in a city that you think of as very not grungy, but industrial. So then what we can do is go "what's another city that's rather industrial that has an unexpected urban farming movement?" Then we might go to Atlanta or to, it's funny that I'm having a bad time coming up with industrial cities, or somewhere in India where there's a lot of pollution or something like that. Take a different type of urban farming. Rather than bees it might be goats. People are suddenly keeping goats in their back yards in some of these cities. Now we have you know an idea that's just as interesting as the other one, but has a different protagonist. So you can even go back and sell that to the very same magazine. Now this technique, "just like blank, but with blank" works really well with features. The thing about features is that a good feature article idea you can boil down what the article is about in just one sentence or less, but it should have a noun and a verb. So I pulled these out of the database and so they're not necessarily going to be set up in the way that the writer would have pitched this article idea to their editor.

For instance, let's look at this third one here about how Leonard Casley has declared his farm a principality and grown it into a tourist attraction, right? So that's kind of cool. Then we can say noun has declared his something a principality or you know an otherwise autonomous legal area and turned it into a tourist attraction. What else can we do with that? You know



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there's the obvious example of Christiania in I believe it was Amsterdam or Copenhagen which is a zone a sort of or this is a bit more hippy style, but declared itself an autonomous area and has become a tourist attraction. You know you can, I recently read about a city in Italy and I couldn't believe I didn't know about this, that had some time back also declared itself its own kingdom or its own country and the Italian government doesn't recognize that, but they have proceeded for hundreds of years you know electing a new king or their own president or what have you and then it was talking about how you can visit as a tourist.

Let's look at another one here because you can really apply this formula to pretty much any feature that you find. So another one here, the next one is about how or let's go down below that "Walking by Water" so about the writer's experience of a four day bushwalking expedition through islands off the coast of Tasmania. Like I wouldn't necessarily think of a walking pilgrimage trekking sort of story by skipping across islands. What a cool idea. So we can take this and turn it into you know a walking excursion in the San Juan Islands of Seattle and how you can do, not Seattle, of Washington and how you can do all of those different islands on foot. You can turn that into, I'm trying to think of some other islands that are close together, for instance, in the Maldives, there's all these different islands and you have to either take a boat or a water plane to get between them. There are some in the south that you can actually walk between them and then you could take a little boat to get to the next one. So you can do a walking trip through the Maldives. It's very unexpected when you apply it to these other things. So this is one of the great things about the "just like blank, but with blank" is that it forces you to look at things that you typically only envision in a certain way as a new article idea.

For instance, the first time I go to a destination, you know whether it's a country or a big city or whatever I typically think of that trip as my familiarization trip, whether someone else is paying for it or not. To me that's like the get-to-know-the-area trip. Then I'll go home and I'll think about it and then I'll pitch some other stories in advance of another trip that are now focused around the background knowledge that I have of that destination. This "just like blank, but with blank" especially when you use it for features is a great way to come up with these ideas. If you know you're going somewhere, for instance I'm going to Israel for TBEX and I've been there in the past and I know a lot about Israel. I could look at this, I could go through some magazines that I want to pitch, and I could look at the type of features that they've done in the past and I could say "Hmm could I do something with this urban farming in Tel Aviv?" And then I could just do a little Googling and see if there's something that fits in. Or I can do something about you know walking. Walking in an island area, what about the Dead Sea? Could I do something about walking the Dead Sea? Something like that. So this is a really great technique for pitching in advance before your trips, but it can also help you if you've already gone on a trip and you're trying to figure out what to do with your trip to



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better organize those interesting experiences that you had, or the people that you met, or business that you're looking to profile but you're not quite sure what to do with yet.

The last one of our way of generating ideas from magazines is "the story behind the story" and I really love this one because it's very universally applicable. You can pick up a magazine and pretty much every article, ask yourself why did they include this article? What is interesting about this? What did they not say in this article that's also interesting? Is there you know a person that they mentioned who deserves a full profile? Or a business that they mentioned in the round-up of a city guide that on its own is doing something very interesting and should have a full feature dedicated to it? So this is the case where you can pitch something that was previously mentioned in a magazine back to a magazine, but in a more full blown format and say hey I know you mentioned blah blah blah, but there's actually a great story in there about how the founder had cancer and decided to do something different with his life and then moved to this area and then recovered from cancer through the amazing cuisine in Okinawa and then became part of a center there educating tourists about the cuisine and I'd like to do a story on that. So that was a totally made up example just now about somebody I actually have read about recently, but it's a good look at how you can take something and as I mentioned this is good for pre-trip research like the previous one. You can take something that has a little inkling in an article and do some digging and see what else is there and expand that into a much bigger story. These do work very well as business profiles or people profiles, but they can also work really good with trends.

It might be that you see one of these shorter front of book trending 250 word city guides about, I'm going to go back to the Baltimore bee keeping example, and you can say "Oh well that's interesting" and then take it two ways. What other types of unexpected urban food programs or revitalization programs are going on in Baltimore or what other cities have a program like this? Then you can take that trend and expand it either of those two ways into a larger investigation into a larger story.

The one caveat here though is the covered-too-recently issue though. So this is one of the things that I see people get with some frequency from editors and I think it chalks up to this idea that we might think "oh well I know the editor did a story on blah blah blah but my story is different because of blah blah blah". For the editor, they just can't. They can't be covering the same places too often if they are a national or international magazine because they have a geographical mandate. What to do in this case is to make sure that when you do a story behind a story, that first of all, you're pitching things that were covered not yesterday, but like a few months back, and then the timeline of magazine publishing will help you out there because by the time your article actually comes out, another six months or a year will have gone by. Also, that you're really making sure that you're only drafting off of the original



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story and you're not writing something that's too similar. So that means that you read this as a short, you're going to make it into a feature that's more a person profile as opposed to a location profile.

Or you know if it was previously more of a person profile, then you're going to turn it into more of a destination piece. So you want to really make sure that you're flipping the type of story as well when you do this in order to avoid issues with the editor saying "well we've already covered something too similar". To go back to what we were talking about common idea snafus earlier, this technique of the story behind the story is really great when you get that email from the editor, like what else have you got? Because that's when you're nervous and you're scrounging and you're not sure what they cover and you can certainly go back and do a fill-in-the-city or a just like this, but with that. But if you're nervous about coming up with the right idea that the editor will certainly like, then this can be a little nerve racking.

So the story behind the story is really great because you can go back and know that they found x, y, z interesting in the past so that they will find it interesting in the future. Like I said it's not a big deal if you get a rejection the second time, as long as you're still showing the editor that you have good idea. So if you pitch them something and they say "oh wow that sounds like a really great story, but we covered it too recently", you're going to be getting a second good rejection. You're also going to be getting more useful information, which is that this magazine won't cover Africa, a specific country in Africa or a specific city in Africa more than once every five years or something like that. That will help you shape your next pitches. Alright, so let me know if you have any questions on this. I want to move on to coming up with ideas more out of thin air as opposed to a specific magazine that you're looking to pitch.

Alright, so one of the techniques I really like for this is called "National to Local". You'll notice that a lot of these techniques sound a little bit similar, but it's really a function of when we're creating these ideas out of "nowhere" they're not coming out of nowhere because they're based on something. So all of these ideas are going to be based on different things. But in this case, national to local, what this means is that you're taking something that is playing out on a national or international level and applying it in a very localized way. So this doesn't mean you know (I'm going to time travel a little bit because now Brooklyn has become a thing everywhere) this doesn't mean going back to the genesis of Third Wave coffee, and saying oh look we have our first Third Wave coffee bar and blah blah blah place, you know now we're finally cool and hip. People definitely are writing those articles, but that's not necessarily what I'm talking about here. So when I say this is great for trends, what I mean is that you want to be able to find something that's not necessarily just a trend coming to your local area first, but you want to show something more complex. You want to show



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how it's playing out. You want to show the effect of the trend, rather than simply that it has arrived. And this is also good for current events, as well as trends.

For instance, something that I've been batting around in my head for a couple weeks now, is that I was at a big writing conference, probably the biggest writing conference in the US, and there was like 40,000 people or something like that. And I could not believe that almost every single session, every single keynote, every single everything, was about Trump. If not entirely about Trump, there was a very large section about Trump and specifically, people were talking about this malaise that was essentially keeping them from writing. Or they were talking about how perhaps an agent was saying how, their writers don't want to work on the books that they're currently writing and they all want to do something different. But essentially there was this whole wind of change that Trump had brought about in the writing world and I haven't seen anybody write about that yet. If someone else wants to steal this and run with it, just let me know so I don't pitch it. But I haven't seen in Salon or in the writing magazines, anything like that yet, sort of a deep examination of how this cultural shift is affecting writers and what you can do about it.

That's the kind of thing where you're taking something that's a national trend, but not necessarily specific to the area that you're writing about and applying it on a local level. So in this case, you'll see what I did as a "local level" was actually more of a local topic, rather than a more local geography. You can do that as well.

This is the kind of thing where, if you write about history travel, RV travel, food travel, but even more specifically food tours or something like that, you can take these national issues or these current events and apply them to your specific subsection within the travel industry. Just as you can apply these things to your specific geographic area. So this works correspondingly very well for more niche magazines whether it's in size or geography, but you can also use these national to local things to frame the articles you are pitching to national magazines. So for instance, the one that I keep mentioning about Baltimore and the bee keeping, is the kind of thing where they found a national trend or something that was trending and becoming more common, in a specific city and they pitched it to a national magazine that has a section about specific cities. The national to local idea doesn't necessarily only have to be used when you are writing for Blue Ridge Outdoors or Los Angeles Magazine or something like that. This is also something that you can use in national magazines as well.

The flip side of this is local to national and this is actually quite different than going from national to local. Because rather than taking a concept and applying it, we're actually taking



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content and bubbling it up. So that's the big difference between these two things. It's that rather than taking a seed and a framework and looking for something to fill into that, as we do with national to local, here we're finding good examples on a local level and then bubbling them up to national recognition. For instance, the one I mentioned previously about the bee keeping in Baltimore. If we were going to start with the bee keeping in Baltimore and then look at how we could do a local to national. Here's how we would do that. So say we found this bee keeping trend in Baltimore and we said wow that's cool. I haven't seen that anywhere else. I'm saying this as if it was really the beginning of the trend. Then what you would do is you would take some other places where this was starting to be seen, there is a good number for trends, and say Baltimore, Seattle, and Nashville, there's starting to be the urban bee keeping trend and so you've taken one city as the kernel and you've put out feelers and grown it into a story that has more national impact.

Because of that, this works really well as a basket of kittens. For those of you that aren't familiar, a basket of kittens is when you have one thing that's just a fantastic idea, it's very cool, it's very shiny, it's very interesting, it might be a restaurant with an entirely new service concept. For instance, when the dining in the dark restaurant came out or something like that. But you want to pitch this to a magazine that is national or international, so pitching something that is so geographically localized would not work for that editor because they need to be serving readers in many many different places. So then you go out and find, if not other dining in the dark restaurants in other places, you go find other restaurants that are very similar in terms of doing something quite unheard of that affects the sensory experience of the restaurant. So you might include a place where you only eat with your hands, you might include this restaurant which I think is in Japan, where there is a full choreographed experience of light and sound that goes along with your meal. Then you might include a place where in addition to eating your food, they also give you a sniff of something to go with each dish or something to show you how that affects the dishes and then places where you can have those, the little sort of drug thing crystals that affect your taste buds and make everything sour taste sweet. So then you would have a round-up or a feature article or something about a new trend in sense-enhancing or sense-altering dining, right? So a basket of kittens is when you have a bunch of things that are all interesting on their own and when you put them together, each of them shines, but the whole package is so great, it can't be ignored.

We're going to be finding these local to national things in local publications or just picking them up by word of mouth on a local level, you can start to feel like you're stealing a story that somebody else has already written. Here's the thing about that. As I mentioned in the beginning of the call about this journalist friend of mine in the San Francisco Bay area, and how I rewrote her entire story about housing prices and they're affecting families in California, the story is going to be different depending on who writes it, depending on how



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it's reported, depending on the examples you use and the people you interview. You'll come up with different quotes, you'll come up with different facts, you'll come up with different examples.

A really interesting example of this, of a journalist thinking that there's absolutely nothing wrong with this, is that, a few years back, it was maybe even four years back now, I got an email from a journalist from the Financial Times ok, so like nothing to shrug about. He had read either one blog post or several articles I had done on a trip to Turkey, in which we visited these places called yaylas, which are the summer residence of the semi-nomadic farmers in the mountains between Turkey and Georgia, where each family has a house just like in the village below, and it's essentially like a duplicate of their house below and it's where they go in the summer. I talked about how you can walk from one yayla to another and things like that. He wrote me and he didn't even say like "oh I like your article. I want to do something similar, do you have any tips?" He said "can you tell me the name of your guide and give me their contact information and also tell me all of your places you stayed?"

So essentially, rather than just taking my idea and pitching an article about it, which he had done, he also came and asked me to give him all of my research. Now obviously I didn't do it. I told him to do his own job, but this is my point. It's that it's not unusual for people to draft. It's not unusual to get an idea one place and then go redo the trip yourself, or redo the interviews or something like that. So as much as it can feel icky and you certainly shouldn't do like that guy did, it's not even that it's not uncommon. It's both common and it's even quite accepted with editors and so don't feel this stealing feeling about it, unless you have specifically written somebody and asked them to hand over all of their research because that is in fact stealing.

A good way to do this local to national sort of transition, is that when you are traveling, particularly if you are traveling to places where there's not a good bubbling up of stories from that area, whether it's a place abroad where there's not a lot of English language media or it's just a small town or something like that. Pick up the local publications. You know now there's Edibles all over the place. So even if you can't physically pick them up, you can go online and check out the Edibles in these other areas. You can Google you know newspapers in x, y, z county and find some stories on there. There's so many ways that you can get in touch with what the local journalists are covering and skim those, both for baskets of kittens, or to just go and re-research yourself, like with the yaylas and just write a bigger first-person feature story.



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Alright, so we're getting close on time, so the last one here on getting ideas out of nowhere is "Re-visiting Big Events." This is a technique that I really love because it's quite under-used, but it's always effective. In a way this is a version of the anniversary idea, so ideas work best, pitches work best, when you have a very strong time peg. A time peg that I think a lot of people rely on is an anniversary. So you know, it's the anniversary of a city and it's a very big one. Like it's their 350th or something like that and that's a great reason for the editor to run that story. But the thing is that anniversaries on their own aren't ideas. You can't just write a story about how it's the 350th anniversary of Quebec City or whatever, because that's just history. That's just a history lesson. That's just getting on Wikipedia and rehashing things. That's not something that an editor is going to bite on. But what you can do when you use "Revisiting a Big Event" is that now you have a built-in story. Rather than just saying this thing happened a long time ago, what you're pitching becomes "I want to talk about what has changed since this big thing happened and how is it affecting x, y, z people". So those people might be tourists, those people might be restaurants, those people might be the hotel industry, those people might be locals of a particular ethnic background. It can be all sorts of things. So you know not to play on tragedy, but a good one here for this transformation angle and recovery angle is terrorist attacks. Not because there are lot of them, but because it's something that really sticks in peoples' heads and they're concerned about how people have recovered. Likewise with catastrophes, like earthquakes and tsunamis and things like that.

I did a piece on this a few years back about this portion of Emelio, not the recent earthquake in the mountains, but the portion of Italy that had had some very severe earthquakes and tens of thousands of people were living in tents, but it's the area that produces all of the prosciutto and parmesan cheese, and balsamic vinegar. I had been covering it for Italy magazine when it happened, so I had a lot of information on just how devastating the damage had been. Then I went back a year later and checked in with people about how they had rebuilt their businesses, what interesting philanthropic initiatives had sprung up to help them survive and how tourists can contribute to that. So that's the kind of idea about a recovery story that you can do and depending on the scale of the initial incident, that a bit informs when you should go back. For instance, you know if it's something small, in a year you could have a good level of transformation to talk about. If it's something very devastating, it would be between five years or even ten years. So another way to do this is to take something that's new or that was new a period of time back, so one year, five years, ten years and talk about how that has changed things.

I know a lot of people have grown up in cities that are now completely different, whether they have become like you know where I'm from Silicon Valley has become this major tech area and cities have sprung up where there was nothing before. My husband had a similar incident in India. It can also be the reverse. It can be a town that was previously a depressed former mining town or former factory town and then a hotel opened and now that's



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completely revitalized the neighborhood. So taking something that was new, but hasn't been new for a little while, is hard to just write about that thing. But if you can say, five years ago, this thing opened and we're going to show how it's transformed downtown Beacon, New York on the Hudson Valley into 1.5 miles of antique shops that are all community owned that draw 10,000 tourists a month from New York City. So this is the way that you can take something that isn't new enough to just talk about because it's new, but use that to tell a greater story, one of transformation.

You can even do it with political things here, right? I think we're rounding up here now on the one year anniversary of Brexit, of the Brexit vote. So you could come to London, and bop around and check out how that's affected prices. You could talk to tourists on the street about if the lower prices motivated them to come here, talk to people who run businesses about if they think that they're going to be able to sustain if Brexit continues, things like that.

Like I said, this is a way to use the concept of anniversaries, that has a built-in angle, that has a built-in story to tell, rather than just a simple time peg. These are the three ways to sort of create ideas, not necessarily out of specific magazine and pitch it back to that magazine, but kind of out of a greater cultural understanding.

The one thing that I want to say about whether you're using this technique or whether you're using the techniques to come up with ideas for a specific magazine from that magazine itself, is to not pitch multiple ideas to the same magazine at the same time. I'm not super sure why there's a discrepancy and misunderstanding around this. I think it might be because when you're pitching to websites, you can often pitch multiple ideas at the same time. But print editors do not like it. Don't do it, unless you've been working with an editor for quite a while and this also goes for major online websites, as in not places that you might be applying through a job ad that has specifically asked for multiple ideas, but a website that pays writers that you're applying to for the first time. Any time that you're pitching a place that you don't yet have an in with, you haven't yet published there, you should only be sending one fully flushed out pitch per pitch email. What that means is that if you have multiple ideas for the same magazine, that's great because as soon as you get that email from the editor that says "oh I like this idea but we're already doing something similar. What else do you have for me?" You have a bunch left.

I think when we get an idea and we know it's a good idea, we're really tempted to sort of get it out the door right away, as soon as we know that it's a fit, we dither for a while about writing it, but once we've hit that moment where we know it's an idea we want to get it out. We want to get it assigned. So if you have multiple ideas for the same publication, it's really



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tempting to try to get them all to the editor because you want to sell them. They're ready. They're all ready to go. But the thing that's really great about having a bunch of ideas in reserve, is not just to have something ready when that editor asks you for more ideas, but also to have something ready when you don't hear back from the editor at all, which is totally disheartening. But you need to be able to be mechanical about it. What I advise people whenever I do workshops is that you send somebody a pitch and then immediately go to your calendar and either one week or two weeks, whatever your preference, or how time-sensitive the idea is, you put a reminder to follow up and then in another one week or two weeks you put another reminder to follow up.

In that second reminder, you put the next article idea you're going to pitch them. So what that means is that you've sent a pitch and in the next you know week or two, you say "hey I just want to check and see if you were interested in (and then put the title of your article idea and make sure that you've also pasted the original pitch below)" and then the next time you check in with them you say "hey it looks like you might not have space for (and then put the title of your previous article), so I wanted to send you a new pitch" and then you go right into your next pitch idea just like that. I have heard editors say either that they have assigned an idea only after getting two, three, four emails like this because they could see the person had a lot of ideas and they wanted to invest time in starting to work with that person. Or conversely, I've had writers say with quite a bit of frequency actually, that when they use this technique of immediately pitching a new idea and just very pleasantly saying it looks like you weren't able to use that idea so let me get you a new one, the editor has assigned them the first idea. So showing an editor that you have a lot of ideas in this way, for the same magazine, does a lot to increase that editor's confidence about working with you in general.

I just had one, oh ok somebody is saying "Thank you. I'm always torn about whether to send one or three."

The one thing I will say though is if you have a bunch of ideas and you're not quite sure what will fit, the only way that I would ever advise including extra ideas is; you've written your whole pitch, you start with your lede, you tell what idea you're trying to pitch and how that would look as an article, you talk about yourself and why you are qualified to write this article, you say would you be interested in (the name of your article) for (the name of the magazine), and then, and I don't like to do this because it can weaken your point. But you can say I also have features around blah blah and blah (and name three other interesting things that you've done recently) available to sell or something like this. Let me know if you would like full pitches on any of those. So this can work if the editor can't use the idea that you're pitching them and they're not quite sure about responding to you, because then they



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can say "yeah I like that idea about the new beach culture in Northern Portugal. Tell me more about that."

But I really advise using this with caution and only using it once you've got your pitches to a really good place because the whole idea of sending only one idea in that pitch, is to show the editor that you are confident that this is a good idea. And not wishy-washy and that you actually know the publication and you know it is the right idea to send them. So I would only advise, including this little kicker at the end of a couple different ideas, just in two or three words each. Don't flush them out any further than that. Because if you're experienced and that's coming across in your tone, the editor will see that and they'll know that you will send an equally fleshed out idea or equally fleshed out pitch for the next idea. But if not, it will just confound the waters for them and make them doubt whether you are really sort of solid in your idea. So, if you want to pitch multiple ideas, and if you're a really solid pitcher, then you can certainly look at including that line at the end. But if you're a little new, if you're on slightly shakier ground, then I wouldn't go about doing that.

I don't want to keep you, especially after and I appreciate everybody joining us after I had mistakenly set the email for 3:30 in the morning. But I look forward to talking with you again next week.

Have a great evening everybody!