



When Your Editor Says No, Don't Give Up

By Mary Charlebois in Fort Bragg, California



At the beginning of my travel-writing career, whenever I didn't get a response from an editor, I wrote the publication off as not interested in me or my work. I'd brood for days, haunting my inbox, waiting for anything—even a rejection letter.

What a mistake. And a waste of time.

It didn't occur to me there could be many reasons I didn't get a reply. And most of those had nothing to do with me personally or the quality of my work.

Timing is the main reason your story or a journalist request to a tourism board wasn't accepted. Here's why.

- The publication may have recently run a story like yours.
- An editor may have a similar story assigned to a different writer.
- Changes in personnel (at either the publication or the tourism board).
- CVBs (Convention & Visitors Bureaus) have budgets and partners to satisfy.

And think about this. Just because your work or request isn't right for one editor or destination, doesn't mean it's not right for someone else.

Perseverance is one of the most vital traits a travel writer can have. In a business where timing is king, hanging in there, even when it appears you're getting nowhere, can have significant payoffs.

Travel writer Lori Sweet relayed this story about not giving up.

In January, I was given an assignment to write about a unique inn and winery. I emailed the manager who quickly responded that something could be worked out.

After a few emails back and forth, to work out details, I suddenly stopped hearing from him. I waited a few weeks and reached out again... nothing. A month had passed, so I called and left a message.... no return call.

I was at the point where I needed to come up with an alternative story to pitch to the editor who had given me the original assignment. I decided to try one more time before giving up. This time I was able to connect with the manager. He mentioned that he had emailed me back and was waiting for my response—an email I'd never received.

Two weeks from now, I'll be hosted at this beautiful inn and winery with lots of extras added.

Perseverance pays off!

Travel writer Jed Vaughn offered this experience...

When I first broke into travel writing and started pitching editors, there was an outlet that I'd always pitch but never seemed to get a response... at least not a desirable one. Nevertheless, I would always add this prestigious publication to my distribution list.

I must have pitched Dreamscapes Travel & Lifestyle Magazine at least a dozen times to no avail. Perhaps my query writing was getting better, or maybe I just landed on something that was a good fit for the editorial calendar, but my persistence paid off. When I pitched a story about a 4-day/3-night cruise through the San Juan Islands aboard a 160-foot Tallship, the Schooner Zodiac, I finally hit pay dirt with Dreamscapes. The editor replied and commissioned me for a 1,000-word article. Not only did it pay well, but it also qualified me for this amazing press trip.

It taught me to never give up on an outlet and to not take rejection personally.

From Travel Writer and Photographer Theresa St John...

When first starting out as a travel writer, I learned a great deal from others more seasoned than I. And for the most part, I followed their lead.

I'd traveled to Jekyll Island for a specific reason. I wanted to visit and photograph hauntingly beautiful Driftwood Beach. And I hoped to tell the story of its "graveyard of trees" to whoever would listen.

Another writer told me there'd be times I'd fall in love with a place, but that finding a storyline might be impossible and that I'd need to move on. Although I knew this was true, something told me to follow my gut and write it.

My story on Driftwood Beach found a home a few months later. I'll always be glad I didn't give up or put it on a back burner.

And, here's a never-give-up anecdote of my own...

30 days touring England's backroads is #1 on my travel bucket-list.

In early 2017, I began formulating my expedition. I researched, bought books, maps, and guides. It was to be a working trip. I started writing to places like Visit Britain, asking for the whole package—airfare, rail passes, and media comps for hotels, B&Bs, and castles. My lengthy, poorly defined letters got me—you guessed it—nowhere.

The first year's requests rarely got replies. Those that did responded with a polite "no." A mentor suggested I wasn't specific enough. I was basically asking, "I'm coming to England, will you pay for my entire trip?"

The second year I followed-up on all my original CVB requests. But this time my emails began by telling what I could offer them in the way of published stories and photos, social media posts, and promotion. They ended with a specific request—a room, tour, etc.

I started to get responses offering accommodations, meals, tours, and all manner of outdoor adventures. One of those offers came from someone that a year earlier

had said “no.” My confidence grew. I wrote to more PR firms, tourism boards, and tour companies.

My trip is in August 2018. To date, I have 82% of my accommodations comped. I’ve been invited on outings that include glider flying, steam train excursions, river canoeing, and cycling. I’ve been offered meals, wine tasting, food tours, and much more. I’ll explore London for five days, then head into the English countryside as the guest of five different CVBs.

My secret?

I didn’t give up. I reached out with a specific offer and request. I set up a spreadsheet to keep track of my requests and replies. I followed up unanswered requests, but no more than three times. Some of my answers came after two or three emails, often apologizing for the delay. Most arrived within a week of my first contact.

A big part of travel writing involves asking. You ask an editor to accept your story when you query. You ask travel bureaus and public relations firms for accommodations, press passes, tours, meals, and information.

Here are 6 reasons you may not be getting what you ask for, however. And ways you can turn it around.

1. You’re giving up too quickly. Follow up on all your pitches and queries. For editor queries, I follow up once after 30 days. For CVB queries, I follow up three times.

2. Your story may not fit the publication calendar. Most publications have a calendar indicating what will be featured in each issue. These are usually available online in the magazine’s media kit or by request from the advertising department.

3. Your proposed topic or region was recently covered. Search the magazine’s past issues back a year or two to see what they’ve recently published before querying.

4. The timing of your visit. Tourism is seasonal, and budgets can be tight for many CVBs. If your request comes when the year's coffers are empty or during high season, you're likely to be turned down for a hosting request. Time your request right and you'll get the red carpet treatment.

5. Story ideas/proposed publications don't fit with the CVB's promotional plan for their partners. Often, a destination piece covering where to stay, what to do, where to eat is sufficient. However, it's good to check the CVB's website to learn what and how they are promoting their area. It will give you a distinct advantage as a writer.

6. Your query to an editor or CVB pitch doesn't showcase your skills as a writer. This is your first impression, make it creative and professional. Proofread your email before sending by checking spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Verify names and addresses. Verify links and attachments.

The moral of the story here is "Don't give up."

Follow these suggestions and examples, and before you know it, you'll be getting what you ask for.