

## INTERVIEW

**WE DEBUT A NEW** feature in this issue of the newsletter: PEN members interview, by phone or Skype, someone who is not a member but is professionally connected to writers, editors, proofers, indexers, tutors, layout specialists, designers or other careers chosen by PEN members.

In this issue, our interviewees are based in the Twin Cities. PEN member Barbara Carrane interviewed Josh McCaffrey from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, and Shannon Taylor interviewed Laura Haraldson at Tiger Oak Publications. — Margo Dwight, editor of Networking News

## Business writing and design tips for freelancers

BARBARA CARRANE



Josh McCaffrey

**THERE IS NO SUCH THING** as a typical day for Josh McCaffrey, manager of writing and design at Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. Several broad responsibilities fall under McCaffrey's charge. He manages a staff, provides creative direction for projects — such as marketing or communication campaigns and video work — and is a relationship manager who works with internal partners

within Thrivent Financial to help move their projects from concept to completion.

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With the quantity and variety of work on McCaffrey's plate, he relies heavily on his in-house staff located in Minneapolis and Appleton, Wis. When he needs to augment the staff writers or designers, he uses contractors and freelance talent. Occasionally, business partners have need of a special writing or design expertise, and McCaffrey targets freelancers who can fill that unique need.

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## Managing editor shares strategies

SHANNON TAYLOR

**FOR MANY ASPIRING** freelance writers and editors, the publishing world can feel like a fortress designed to keep them out. Laura Haraldson, managing editor of community lifestyle magazines at Tiger Oak Publications in Minneapolis, shares advice on how to break down those walls.

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Instead of typing “freelance writer and editor” in the subject line, get specific.

### Make meaningful contact

Most editors prefer email queries to phone calls, but Haraldson agrees that emails can get lost in the mix. So how do you make your email query stand out? Instead of typing “freelance writer and editor” in the subject line, get specific: “Plymouth resident story” or “Woodbury new business story.”

Haraldson also recommends studying editorial calendars. If you time it right, your story could be just what an editor needs. Or if you pitched a semi-related idea an editor might remember you in the future and give you an assignment.



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Although Josh McCaffrey's store of contractors and freelancers is fully stocked, he offers some candid advice that can help freelancers in their overall prospecting and marketing efforts.

- **Be mindful of managers' time.** Put your good judgment forward when prospecting or "checking in" with hiring managers about potential work. McCaffrey says that it can be a fine line between staying on a manager's radar and becoming a nuisance. Too-frequent check-ins or lengthy messages take time away from a manager's day and may cost a freelancer points when that manager has a job to assign.

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- **Be curious about the businesses or organizations you are targeting.** Do your homework in advance. McCaffrey notes that "freelancers need to know what makes my organization different. Thrivent Financial is not a 'typical' Wall Street-type financial services firm. We are faith-based, not-for-profit and member-owned with a culture that reflects that. Freelance professionals who know us and are curious about our processes, teams and business partners tend to stay with us long term."

- **Hone your relationship skills.** Even when freelancers work remotely, they will likely interact with staff or others at their host or hiring company. "Fitting in with the team in place is crucial," says McCaffrey. If a freelancer's relationship skills are lacking, the talent they bring to an organization could be overshadowed. —

McCaffrey is not hiring contractors or freelancers at this time.  
— Margo Dwight, editor of Networking News



Barbara Carrane is a freelance writer and editor specializing in financial services. She lives in the Twin Cities.

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### Be findable

Twitter is the most relevant tool for our industry: quick to read and update, with access to large numbers of people. Make good use of Facebook, too. Posting "I just had a great interview with X" might trigger ideas or connections.

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### Get clips

Any published clip is going to make you stand out. Start by approaching universities and corporations that need people who can communicate.

If you write an article for a corporate newsletter, go ahead and say why it's extraordinary: "I'm proud of this article because the CEO only grants

one interview a year." Whatever you do, Haraldson says, don't send an editor a Word document! They need to see actual clips.

### Pursue interests you love

One of the best ways to generate great story ideas is to have a life outside of work. Join groups that interest you and parlay that into writing opportunities. The more dynamic an individual you are, the more dynamic a writer you will be. —



Shannon Taylor lives, writes and edits in western Wisconsin. She's currently developing websites and working with an author to complete his book.