

Council Post: Use Your Voice To Build Business: The Beauty Of The Op-Ed

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Leadership

Program

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It was early fall, and I was brainstorming with a client about how to build awareness for his industrial company. A veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces, the CEO was proud to run a certified veteran-owned business.

I encouraged him to write an op-ed in time for Veterans Day about the importance of giving jobs to veterans. He wrote a compelling piece, and a business magazine in his market picked it up, running it alongside a big photo of the CEO. Wow, did it bring him and his company lots of attention!

An op-ed (short for “opposite the editorial page”) is an opinion-based, first-person persuasive essay that a thought leader writes and a media outlet publishes to share a nonstaff, expertise-driven perspective on a timely matter. It’s an opportunity to share expertise, establish an authoritative voice and add timely, original content to a global conversation about a particular topic.

An op-ed is also a great chance for a person or organization to build positive exposure for their brand while influencing public opinion on important matters. Longer than letters to the editor, op-eds are written by subject matter experts and usually run between 600 and 700 words in length.

Anyone can write an op-ed, and more people should — it’s an easy way to reach a wide audience and immediately build thought leadership.

According to the Oxford University Press, the op-ed got its start in 1921 when Herbert Bayard Swope took over as publisher of the *New York Evening World* and realized that the page opposite the editorials was prime real estate to generate conversations. The modern op-ed, written by people outside of the newspaper’s staff, came into being in 1970 at the *New York Times*.

Almost every media outlet has a place for opinion pieces from outside the publication’s staff. Every single day, editors and producers are hungry for meaningful, persuasive content. Opportunities abound!

Op-eds can rapidly build brand awareness, thought leadership and validation for expertise. When published in a vetted, respected media outlet, they are perhaps the single best way to build your personal brand.

If you’re going to try your hand at an op-ed, keep these things in mind:

- **Be opinionated.** Express positions clearly. Dare to be bold. Risk offending, but don’t rant.
- **Provide solutions.** Back up your opinions with evidence and stats. Don’t simply whine. Provide concrete solutions.
- **Take on critics.** Acknowledge the opposite stance, and then debunk it.
- **Make it topical.** Find an original angle for a current or upcoming issue.
- **Tell a story.** Consider including first-person accounts. Use humor when possible. Make it relatable.

Tips For Writing Successful Op-Eds

Make one powerful, important point, and use the piece to build a case. Be authoritative. State your claim, and be confident about it. Don't say "I think;" it's implied. Hook the reader with a compelling anecdote to draw them in to the piece. Include two brief examples to support your claim. Quickly acknowledge, and then discount, the opposite perspective on the matter. Know your audience! This is true for any media opportunity. If your stance is popular in progressive circles, don't write it for a conservative outlet and vice-versa. Write beautifully. This includes using details, specifics, data and active verbs. End with a call to action to bring the reader into the conversation. Give them a way into the issue.

Media outlets want to publish meaningful, provocative op-eds. A talented publicist will work with a client to capture their perspective, words and nuanced voice and help find a home for the finished piece. This is an easy way to capture your expertise.

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