Telling Your Story: Leveraging Outdoor Writers

How to Work with Travel & Outdoor Media

Speakers

Chez Chesak:

Chez is an award-winning adventure travel writer, 30-year veteran of the outdoor industry, Executive Director of the Outdoor Writers Association of America and President of The Society of American Travel Writers.

As a freelance writer, his works have appeared in *The Los Angeles Times*, *Fodors.com*, *Ohio* magazine, *Rails-to-Trails* and dozens more outdoor/adventure publications and websites. He's also done travel segments for his local FOX affiliate and on American Forces Radio and is a regular 'expert' contributor to USA Today's 10Best.

Learn more about him at www.chezconnects.com.

Speakers

Tony Harrison:

Tony has worked for 39 years as a PR counselor. He spent his first two decades at renowned agencies in New York, Phoenix, and Boise before opening his own firm, COMMposition, in 2007. COMMposition is the PR agency of record for Ski Idaho. Soldier Mountain, the dance company LED, and the City of Blaine, Washington, are also current COMMposition clients. While his experience spans the PR gamut, Tony is renowned for leading turnkey group FAM tours. Tony's work has received numerous accolades, chief among them two Public Relations Society of America Bronze Anvils. He is a lifelong skier and boater and a fifth-generation Idahoan. Visit **COMMposition.biz** for more details.

OWAA

- 530+ vetted outdoor media members
- 70 corporate members, including gear brands, destinations (from local to national), conservation nonprofits, state/federal agencies, etc.
- Annual conference – Aug 23-25, Roanoke, VA!

Ski Idaho

- 19 destinations ranging from small nonprofit ski areas and mom-and-pop mountains to one of the world's most beloved resorts
- >29,000 vertical feet and >22,000 skiable acres
- Represents upwards of 8% of Idaho's travel economy
- Robust summer operations, too — 14 Idaho ski areas opened in some capacity this summer, with 8 offering lift-served mountain biking

The state of outdoor/travel media

- Generally, it's a real challenge to be media right now
- Diminishing outlets to sell their stories — outlets continue to close, consolidate, cut pages, etc.
- Diminishing other paying writing gigs (outside their stories) — AI
- Decrease in pay — Whereas $1/word was once the norm, payment is all over the place now and generally well below that
- Most have a 'side hustle,' regular gig and/or are wearing ALL the hats

Definitions: travel vs. outdoor media

- **'Hook & Bullet' (or 'Cast and Blast') = hunting & fishing**
- **'Nut & Berry' = the 'nonextractive' outdoor pursuits (hiking, climbing, SUP, riding, etc.)**
- **'Travel' – any trip of 50+ miles from one's residence, other than for commuting, and/or any trip involving an overnight stay**
- **'Adventure travel' – When you have a physical activity, a cultural exchange or interaction and engagement with nature**
- **'Soft Adventure' – is 98% of the adventure travel market**
- **Outdoors vs. adventure travel – Currently there's something of a division between the two, but: virtually all adventure travel is outdoors. But not all outdoors is adventure travel.**

The myriad facets of travel

- Outdoor
- Adventure travel
- Equestrian
- Family travel
- LGBTQ+
- Religious
- Meetings & Incentives

- Motorized — Overlanding, snow machines, side-by-sides
- Agrotourism
- Ski
- Spirits (beer, wine, liquor)
- Vandwelling

Play the long game

- Look to build genuine, lasting relationships
- Be professional, polite and understanding
- If something isn't working out now with a writer, keep coming back (periodically) with new ideas, new angles
- Always try to put yourself in their shoes and understand their needs
- Anything you can do to make their life easier is a great add-on (dream scenario is if you have an editor friend, etc.)

Targeting the *right* media to get the *right* placement

Read, Research, Reach out

- **<u>Read</u> the publications you want to be in and pay attention to those bylines! Take notes. Build a database/hit list. Find them on LinkedIn, TravMedia or Muckrack. Stalk them on social media.**
- **<u>Research</u> the writer's works to find one whose coverage you like.**
- **<u>Reach</u> out — Be proactive, be positive, be pragmatic**
- **Work with them on outlet ideas — what are your key markets and who is reaching them now?**
  - **Regional (drive) markets**
  - **Major metros**
  - **Specialty publications**
  - **City magazines — 5280, Salt Lake Magazine, Boise Lifestyle, etc.**
- **Stay FOCUSED — 'spray and pray' doesn't work that well any more (a note about press releases)**
- **Work your networks! Call partners, friends, former colleagues now elsewhere, etc.**

Where to find media to connect

- Reach out directly
- Leverage associations
  - Media: OWAA, SATW, NATJA, Midwest Travel Writers, NASJA (generally their members are vetted)
  - Travel: ATTA, FTA, Wellness Tourism Association
  - Outdoor: regional ones are often solely hunt/fish
- Shows
  - State governor's conferences on tourism
  - IMM
  - State tourism board missions to destinations, IPW, etc.

How to pitch

- **RESEARCH**
- **Target your ideal media**
- **Good subject line — 50 characters or less?**
- **Clear communication and straightforward writing (beware the adjective dump and overused phrases like ‘hidden gem’)**
- **Simple, clear call to action**
- **Always positive**
- **Attachments: PDF’s & JPG’s only, less than 10MB**

Hosting media for a press trip

- When
  - Most good writers understand peak seasons are generally off-limits and know that your shoulder season might be best for you
  - Need LONG lead times for your invites as the best travel media book up about 10 months in advance
- What to cover - the more the better…
  - Air? (can you work with your state tourism board on this?)
  - Transfers
  - +1 - or more?
  - Accommodations, adventures on site, tips, meals (to include alcohol or not?)
- Group trips v. individual
- What to expect…

Hosting media for a press trip, con't

What to expect - varies on the media

- **Influencers - immediate return, guaranteed 'placement' (but often charge for these services)**
- **Bloggers - immediate return, guaranteed 'placement' (but often charge for these services)**
- **Staff writers - placement is guaranteed, but will take some time (expenses only)**
- **Freelancers - can get you placement in multiple publications, but placement isn't guaranteed (or is it) and will take time (expenses only)**
- **Podcasters - generally quick turnaround (expenses only, but might charge too)**
- **Photographers - special cases, based on your needs (and will have to charge…)**

Group FAM tours

Group FAMs can be magical, but they can also be tricky.

- **Keeping them small helps you avoid the cliques that can form in larger ones.**
- **Be careful how/if you mix experienced guests vs. inexperienced ones.**
- **Be careful who you mix from a media standpoint, because you don't want to host a half-dozen freelance writers who all contribute to the same outlets.**

Working with ITC grant funds

You need to keep a few things in mind when utilizing Idaho Travel Council grant funds:

- **Detailed itineraries are a must.**
- **Per diems are tricky. Alcohol is not reimbursable.**
- **Group FAMs require a group sign-in sheet.**
- **Tips for guides are now acceptable, but pay via Venmo to document expense.**
- **Matching funds may be required.**

Other things to keep in mind

- It's important to gauge your guests' level of experience or inexperience.
  - Keep in mind guests will often overstate their abilities.
  - For many activities, you will need to arrange for experienced guides to accompany guests.
- Liability waivers are recommended, but forbidden on USFS land, where an acknowledgement of risk form comes in handy
- A journalist's deadlines don't stop when they're visiting your destination. Build in time for them to work into your schedule or have flexibility in your schedule to account for that.
- Likewise, be careful not to cram the schedule too full.

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