Freelance of the month

Helen Croydon tells Nikki Wicks how she writes on relations, love and sexuality

Helen Croydon is a freelance journalist working across both print and broadcast media with a focus on "anything with a fresh angle on relationships, love and sexuality". She started her journalism career in local radio then worked for various divisions of ITN as a presenter, producer and reporter. Helen is the author of Sugar Daddy Diaries, a confessional memoir about the attraction of older men, published in March this year.

How long have you been a freelance?
Two and a half years.

Why freelance?
I gave up a staff job because I wanted to write. I'd been in broadcast news for seven years. Broadcasting is very restrictive and it's more about techy skills than journalism skills. I left so I could dabble in print and develop my book idea. I knew no one and nothing about the industry. I spent the first six months forcing myself to pick up the phone to intimidating newsdesks and ask how to pitch a story. I cringe when I think of some of the pathetic ideas I tried to get commissioned.

Who are your main sources of work?
In print: The Times, The Sunday Times and The Independent.
In broadcast: ITV News. I also run media training courses and appear as a relationship commentator on various TV and radio programmes.

How much do you charge?
Depends on the story and publication. It's the work, not the money that is important. I often turn down a well-paid broadcast shift to spend time on a speculative story that's more suited to my 'brand'. I was paid a pittance for a column in The Erotic Review because I loved the magazine, had a great rapport with the editor and enjoyed writing it.

Helen Croydon – went undercover at a turkey farm

What's been your best gig?
Going to the Ukraine for the Daily Mail to expose the 'buy a bride' industry. An ITN reporter friend fixed me up with the story because it wouldn't work for TV. It was my first overseas, undercover exclusive.

And what's been your worst?
Going undercover to a Bernard Matthews turkey farm – also for the Daily Mail – and being unmasked as a journalist. I sat through a painfully long induction day sardined between two Polish men who smelled. On the second day, just as I got my uniform and headed for the conveyor belts, I was pulled aside, ushered into a room and asked who I worked for. How they found out – I still don't know..

Have you agreed to do anything ridiculous for money?
I wouldn't say 'agreed' – worse, this was my idea: I did a documentary for Current TV on the dangers of buying anabolic steroids over the internet. I took them for a month and video-diarised the results. They weren't pretty. I put on a stone, broke out in a rash, developed permanent headaches and couldn't sleep. It took months to go back to normal but it was great TV.

What's the secret of keeping the wolf from the door?
Having fingers in lots of pies. As well as freelance commissions and ITV News shifts, I'm ghost-writing a celebrity memoir, writing on my own second book, working with a production company on pitching a documentary and hosting media training days.

What are your commissioning editor gripes?
Not replying. •

Contact Helen Croydon
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Perfect pitch GET IT RIGHT WHEN MAKING A PITCH

Launched by Future in May, 2011, Mollie Makes is a monthly magazine focusing on contemporary fabric crafts.

Circulation (UK): 3,000 subscribers
Publisher: Future Publishing
Editor-in-chief: Janet Meadowcroft

Where to pitch: For features, pitches should be sent to submissions@molliemakes.com. For news, send an email to PR@molliemakes.com.

Types of articles: We cover topics such as: profiles of designer/makers for our 'Tea and a chat with' Q&A feature, Homes Tours of creative home owners, preferably with a fabric based business and with online shops to buy from.

How to pitch: Single topic per email. Indicate which slot it is being considered for, plus a brief synopsis and a list of photos, links etc, reader offers.

Post-pitch: If you have not heard back within four weeks, please contact again.

What will impress: Succinct initial pitch.

What will NOT impress: High-res or more than three attachments to an email.

Rates? Negotiable.

Will writers be expected to provide images with their articles? Yes or a link to a suggested photographer's portfolio.