



Publicity

Do's and Don'ts

By Beach Conger

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The object of a resort and travel section in a metropolitan newspaper is to tell the paper's readers what they can do and see in different cities, areas, States, or countries: the most interesting historic spots, the scenic sights or drives; the methods of transportation used in getting there; the special festivals, pageants, etc.; the vacation facilities, such as golf, tennis, swimming, skiing, boating, fishing; in short, accurate news or feature stories about any attraction which is likely to bring tourists to that particular spot. After that, it is up to the reader to decide where he wants to go on the basis of information given him in the paper.

Some newspapers prefer an informal, almost jazzy style of story. Others prefer a straight news story. It is up to the publicity writer to study the material used by the paper he wishes to reach and to slant his stories accordingly.

Most publicity writers suffer from "adjectivitis." Lakes are always "sparkling," "azure," "crystal-clear." Golf courses always have "velvety greens." Fishermen are always "ardent anglers," while the fish they seek are always "scrappy," "fighting," or "wily." Hotels and resorts are usually "luxurious," or "swank." Parades are "thrilling" and "exciting." A few sample sentences follow which may be all right in a pamphlet blurb but not in a news story: "Zilchville and Jonesboro are placed like sparkling jewels in settings of natural scenic grandeur." "Lake Blatz is a crystal gem sparkling below gigantic sloping heights of forest." Just lay off the adjectives; give us the facts, and if they are interesting, we'll use them.

Something else that has been worked to death is the word "Mecca." Mecca is the center of the Mohammedan religion. There is hardly a single publicist who hasn't at some time used a phrase such as "Zilchville is the mecca of all mah jong enthusiasts of the western hemisphere." He may wish that it were, but publicity releases would indicate that the resort industry in the United States has enough Meccas to populate desert Arabia ten times over.

Even the simple mechanics of newspaper writing are sometimes ignored in publicity releases. Copy should always be double-spaced. The writing on the first sheet should start in the middle of the page, to give the editor

room at the top for instructions to the composing room. When referring to specific dates—next Sunday, next week—insert the actual date in parentheses so there can be no mistake. And in sending out stories about dated events, send them at least a month in advance. Space requirements may prevent using the stories at once, and if they are sent only 2 weeks in advance, the events may be over before the stories can be used. And most readers plan their vacations ahead, need their information early.

Statistics about how many persons visited Zilch Falls last year; how many States were represented by automobile license plates at Jones Cave; how many children rode the merry-go-round at Blatzville State Fair 3 years ago come Michaelmas, are usually wasted. The prospective vacationist looking for information about what he can do and see is not going to visit Jones Cave because there is a possibility he will see an Alaska license plate there, or because 123,456 children under the age of 12 saw it in 1947.

On pictures, *Resort Management* recently pointed out that vacations are generally planned by the women of the household, and they are not likely to pick a resort on the basis of cheesecake pictures. Be that as it may, some papers do prefer cheesecake; others like scenic shots with a little activity in the middle foreground. Again, as with stories, watch your papers to see what is used, and select your pictures accordingly. But definitely not pictures of Mr. and Mrs. Bigdome smirking at the camera and taking up two columns of cut space. At least not in travel sections. That is generally for the society editor or the small home-town paper without a resort or travel section.

A few suggestions: Use regular copy paper, not hard bond paper; the latter is too hard for pencil corrections and deletions. Don't send releases to the advertising department to be passed along to the travel editor with the suggestion that advertisers are entitled to editorial space regardless of the news value of the item; such items are often consigned directly to the wastebasket. Find out whether your editors prefer mats of pictures or prefer to make their own cuts. If you have had a hurricane, or a flood, don't try to present too optimistic a picture in stories about the effects on resorts. There will always be readers who will tell the editor he was 100 percent wrong.