

Analyzing Trade Magazine/Journal Articles

What Is a Trade Publication?

A trade publication is a regularly published collection of articles that address topics of interest to members of a particular profession, such as law enforcement or advertising or banking. These are variously referred to as trade magazines or trade journals. Trade journals might also include editorials, letters to the editor, photo essays, and advertisements that target members of the profession. Examples of trade journals include *Police Chief*, *Education Digest*, *Energy Weekly News*, *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, *Engineering News Record*, *Design News*, and *Traffic World*.

General Characteristics of Trade Publication Articles

Articles tend to be brief and often report on developments and news within a field and might summarize current research being done in a particular area. While trade journal articles might include references, the reference lists tend to be brief and don't reflect thorough reviews of the literature. Articles are usually written with the particular profession in mind, but are generally pretty accessible so that a lay person wishing to learn more about the profession would still be able to understand the articles.



When To Use Trade Publication Articles

While most academic research is better done using articles from scholarly/academic journals, trade publication articles can also be of use in a variety of situations. Following are some of the ways these publications can be helpful.

Recent Developments -- Trade publications are excellent places to look to keep up with recent developments in an industry, occupation, or profession. A construction magazine, for example, will likely announce new projects that are currently underway in a particular city, state, or country and also announce which companies are involved in the projects. An aviation magazine might announce new developments in supersonic jet transport or provide background information on up-and-coming developers who work in aviation or related fields. A music magazine might profile new artists, announce the release of new CDs, and even provide reviews of recent music releases and concerts. A trade publication targeting dieticians might provide an overview of a recently completed study on a new weight loss plan and tell who did the study and where it was published. So, while these publications might not directly provide detailed research findings, they are extremely useful for keeping up with recent developments in their targeted fields.

Career or Job Opportunities -- Many times, job advertisements will appear in trade publications. Public universities in the state of Florida, for example, routinely advertise open faculty positions in at least a couple of publications that target readers within specific fields. For example, when

the library has an opening for a faculty position, one of the places it might advertise is the profession's trade magazine, *American Libraries*. Many other trade publications routinely run advertisements for job openings of interest to their readers.

Conference Announcements -- Every professional association will hold yearly and sometimes twice-yearly conferences where their members will share ideas about the profession. Often times these conferences are announced in the association's trade publication.

Product Advertisements -- Unlike those found in consumer magazines, advertisements in trade publications tend to be for products and services that are specific to the profession. For example, a police magazine like *Police Chief* might run advertisements for bullet-proof vests or newly developed night vision goggles. A nutrition magazine might run ads for natural foods suppliers or for equipment that helps track weight loss. While advertisements might not be of use in the process of research, they can be helpful to practitioners who are looking for alternatives to the products that they are currently using or for newer, better products that can assist them in better serving their clientele.

Editorials and Letters to the Editor -- Editorials will reflect current issues and concerns within a profession. These could be useful to a researcher looking for "hot" topics that could be further researched in professional journals. Once an editorial appears, almost always the publication's readers will write letters addressing issues raised in the editorial, so a researcher can follow up on the positions taken by the editorial staff and look at the professional community's responses as an even better means for assessing what is important to the profession.

Assessing the Potential Value of a Trade Publication Article: What To Look For?

While there are many things to consider when assessing the value of a trade magazine article, some primary considerations include:

The type of trade publication -- Trade publications have a particular focus and target a specific profession or trade. While the focus of many trade publications will be obvious from their titles, some are not so easily discerned. In those cases and even just to check up on the obvious, publications like *Magazines for Libraries* and websites such as Ulrichsweb.com will be useful in determining the type of publication that is under consideration.

Audience -- To whom is the article targeted? This should be fairly obvious once the focus of the publication is determined. However, some trade publications might be directed more toward management in a profession than to practitioners, so it will still be useful to get a better understanding of exactly who is being targeted with the articles in the publication. Understanding something of the intended audience will help a researcher determine if the article is appropriate for what he/she is researching.

Authorship -- Many trade publication articles are written by staff writers who work for the publications. Some articles might be contributed by other writers not employed by the publication. Editorial and analytical pieces included in a trade publication will likely be contributed by one or more of the editorial staff. While not all articles provide authors' names, many do. And while an author's qualifications and background might not be specifically listed at the beginning of the article, a researcher can easily check to see what other articles the author

has written by scanning a library database. Knowing more about the author will help the researcher understand more about the article under consideration.

Article date -- Is the article's date of concern? In most cases, the answer will be "yes." Since trade publications are often used to find up-to-date information about developments within a profession or to help in a job search, it will be very important to retrieve the most recent articles possible.

What to keep track of to adequately cite a trade magazine/journal article:

- Article title
- Author's name
- Publication title
- Date of the issue (some trade publications might also use volumes and numbers)
- Inclusive pages for the article
- From where the article was retrieved (print, web, library database, etc.)
- Date when the article was retrieved (especially if it was found on the open Internet)



Example of an article from the trade publication *Billboard*, July 14, 1945, issue. Note that articles tend to focus on trade news and that advertisements also relate to the trade represented in the magazine.

Reading by Jim Alderman. Updated March 2014.