



UNITED STATES
PRESS AGENCY



Success Stories

**The Complete Guide to a Successful
Career as a Freelance Journalist**

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Success Stories - The Complete Guide to a Successful Career as a Freelance Journalist

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Preface

It sounds like a dream job: Traveling the world while reporting on great places and interesting people. But for most of us in the journalism field, reality looks quite different. Many journalists work as part-time freelancers or come from non-traditional backgrounds, and they often lack the requisite experience and professional knowledge to make their dream of a successful journalism career come true. But don't despair: No matter what your professional background looks like, you can turn your dream into reality. All you need is tenacity, an open mind and the right partner at your side.

The path to journalistic success isn't a walk in the park, but you don't have to go it alone. Associations for freelancers, such as the United States Press Agency (USPA) or the International Association of Press Photographers (IAPP), provide excellent support for journalists and press photographers, and this book has all the information you need to get started in this field. Our goal is to help you turn your passion into a prosperous career while giving you the tools to become a more efficient, assertive journalist. Because one thing is clear: It isn't going to happen overnight. Journalism is a popular career, and if you want to make it in this field, you need to be prepared to stand your ground every now and then. We are not trying to be overly dramatic. It simply is the nature of the news business.

In order to become a successful journalist or press photographer, you need to be resilient. Don't let other people get to you, because if you do, you have already lost the game, and the best assignments will be snatched up by your competitors. Courage and independence are critical components of journalistic success. With the right attitude, journalism can be more than just a way for you make a living – it can be a lucrative and highly rewarding career. Isn't that what we all want?

Don't let the fact that you keep running into more experienced journalists intimidate you. That is an unavoidable part of the job. Freelance journalism is on the rise around the globe, and competition within the industry is fierce. This affects assignments as well as the prices you can command for your photos and articles. Once you have made a name for yourself in the field, you may be able to charge what you want. But the path to get there is not only long, it is also full of obstacles. More than likely, you will encounter at least a few colleagues who will try to throw bricks in your way. But that won't keep you from pursuing your goals, will it?

Of course not, because you have a strong partner at your side who will support you every step of the way. So, what can you expect to gain from reading this book? A lot! Journalism is a vast and multifaceted field that requires extensive knowledge and professional insight. Our goal is to open your eyes and make you understand that becoming a top dog in the journalism world isn't something that happens by chance. Most journalists and press photographers must work hard for many years to establish their credibility. Success isn't something that comes easy or fast in the media world.

In this book, we will explain the most important elements of your journalistic toolbox, including the all-important press pass. Does every journalist need press credentials? The answer is just a few pages away.

In addition, we will address the accreditation process and why it is so important. Of course, we also need to cover some basic journalistic concepts. After all, they form the building blocks for your success. Without some fundamental insights and the knowledge how to apply them, your chances of becoming a successful journalist or press photographer are slim.

But this book goes beyond the basics. Take it one page at a time, and you won't regret investing your time in reading this useful guide.

Before we go into too much detail here, let's move on and get to the meat of the subject. We hope you will enjoy reading this book as much as we enjoyed writing it.

Your team from the United Journalists & Photographers Association, Inc. (UJPA)

Everyone is looking for fame and fortune

Breaking a news story or capturing the perfect photo is exciting, but journalism is about much more than that. It's about finding your true passion. By Hollywood standards, journalists are a cut-throat pack, always on the hunt for the latest celebrity or political scandal, engaging in unethical behaviors to get a scoop, or putting themselves in danger to get that million-dollar photo. But that's not the reality. Real-world journalists don't just write about the rich and famous, and most of them are far from being rich and famous themselves. Let's be honest: Life as a journalist or photojournalist can be rough. It starts with the search for assignments or a gig as a regular contributor. Then, once you have a story to cover, you need to find the best way to approach it. And finally, there is the matter of getting paid adequately for your efforts. All of this requires hard work and dedication. Not everyone is cut out for this job.

Like any other field, the news industry experiences crises. During a serious news crisis, working conditions are even more dire than under normal circumstances, and the ramifications can be substantial. For some journalists, this can mean the end of their career. Thus, freelance journalists must always think about the future. Freelancers of all professions tend to get caught up in a feast-and-famine cycle: One month, you are too busy to think of anything but work, and a few weeks later, you may find yourself staring at your empty assignment calendar in panic, wondering if you will be able to continue this freelance lifestyle for much longer. Even stringers who have ongoing relationships with one or more news organizations are not immune to the effect the economy can have on the freelance journalism market. From budget cuts to increased competition, there are many reasons why assignments may dwindle. In this field, you cannot take anything for granted.

Your best defense against these fluctuations is a strong network that will offer support when things are not going well. We will explore the benefits of networking later in this book. First and foremost, you must find your niche and specialize in one area where you know you excel. Being flexible and dedicated to your work with heart and soul is an important prerequisite in this field, but it is not enough to get you to the top. Success is built on a solid foundation. And this foundation includes a strategic approach. Ask yourself what your strengths are. Do you enjoy covering government meetings or court trials, or are you more of a features writer? Do you like to go out and investigate to find your own stories, or do you prefer to write about breaking news? What types of photos do you enjoy taking? With enough planning, you may even find an area of specialization so unique that you face little to no competition from other journalists. Once you have found your niche, you must market your services. As a member of the press, you already know the importance of hooking your audience. Apply this talent to market yourself. Your name must become your trademark. This is certainly not an easy feat. But it is not impossible.

Prospecting - a key factor in your success

Maybe you want to become a household name in the news business, or maybe for you, journalistic success simply means earning enough money to live comfortably while doing what you love. Either way, you will need a strategy to achieve your goals. Haphazard prospecting emails and cold calls won't get you very far – unless, of course,

your goal is to appear desperate for work. Instead, identify the right people to call, then call with purpose. Develop your sales pitch before you pick up the phone to make sure you have convincing arguments at the ready. Show the person on the phone that you are good with words. That's a big part of your job, after all.

Never give up

Occasionally, you may encounter bias against freelance journalists, particularly if you are new to the field or come from a non-traditional background. Or you may have an assignment editor on the phone who shows no interest in your pitch. Should you let this discourage you? Absolutely not! Thank them for their time and try your luck somewhere else. An editor's job can be even more stressful than yours, hard to believe as that may be. Sometimes, an editor may reject an idea because there is simply too much going on at the time, even though the topic might have been a great fit. Another editor may love to hear your pitch and offer to buy your story or photo without hesitation. If not, just try again another time with a different topic.

Build a strong network

Connections can make or break your freelance career. A strong support network allows you to exchange thoughts and ideas with other journalists and provides access to assignments or jobs that aren't otherwise announced. However, joining a network is not enough. To reap the benefits, you must engage with your colleagues. Active participation is important. Social networks are two-way streets. Self-promotion may be acceptable in very small doses, but the primary purpose of these forums is to support each other and build a community. This way, all participants will get the most out of the network. Platforms such as Facebook or LinkedIn are very popular with journalists. The Internet has become an invaluable tool for anyone working with or as a member of the press.

Get support from a professional organization

All media representatives should be able to rely on the help and support from a legitimate, professional news organization. Our partner organizations are a great place to start:

- International Association of Press Photographers (www.ia-pp.com)
- German Daily News (www.germandailynews.com)
- United States Press Agency (www.uspa24.com)
- Press Pass (www.press-pass.us)

These organizations provide various benefits for journalists in general and freelancers in particular, including issuing credentials such as press passes. We have devoted an entire chapter on this subject elsewhere in this book, so keep reading. Unfortunately, not all organizations have your best interests in mind. Many so-called press associations are merely business vendors that sell press passes for their own profit without offering any benefits for journalists. But not every piece of paper with your name and the title "Press" on it will get you access when you need it. Luckily, determining whether an organization is legitimate is relatively easy. Often, all it takes is one look at their website and you know that you are dealing with amateurs. We cannot stress this point enough: Not every organization that promises to issue press passes will

provide you with a legitimate badge that will establish your credibility as a reporter or photojournalist. Finding the right partner requires you to do your due diligence. It is all too easy to fall into a trap that can cause damage to your professional reputation. Imagine trying to enter an event with a phony credential. The organizers are unlikely to grant you admission, and your image as a professional journalist may be seriously tarnished. In the worst case, this may cause you problems when trying to get access to any events organized by the same people in the future – even if you have a genuine press pass by then. Don't make things harder for yourself than they need to be. Place your trust in the right partner and the right network from the very beginning.

Adapt and be flexible

Flexibility is an important element of journalistic success. While choosing your niche is important for your career in the long run, it may not be wise to specialize in a particular area right from the start. Find out where the market is going first. Some subjects are more interesting to readers than others. No matter how well you write, or how great your photos are: If the topic isn't engaging, you will have a hard time finding an editor willing to give you the time of day. On the other hand, working in a popular beat is problematic, too, as it will make it harder for you to sell your work. Therefore, you must assess your own skills and abilities with a critical eye. The same holds true for press photographers. What type of photos do you enjoy taking? And no, the fact that you can take beautiful portraits of your kids doesn't make you a good photojournalist. Remember that as a journalist, you are free to write about any topic. Take advantage of that flexibility. You won't get rich covering local events or writing feature stories for your small-town newspaper. If your goal is to make a name for yourself and live comfortably, you need to set your ambitions higher. Take a hard look at your skills and decide whether your chosen career path is right for you.

Now let's assume that you have made the right choice and possess the required skills. Alas, you still need to remain flexible. It would be foolish to expect that you will sell all your stories and photos to renowned newspapers and magazines. Sometimes, you may even need to turn to non-journalism jobs in order to pay the bills during a famine period. That is why flexibility is key. If you are willing to adapt, you will not only be able to make a living as your own boss, you will improve your skills along the way. Remember that with every assignment, every story and every photo, you turn your name into a brand and get one step closer to success. You will almost certainly go through rough times that will have you wonder whether you made the right decision. But your hard work will pay off in the long run, and you will earn the recognition you deserve.

And that's our segue to the next chapter. In this chapter, we want to help you understand that successful journalists are not born, they are self-made. You will need to overcome many obstacles. You will experience setbacks. But you will learn to accept them and move on. We are human, and we all make mistakes. In order to reach our goals, we need to keep our chin up and keep going.

Great journalists are made, not born

Ah, the life of a journalist. You get to travel, meet famous people, have a front-row seat to important events, and write about interesting topics. It's a glamorous way to make a living. Or is it? Well, unfortunately, all that glitters is not gold. There are many misconceptions about the journalistic profession – and some are more grounded in reality than others. If you enter this field with aspirations of becoming the next Anderson Cooper, be prepared for a rude awakening. For one thing, you would be putting far too much pressure on yourself, which would only stifle your career. To be successful as well as satisfied in this line of work, you must free yourself of expectations. Don't get caught up in a relentless pursuit of clichés, and accept that things may be different than you imagined.

Of course, there are examples of journalists who found fame and fortune seemingly overnight, all thanks to that one story they broke or that one photo they captured. But let's be real: Such cases are the exception, not the rule. Sure, it could happen to you. Just don't count on it. After all, the pool of journalists hoping to catch their big break is endless. Some may get lucky after a few years. But should you wait for it? The answer is no. You need to go on the offensive. Have a strategy in place and a network to back you up, then get to work. Write your own success story.

Learn from your mistakes

It is natural for beginners to make mistakes. So don't worry if you mess up from time to time, because we are all human. Journalism is a path that is full of potential stumbling blocks. The important thing is that you learn from your mistakes and never make the same mistake twice. A misspelled name, a quote out of context – it is easy for errors to sneak into your work. Tight deadlines and stressful working environments don't lend themselves to a thorough QA process. "Publish first, confirm later" seems to be the motto of many news outlets. But beware that even seemingly minor errors can lead to expensive lawsuits. In many cases, the fact that you were unaware of an inaccuracy may be irrelevant. Whether you have committed a slip of the pen or written an entire piece full of misinformation, you must be prepared to accept both the professional and financial ramifications.

Legal considerations for journalists

Whether your medium is the pen or the camera, chances are that in the course of your career, you will run into people who simply dislike journalists. The nature of journalistic work is to gather information, whether that means digging into people's private lives or trying to uncover the deficits of society. People don't like when you step on their toes, and some may retaliate with threats of a lawsuit. Here are a few potential legal issues you should be concerned with:

- Libel
- Copyright infringement
- Trademarks and licensing
- Privacy rights/right of publicity
- Competition regulations
- Data privacy rules

The challenge for journalists lies in trying to avoid legal issues while exercising their right to inform the public. For print journalists, copyright violations in particular are a potential minefield. Always take great care to identify all text passages or quotes taken from other sources with the appropriate citations. In any case, you should consider getting professional liability insurance, which will cover any claims for damages should they arise. Otherwise, the financial consequences of a lawsuit could be devastating for your career and your livelihood. No one is immune to making mistakes – so don't take any chances.

Practice makes perfect

Whether you are straight out of college, a career transfer or just starting your part-time freelance business, you will need to gain experience. In order to catch up to your competitors, you need to work hard and get lots of professional practice. What if you can't find any assignments right away? Simply find a topic you are interested in and write about it for your portfolio. Maybe you can find a side gig as a copywriter or product photographer. Even if a job is not directly related to journalism, it will give you a chance to earn money and, more importantly, experience. Both of these factors are crucial for a successful freelance lifestyle. Over time, you will develop your own routine of how to approach assignments. You don't need to be an expert from day one. It's okay to learn as you go. What you need to start out is passion and perseverance. Add a press pass to the mix, and you have a winning combination for a thriving journalism career. In the next chapter, we will tell you all about the press pass and its importance for your success.

The press pass – Your golden ticket?

In this chapter, we will talk about one of the most important tools for journalists around the globe: the press pass. But before we tell you about the benefits of this credential, we would like to clarify what a press pass is not. Some people may believe that a press pass is a ticket to get into any event without paying admission, a badge to flash to get front-row access to the action, or a way to get freebies and discounts. While it is true that a press pass does provide certain advantages, that is not its primary purpose. A press pass identifies you as a professional journalist, and as such, you should abide by the rules of conduct and ethical standards of the profession. Never abuse your press pass for private purposes. It identifies you as a professional journalist, so act accordingly.

Without a doubt, the most useful aspect of a press pass is the fact that it can open doors for you. Government agencies and other organizations, for example, may be reluctant to provide information unless you can identify yourself as a representative of the press. They may want to see that you have a legitimate reason for your inquiries and are not just wasting their time or trying to satisfy your own curiosity. You also need a press pass to become accredited to cover official functions and large events. Moreover, as a journalist, you are not to be hindered in the execution of your journalistic duties. A press pass is proof of your right to information.

Go where the action is

At some point during their career, most journalists will report on a tragic event, such as an accident, crime scene or natural disaster. To get the story or capture the scene on camera, you need to be close to the action. Political summits, public speeches and other events also require journalists to have special access in order to get interviews or take photos up-close. Without a press pass, you are left on the sidelines. A good story, whether told with words or in pictures, requires you to have a front-row seat. Thus, a press pass is an indispensable tool if you are serious about your career.

When it comes to covering events such as trade fairs or conventions, a press pass may be the only way for you to gain admission. Event organizers may only allow outsiders if they can prove their media status, and your press pass shows that you are a professional journalist. As mentioned earlier, a press pass is also essential during the accreditation process. In addition, it will help you get access to sources who can provide insight into the event you are covering and answer your questions. This means you don't have to waste your precious time trying to hunt down the right person for an interview or background information.

As a press pass holder, you carry a responsibility towards your profession, your sources, and the general public. Part of this responsibility means resisting the temptation to use a press pass for personal gain. Should you be caught, your press pass may be revoked – not to mention that you would be doing a great disservice to your colleagues.

You will find that a press pass is a basic requirement that will significantly facilitate your reporting efforts. Don't think that just because you cover the business beat, you won't need this credential. What if you are writing about a company and would like to tour their facility to get a better feel for the working environment there? Or you want to write about the launch of an important product? In any of those scenarios, a press pass will allow you to establish your credibility and get people to open up to you. After all, business owners have a vested interest in talking to journalists: A news story means free publicity for them. But unless you can prove that you are a journalist with the intention of publishing your story, you are unlikely to get through to the people who matter. Finally, even getting added to a company's media distribution list or gaining access to their online media section may require a press pass. You see: without a press pass, you won't make it very far in this field.

The press pass as professional identification

Getting a press pass has traditionally been a privilege reserved for full-time staff reporters and photographers. However, a growing number of journalists is entering the business as freelancers, and they quickly learn that this press credential is crucial for their success. Fortunately, journalist associations such as the United States Press Agency (USPA) and the International Association of Press Photographers (IAPP) support all journalists, whether they pursue this career as their main profession or as a secondary source of income. They also issue press passes, enabling freelancers to take advantage of the benefits that come with a professional ID. No matter which organization issues it, a press pass needs to be renewed every year and can be revoked in the event of abuse.

Not all press passes are created equal

As mentioned earlier, not all organizations that sell press passes issue credentials that will actually help journalists when push comes to shove. We could go on and on about such frivolous providers, but we don't believe they are worth our – or your – time. Instead, let us tell you about another important media credential: the International Press Pass. Unlike a regular press pass, which is an ID the size of a credit card, the International Press Pass is a 32-page document that resembles a passport. It is available in 50 languages and allows journalists to identify themselves as media representatives anywhere in the world.

A press pass is not a ticket for a free ride

A press pass offers numerous advantages for journalists. For instance, many hotels grant rebates to journalists who can present a press pass when booking accommodations. However, as a professional ID, a press pass may only be used in the line of journalistic work. Even then, journalists must take great care to ensure that any special benefits they might receive do not create bias in their reporting. A press pass comes with responsibility. It should never be abused to get personal discounts or freebies. If you work as a journalist, we guarantee that you will need your press pass at least occasionally. Always carry it with you! Continue reading to find out more.

The press pass – Your key to getting the story

As a journalist, you rely on your press pass. It is the only way for you to prove that you are a professional media representative. If news breaks, you don't want to be caught without it. A press pass shows government officials and first responders that you are there on official business, which will significantly facilitate your reporting efforts. And that's part of your plan, right? After all, your goal is to be successful. Of course, professional appearance and a serious approach to your work are also factors in this equation. Over the course of your career, you will cover live news, trade shows, press conferences and other events. There's no way around it: If you want to make a name for yourself in the news business, you need to have a press pass and carry it with you at all times.

What you should not expect from a press pass

A press pass is not an all-access ticket that will lead to journalistic fame and fortune. It is a tool to help you establish your credibility. Don't expect to receive freebies or VIP treatment just by flashing your press ID. While it is true that being able to identify yourself as a journalist may grant you access to areas that are off-limits to the general public or qualify you for media rates and other press benefits, it does not entitle you to special treatment. Your success also depends on your personal demeanor and being able to showcase published samples of your journalistic work. Alas, if you do get offered special media treatment, by all means, take advantage of it. We will talk more about this later in the book. Just don't look at a press pass as your golden ticket. First and foremost, it is a professional credential. Any additional benefits are a nice bonus, but certainly should not be taken for granted.

You get what you pay for

You may have come across organizations on the Internet that sell press passes for journalists. Let us tell you why this is a bad idea. Many of these organizations offer nothing more than a cheaply made ID card. You send them money, they send you a press pass. And if you are lucky, you may actually gain access to certain events with such a press pass. But don't count on it. Having a press pass is only half the battle. A holistic organization such as USPA or IAPP provides journalists with the necessary tools and support to be successful in this field. You don't buy a press pass, you purchase a membership in a modern, international media association. The press pass is just part of the package. With the backing of a renowned press association, you immediately have a leg up on your competition.

Freelance journalists and press passes

Let's be honest: Independent freelance reporters and photojournalists can be seen as a nuisance by full-time staff journalists, especially if they produce better articles or photos than their salaried colleagues. But that is not your concern. You are doing your job, and you want to do it well. So don't feel like you are somehow less of a journalist than they are – you're not. What counts is the end product, and readers don't care if that was provided by a staff journalist or a freelancer. Freelance journalists are equally entitled to carry a press pass, which, in turn, will make them eligible for the same benefits as a journalist who works for a large newspaper or broadcast station. However, always keep in mind that you do not have a legal right to any special treatment.

Even journalists face restrictions

A press pass is no guarantee that you will be allowed free access to every event you want to cover. Organizers always have the final say, and if they feel that there is nothing to be gained by admitting you, it won't matter whether you show a press pass or not. Sometimes, an event organizer may only want photo coverage. That's bad news for writers, but there is nothing they can do about it. And don't forget the fact that anyone who works in the publishing business can obtain a press pass one way or another, often without needing to submit any evidence of professional qualifications. This means that it is extremely hard for organizers to ascertain who will produce valuable coverage of their event and who is only looking for a free ride. Try to be understanding of this fact, and never get confrontational if you are told "no."

Besides a press pass, there are other ways to identify yourself as a member of the media. A particularly useful credential is the press vehicle ID. We will explain why in the next chapter.

Why do you need a press vehicle ID?

Placing a press vehicle ID inside your car can significantly cut down on parking expenses. But remember: Identifying your car as an official press vehicle doesn't give you the right to park anywhere you want. However, a press vehicle ID can help you while you are on a journalistic assignment. Imagine covering an event in an inner city area, where parking is not just limited but also expensive. Or trying to drive closer to the scene of a breaking news event when the police have blocked off the roads to general traffic. When you are covering a trade fair or a concert, you may want to take advantage of the free parking spots often reserved for members of the press. With a press vehicle ID, you no longer have to stress over the parking situation. Simply place the sign on your dashboard and enjoy one of the small perks of being a media representative.

Ticket-free parking?

In many cities around the world, parking violations may not be prosecuted if a car is marked as a press vehicle. If you are lucky, a parking enforcement officer may look the other way should your meter expire before you return from an official assignment. Of course, there is no guarantee, so we wouldn't advise you to rely on the goodwill of a parking attendant. Journalists may be held in high esteem in some communities, but you should never abuse the image of your profession for your personal benefit. Even with a press vehicle ID, you are not safe from receiving a parking citation.

The press vehicle ID and traffic regulations

A press vehicle ID does not exempt journalists from following local traffic laws. It does not turn your car into an emergency vehicle, even if both may need to get to the scene as fast as possible. Traffic signals, speed restrictions and other traffic regulations still apply to you, and failure to obey traffic rules can have serious consequences. Only display the press vehicle ID if you are out on a journalistic assignment, not if you are running a private errand. Remember that journalists should use all credentials in an ethical and responsible way.

When to use your press vehicle ID

Accident reporters and photojournalists often need to drive to areas that have been blocked off by law enforcement. By clearly displaying your press vehicle ID, you signal to the police, firefighters and other first responders that you are a member of the press and therefore have a legitimate interest in being close to the scene. However, journalists do not have any legal rights when it comes to restricted access. Even with a press vehicle ID in place, you may be kept away from the scene by emergency personnel. Safety always comes first. The right to information is a secondary concern when lives are at stake.

How does a press vehicle ID look?

Press vehicle ID signs must be clearly identifiable as such. Just like for press passes, there are standards regarding size and color. For example, a press vehicle ID must always include the official seal of the news organization, the current year and a signature. It also lists the number of the press pass associated with the vehicle ID. Other features of a press vehicle ID may include: