

Special Report

\$29.00

HOW TO  
WRITE A  
BOOK  
AND  
GET IT  
PUBLISHED

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## Section 1

### Maybe You Should Write a Book

Nowadays, it seems as if everybody is writing a book or wants to. And, because I have published a few myself, many people have asked me for advice on how they can get their book published.

In this report, I'll try to answer some of the basic questions—and point to resources that can help you become happily published.

#### Subject Matter

A lot of the people I meet in business want to write a book on some business topic—usually related to their job.

Although there will always be a market for solid how-to business information, the publishing industry works in cycles. Management books, which were hot last year, have cooled off considerably. On the other hand, the demand for books on direct marketing (especially online marketing) continues to be strong. The best way to get a feel for the market is to go to a bookstore and browse.

#### Publishers

Ask a businessperson to name three publishers, and chances are they'll name John Wiley, McGraw-Hill and Prentice Hall.

These giants do publish a lot of business books, but there are many others you can approach. One good reference is *Writer's Market*, published by *Writer's Digest Books* (Cincinnati, OH). Another is *Literary Market Place*, known as "LMP," published by R.R. Bowker (New York, NY).

## **Money**

Unless your book becomes a best seller, you probably won't make much money from it.

Advances for a non fiction book these days range from \$3,000 to \$15,000, with \$7,000 being a typical figure. Half the advance is paid upon signing the publisher's contract, with the balance due upon acceptance of your manuscript.

Remember, this is an advance against royalties. So if you get a \$10,000 advance, and you are paid a royalty of \$1 per book, you won't start receiving royalty payments until book number 10,001 is sold.

Royalties range from 10 percent to 15 percent on hard covers and 6 percent to 8 percent on trade paperback editions. Books sold through mail order typically pay the author a 5 percent to 6 percent royalty. Most publishers base royalties on the cover price of the book, but a few base it on "net revenue" from the sale of each book...whatever that is.

A friend told me that the late Rosser Reeves was earning \$25,000 a year in royalties from *Reality in Advertising* 25 years after the book's initial publication. Nice, but don't count on it.

## **Selling the Book**

Don't sit down, write a book, and then try to sell it to a publisher. It works that way for fiction. But non-fiction is different.

In non-fiction, authors submit book proposals to publishing houses, and publishers decide whether they want to publish your book based on your proposal.

## **Book Proposals**

The proposals I submit to publishers all contain the same basic information:

1. A brief overview of the basic idea behind the book.
2. A description of the format (length, organization, illustrations).

3. A chapter-by-chapter outline describing the purpose and contents of each chapter.  
Detailed table of contents.
4. Marketing and promotion, including an analysis of the market for the book, reasons why these people need the book, and suggestions on how to promote the book (through publicity, advertising, direct marketing).
5. List of competing books with a description of each and explanation of how the book being proposed is different and better.
6. Author's biography.

### **Sample Chapters**

If this is your first book, you may want to include one or two sample chapters with your proposal as an example of your writing style. These sample chapters should be Chapter 1 and whatever chapter you think is strongest.

For more advice on how to write a book proposal, read Michael Larsen's book, *How to Write a Book Proposal* (Writer's Digest Books).

### **Agents**

You do not need an agent to sell your book, but it does help.

The large mainstream publishers are so overwhelmed with submissions that many will return unagented manuscripts unopened. Others have "slush piles," and rarely does a manuscript that starts in the slush pile end up in the published pile (although there are exceptions).

Smaller publishers are usually more receptive to unagented submissions. Also, if you have contacts at a particular publishing house, you might be able to get your manuscript read by an editor without an agent's intervention.

Agents' fees range from 10 percent to 15 percent of the money (advances and royalties) paid to you by your publisher. Most legitimate literary agents consider postage, telephone calls, and other expenses as overhead and do not pass these charges on to the client.

### **Length and Timing**

A medium-length non-fiction book, running around 200 printed pages, contains approximately 80,000 words. That represents a double-spaced typewritten manuscript of slightly more than 300 pages.

If your publisher is typical, your manuscript will be due on the editor's desk 6 to 9 months from the date you sign your book contract. Once you hand in the manuscript, it will take another 4 to 6 months before the books are published and distributed to bookstores.

### **Rights**

Rights deal with how the money is split between the author and publisher when the book is sold to a book club, made into a movie, serialized in *Forbes*, reprinted as an article in the trade press, made into an audio-cassette program, or sold as a premium or incentive item. Author/publisher percentage splits on these items generally range from 50/50 to 90/10 in favor of the author.

### **Author's Copies**

Most contracts specify that the author will receive 10 free copies of his or her book and can buy more copies at a discount of 40 to 50 percent off the retail price. If you are planning to use copies of your book as giveaways to potential clients or as a training manual in your seminars, try to get extra free copies and a slightly better discount. This is especially important if your book is expensive (\$20 or more).

## **Termination**

One of the most important clauses to look for in the publisher's contract is the termination clause. This simply says that if your book goes out-of-print (meaning the publisher is no longer selling it) or the publisher goes out of business, all rights to the book revert back to you, the author.

## **Permission**

No one seems to be able to say with authority when it is or isn't necessary to get permission to reprint someone else's work in your book. And I'm not a lawyer, so I can't give you any legal advice on this issue. But let me tell you what I think is correct.

I know for certain that you need to obtain permission to reprint lines (even a single line) from any poem or song. You also need permission to reproduce material as a visual in your book—for example, to reprint a diagram, a drawing, an ad, or a sales letter.

Get permission if you're quoting more than 50 words from an article or more than 300 words from a book. Use a standard permission form; ask your publisher to provide one.

## **Handing In the Manuscript**

Make sure you have a clean, readable photocopy of your manuscript. Originals do get lost in the mail.

## **Acceptance**

The publisher may accept your book as is or request changes. These changes can be either minor or substantial. You are contractually bound to make the changes the publisher requests. Every book contract I have read contains a clause which in effect says, "Submit your book. We'll read it. If we don't like it for any reason (or for no reason), we don't have to publish it and we don't have to pay your advance."

So in a sense you are really at the publisher's mercy. In reality, though, don't worry. The publisher wants to publish your book (that's why they give you a contract) and will work with you to get it into publishable form.

The "pub date" is the official publication date of your book—the date when the book supposedly will be available in bookstores.

Don't be disappointed when this day comes and goes without any hoopla or excitement whatsoever. The sad fact is, most publishers don't put much promotional effort behind most of the books they publish. If they put out a press release, print up some fliers, and get the book in some bookstores, consider yourself fortunate. Many books don't even make it into the stores these days!

### **Do-It-Yourself**

As an author, you have to become the promoter of your book.

What can you do? Send sales fliers to prospects. Give away copies as gifts to your clients. Send review copies to business journals that cover your industry. Establish speaking engagements and talk about your book at meetings and conventions. Send press releases to your hometown paper and get them to do a story on you. If your book is about advertising or marketing, send it to me and I'll review it (maybe).

Go to local bookstores and make sure your book is placed prominently in the business section, with the front cover facing out. Correspond with people who write to tell you your book was helpful. Be happy that you are a published author, and that your advice is helping someone out there do his or her job better and more profitably.

And of course, don't forget to dedicate your book...to your mother.

## Section 2

### Finding a Good Idea for Your Book

The journey of a thousand manuscript pages (or even 150) begins with a single idea. Here's how to find one.

Many people who attend my book publishing seminars already have a book idea in mind. Others, however, have a strong desire to write a book, but are stuck on coming up with a suitable topic. If you fall into this category, here are ten sources of ideas for books you may want to write:

#### 1. JOB EXPERIENCE

An obvious but often overlooked source of book ideas is your job. Thousands of excellent books have been written by authors about a skill, expertise or career experience gained on the job.

This is how I came to write my first book, *Technical Writing: Structure, Standards and Style* (McGraw-Hill). My first job after graduating college was as a technical writer for Westinghouse Electric Corp. in Baltimore. After several months writing technical materials, I began to feel the need for a writing guide to assist technical writers with matters of style, usage, punctuation and grammar (for example, does one write 1/4 or 0.25 or *one fourth* in technical documents?). Being book-minded, I went to the bookstores and found nothing appropriate.

My idea was to compile a style guide for technical writers modeled after the best-selling general writing style guide, *The Elements of Style*, by Strunk and White. I wrote a content outline and book proposal, and began to pursue agents and publishers. I was extremely lucky: The first agent who saw *Technical Writing* agreed to represent the book, and within three weeks, he sold it to the first publisher to look at it, McGraw-Hill. The advance was \$8,500—not bad for a first-time author in 1981 for a short (100-page) book.

Not every book I've written since has sold so quickly and easily. But subsequently, I have written a number of books based on skills and experiences gained in various careers and jobs.

Do you hold a highly desirable position or work in a glamorous industry? Then you can write a book telling others how to get into your line of work.

Have you developed specific and valuable skills such as computer skills, selling, marketing, finance, negotiating or programming—skills that others need to master? There's a need for a book telling them how to do it.

## **2. TEACH A COURSE**

There are many opportunities for you to design and teach courses to other people at work, at adult education evening classes at the local high school or college, at community colleges, at association meetings and even on the university level.

If you get the opportunity to teach a course, keep in mind that the topic and content outline you develop for the course may have appeal to a publisher as the outline for a potential book on the same subject.

In 1981, a private seminar company offering low-cost public seminars in New York City asked me to do an evening program on marketing and promotion for small business. The pay was lousy but I accepted. A year or so later, I took the course title and outline, turned it into a book proposal, and sold my second book, *How to Promote Your Own Business*, to New American Library.

If you want to write nonfiction books there are two advantages to teaching a class or seminar. First, in developing and teaching the course you will simultaneously be doing most of the legwork necessary to produce a book on the subject. Therefore, once you've given the course, transforming it into a book is a relatively quick and easy next step (or at least quicker and easier than doing a book from scratch).

Second, teaching the course positions you as an expert in the subject making you more attractive to book publishers. They figure that anyone who can give a course on the topic must have a substantial amount of information and expertise to share. If you taught the course at a prestigious, well-known institution, that further boosts your credibility.

### **3. TAKING COURSES**

Taking courses can also give you a fresh infusion of ideas and information that can become the basis for a book.

The same private seminar company I was teaching small business promotion seminars for offered a number of courses in different career areas, which as an instructor, I could take for free. After taking several, I came up with the idea of doing a career book on how to break into some of the more exciting, glamorous industries and professions, such as music, film, advertising, travel and television. The book, *Creative Careers: Real Jobs in Glamour Fields*, was published by John Wiley & Sons.

Warning: When you take the course, don't steal or plagiarize the instructor's seminar, reprinting it word for word as your book. Consider it a starting point and supplement it with additional research from many other sources (book articles, interviews, other seminars, etc).

If the instructor does have good information you want to reprint (such as lists of contacts and resources), get his permission in writing. You can also ask the instructor if he or she will agree to be interviewed by you for inclusion in the book.

#### **4. WRITE ABOUT YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCES**

“It is in the totality of experience reckoned with, filed and forgotten, that each man is truly different from all others in the world,” writes Ray Bradbury in *Zen in the Art of Writing*. Every person, every life, is unique, and this is why I say that everyone has at least one book inside them: What has happened to you has not happened to other people, and your experiences will make for a book that is either instructive, entertaining, moving or any combination of these.

This applies to everyone. For example, if you have chosen to remain single you can write *Living Alone and Loving It* or a similar book on the joys of being single. If you are married with children, you have unique experiences as a parent, and can share your knowledge and experiences with others in an entertaining or informative book. If you are married but have been unable to have children, you have credibility to write a book on infertility. If you and your spouse have not had children by choice, you can write a book on *Choosing to Live Child-Free*. If you have only one child, you can write *Raising the Single Child*. If you're a single parent, you can write *Straight Talk and Advice for Single Parents*.

In 1982, the New York City engineering firm employing me told me I would have to relocate. My fiancée did not want to leave Manhattan, so I resigned and started a new career as a self-employed industrial writer, producing brochures and data sheets for chemical companies and industrial equipment manufacturers.

The transition from employee to freelancer was an educational experience, one I knew many others would go through (or would hope to, some day). This became the topic of my book, *Out on Your Own: From Corporate to Self-Employment*, also published by Wiley.

#### **5. WRITE ABOUT A PROCESS OR TASK YOU KNOW HOW TO DO**

Through work, leisure or life experience, we all have done things that many other people have not done, and therefore know a good deal more about these

things than they do. The inexperienced would like to learn from your experiences and avoid your mistakes, and a book is the ideal vehicle for this.

For instance, after resigning from the engineering firm and becoming a self-employed industrial writer in 1982, I was forced to learn how to succeed in the commercial writing field on my own; there was no book to guide me. I made many expensive mistakes and learned from experience.

To help other writers speed the learning curve and avoid these mistakes, I wrote *Secrets of a Freelance Writer*, published by Henry Holt & Co. The book is about the process of running a freelance writing business, covering everything from getting started and finding clients to setting fees and negotiating contracts.

## **6. WRITING ABOUT YOUR HOBBY**

Hobbies that fascinate you no doubt fascinate a lot of other people. As a hobbyist, you have much more knowledge than a journalist or other outsider who would have to research the field from scratch. Why not turn your hobby into a profit center by writing a book about it?

One of my hobbies is collecting comic books. I love Superman, Batman Wolverine, and the other DC and Marvel superheroes.

When I graduated college in 1979, I burned with the desire to write a book and get it published. I started two book projects. One was a Harlequin romance novel, which I started not because I enjoy Harlequin romance novels—I've never even read one—but because I figured it would be easy to do. I was wrong. I wrote 40 pages of the worst Harlequin romance novel of all time before abandoning the project.

But writing those pages taught me an important lesson: Don't select a topic or form for your book just because you think it is commercially viable and will make you a lot of money. If you do, your lack of enthusiasm will show through in your writing.

On the other hand, if you are passionate about your topic, your enthusiasm will show through in your writing. The book will be easier and more fun to write, and the final product will be much better in quality.

The second book project I started working on was a trivia book on comic book superheroes, written in quiz form. For example: What are the six types of kryptonite? (Green, red, blue, white, gold, jewel.) What was Spider-Man's major in college? (Physics.)

I wrote a short manuscript and, having no contacts in publishing, and no knowledge of the publishing business, sent it to editors at various paperback publishers with a cover letter. It was rejected by all. I gave up and put it in a drawer.

Years later, when I was cleaning out some files, I came across the manuscript. I was going to throw it out, but instead mailed it to my literary agent with a note saying, "Do you think you can do anything with this?"

Six weeks later, she called and said she'd sold the book. I was speechless. The book, *Comic Book Heroes: 1,101 Trivia Questions About America's Favorite Superheroes From the Atom to the X-Men*, was published by Citadel Press.

The second lesson I learned from this, experience was: A book idea that doesn't sell now might sell later. If you get rejected by publishers, don't throw away or forget about the book proposal. File it and make a note to take another look at it in six or twelve months. Sometimes you have success on the second or third try because the timing is right. Other times, you see the idea from a fresh perspective, rewrite it, and make the sale with the revised book proposal. When asked to address the graduating class at Oxford, Winston Churchill, a great writer, stood up, said only "Never give up," and sat back down. These three words are good advice for authors who want to sell book proposals to publishers.

Eventually, a third lesson revealed itself: Every book published gives you a credential that can lead to more book contracts in the same field.

I enjoyed writing the comic book trivia book. After it came out, I thought about doing trivia books on other topics in a similar format.

I was always a big *Star Trek* fan. This resulted in two books with Harper-Collins: *The Ultimate Unauthorized Star Trek Quiz Book* and *Why You Should Never Beam Down in a Red Shirt*. As publishers began to see me as a writer of popular culture trivia, I received several more contracts along this line, including *What's Your Frasier I.Q.?*, a quiz book on the TV show *Frasier*.

Books about hobbies can be how-to, money-making, reference, specialized or general information. If you have an interest in tropical fish, for example, you could write *How to Keep Tropical Fish* (how-to), *How to Breed Tropical Fish for Fun and Profit* (money-making), *An Illustrated Guide to Aquarium Fish* (reference), *Care and Breeding of Fancy Guppies* (specialized) or *Your First Fish Tank* (general).

Notice that the first six methods on this list involve you, the author, having some special insight, experience or information on the topic of your book. Author and publisher Dan Poynter says: "Write about something in which you are a participant. The world needs more books written by writers who are also experts, not writers who are journalists."

"Concentrate on the area that interests you, and if you're not an expert now, you may become one," writes Tom Peeler in *The Writer*. "And even if the area of interest still requires consultation with recognized professionals, specialization will allow you to develop regular sources and will give you credibility with them."

One of Gary Larson's Far Side cartoons shows an author autographing his book at a book signing. The caption reads, "After being frozen in ice for 10,000 years, Thag promotes his autobiography." The title of the book: *It Was Very Cold and I Couldn't Move*. Obviously, no publisher expects you to have 10,000 years of

experience in your subject matter. But writing about something you know, have experienced or have achieved is one route to coming up with a book idea a publisher will buy from you.

## **7. COLLECT AND COMPILE TIDBITS OF SCATTERED INFORMATION**

Are you interested in a specific field of knowledge or study? And are you the type who clips articles and collects tidbits of information on your topic? If so, you can convert this passion for information by compiling your collected knowledge into book form.

For a while, I became fascinated with all the toll-free consumer helplines and hotlines I saw advertised, giving free information on everything from AIDS prevention to gardening tips to stock market quotes. I became an obsessive collector of these numbers, clipping articles and writing down 800 numbers I heard on radio and saw on TV. Finally, I compiled them into a book, *Information Hotline U.S.A.*, published by New American Library.

Similarly, a friend of mine, Don Hauptman, is obsessed by language in general and word-play in particular. Don is a collector of information, and began collecting acronyms (such as DNA, LSD, scuba, laser). When his collection got large enough, he turned it into a book on acronyms, *Acronymania*, published by Dell.

## **8. FIND AND FILL A NEED OR GAP IN THE READER'S KNOWLEDGE**

An excellent way of finding marketable ideas is to talk with people and find out what they want and need to know, then write a book to satisfy that information need.

For example, an attorney with good negotiating skills heard many clients telling him that they too wished they had good negotiating skills and would like help becoming better negotiators. The attorney became a millionaire by writing

and selling books, audio and videotape programs, seminars and training sessions in negotiating skills.

Working as a business consultant, I saw there were dozens of books on sales, but almost nothing on how to generate leads for salespeople. I proposed *The Lead Generation Handbook*, which sold to Amacom, the publishing division of the American Management Association.

And when we moved out of New York City and bought a home in the suburbs, we knew nothing about plumbing, electricity, gardening, cars, aluminum siding, roofing, or the dozens of other things every homeowner eventually becomes familiar with. I thought, “Why not do a book that will be an instruction manual for first-time homeowners?”

I wrote a proposal for a book titled *The Homeowner's Survival Guide*. No one was interested, and I put the proposal away in a file and forgot about it. Several years later, a major publisher – one for whom I've now written several books – came out with such a book with the exact same title. Another lesson learned: Pay attention to your own gut feelings. Had I kept trying with this book, as I advise you to do, it might very well have sold within a year or so. But I gave up on it, and now another author's name is on the cover.

## **9. TAKE AN EXISTING TOPIC AND TARGET IT TO A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE**

A common situation is the author who wants to write a book on a specific topic but finds the field overcrowded.

This happens to all of us: You get an idea for a book, get excited about it. But then you visit the bookstore and find two shelves full of books on the same topic, books that seem very much like yours. You become discouraged by the competition, give up and drop the idea. Don't! You can still write that book. You just need a fresh slant, angle or hook.

One of the easiest and most successful methods to finding this fresh slant is to target your book toward a specific audience within the market. For example, a female seminar leader told me she wanted to write a book on presentation skills, but was afraid to try because so many books already exist. She mentioned at one point that she trained mainly women. I asked her if women making presentations in the business world face a different set of challenges than men do. "Of course," she replied.

"Then," I suggested, "the title of your book should be *Presentation Skills for Women*."

In the same way, I wanted to write a book on selling, but found the market overcrowded. Since my experience is in selling services vs. products, I offered Holt a book on *Selling Your Services*.

## **10. WRITE WHAT INTERESTS YOU**

In addition to finding out what interests other people, an excellent source of ideas is what interests you. You are a curious, intelligent, creative human being, constantly thinking and wondering about the world around you. Chances are what interests you will interest many other people, too.

I'm a big Stephen King fan, as are many others. Having written the TV and comic book quiz books, I naturally thought of doing a quiz book on Stephen King. My agent promptly sold it to Kensington Books, a paperback publisher in New York City.

I recommend you keep a notebook, file folder or computer file labeled "book ideas," and whenever an idea for a book comes to mind, write it down and save it. Don't worry whether the book will eventually interest a publisher. Creating ideas and analyzing/assessing ideas are two separate activities, and should not overlap.

Don't hold your creativity back; let the ideas flow and quickly get them all down on paper. Later you can decide which won't work and which merit further effort.

But first, you must have the idea.

## Section 3

### The Bulletproof Book Proposal

Publishers ask five key questions about every project they consider. Here's how to make sure your proposal gives all the answers.

You have a great idea for a nonfiction book. Your spouse thinks it's a great idea. Your parents think it's a great idea. Even your neighbor who hates to read thinks it's a great idea.

But will a publisher think it's a great idea—enough to pay you an advance, commission you to write it, and publish and sell it?

That will depend largely on your book proposal. Here's where you demonstrate persuasively that your idea has merit. Of course, even a solid idea and a great book proposal can't guarantee success, but they surely can tip the odds in your favor. But if either the idea or the proposal is weak, your chances of a sale are slim to none.

It's no secret what book editors look for when reviewing book ideas and proposals. You'll improve your chances of winning a publisher's contract by testing your book proposal against the five key questions editors ask. Let's look at those questions and the best ways to answer them.

- 1. Is there a large enough audience interested in this topic to justify publishing the book?**

The major New York publishing houses aren't interested in highly specialized books written for small, narrow interest audiences. If you want to write the definitive work on LAN/WAN internet working, for example, seek out a publisher of technical books.

Big publishers are primarily interested in "bookstore books" — that is, books that appeal to a general audience or at least to a large segment of the general population. Examples of such audiences include parents, small business owners, corporate executives, fitness enthusiasts, movie buffs, users of personal computers, teenagers, and other large affinity groups.

A book aimed at a major publisher must appeal to an audience of hundreds of thousands of people, if not millions. To sell your idea to the editor, you must demonstrate that such an audience exists. In our proposal for *How to Promote Your Own Business* (accepted and published by New American Library), Gary Blake and I cited statistics showing there are more than 10 million small businesses in the US and 250,000 new businesses started each year.

One excellent source of market data is *Standard Rate and Data Service (SRDS)*, a book listing US magazines that accept advertising and their circulation's. SRDS is available at your local library or from the publisher (tel. 847/375-5000). If you're proposing a book on freelance writing, for example, you could look up writers' magazines and find that the two largest publications in the field have a combined circulation of more than 300,000; this is the potential market for your book.

But only a small percentage of the intended audience will actually buy your book. And a major publisher hopes to sell at least 5,000 copies of your book. So if you're writing a book that appeals only to the 44,171 branch managers working at banks nationwide (say, *How to Manage Your Branch More Efficiently*), and 2% can be persuaded to buy the book, you've sold only 883 copies — not nearly enough to make the project worthwhile for either you or a publisher.

## 2. Is this a book or a magazine article?

At the onset of the 1991 recession, I came up with an idea for a book I thought would be a strong seller – *Recession Proof Business Strategies: Winning Methods to Sell Any Product or Service in a Down Economy*. It was timely.

It had strong media appeal. And it contained vital information readers desperately needed.

But, as my agent pointed out, there were two problems with the book. First, its timely nature. From conception to bookstore, it can take 18 months to two years to write and publish a book. If the recession was over by the time *Recession Proof Business Strategies* came out, the book would bomb.

Second, my agent was concerned that there wasn't enough material to fill a book. And he was right.

The average nonfiction book is about 200 pages in typeset, published form, with approximately 400 words a page. That's 80,000 words; about 320 double-spaced typewritten manuscript pages. Your book might be longer or shorter, ranging from 35,000 words (a slim, 100 page volume) to 200,000 words or more.

Trouble was, when I finished writing everything I knew about recession proof business strategies, I had 5,000 words—too short for a book, too long for an article. The solution? I self published *Recession Proof Business Strategies* as a \$7 booklet and sold several thousand copies. So a booklet not a book was the right vehicle for this material.

Many book ideas seem strong initially, but wilt under close examination.

For example, a (to me) wonderful book title popped into my head a while back: *How to Survive a Midlife Crisis at Any Age*. My co-author loved it and wanted to do the book. But when we sat down, we couldn't think of anything to put in it! We soon abandoned the idea.

How do you know whether your idea is a book, article or booklet—and how do you convince a publisher that your concept is a big one? Here are some guidelines:

First, see if there are other books on the topic. The existence of a few similar titles indicates that this idea is big enough to deserve a book, since other publishers bought and published book length manuscripts on the topic.

Second, go to the library and see what else is written on the topic. If you feel overwhelmed by all the magazine articles, newspaper stories, booklets, pamphlets, surveys, reports and statistics on your topic, that's a good indication the topic is "meaty" enough to justify a full-length book.

For example, I heard a public service announcement describing a toll-free number you could call to get safety information about any car you were thinking of buying. I thought, "There seems to be a lot of these free consumer hotlines; why not organize them into a reference book?"

I researched the subject and discovered there were indeed hundreds of such hotlines. New American Library bought the book and published it as *Information Hotline USA*. If I'd uncovered only a few such hotlines, New American Library would have rejected my proposal.

The third step to convincing a publisher that your topic is broad enough to warrant a book is to organize your information into chapters. Think about how you would logically explain your topic or present your information, and organize it into major categories. These will become chapter headings.

A full-length nonfiction book typically has 8-15 chapters. If your outline has fewer, the publisher may think there's not enough information to fill a book on your topic. Shoot for an outline with at least 10 chapters.

On index cards, organize all your research material by chapter. Then add the most important or interesting items as bullet points in your chapter outline to

create a complete table of contents for your proposed book. Here's how my co-author and I described Chapter 15 in our proposal for *How to Promote Your Own Business*:

Chapter 15: On With the Show-Trade Shows and Displays

- Why do people attend trade shows?
- How to select the shows at which you will exhibit
- Creating effective trade show displays
- Five things you can do to attract more prospects to your exhibit:  
demonstrations, product samples, free gifts, contests and entertainment
- Other uses for your display materials: retail point-of-purchase, malls,  
lobby displays

This type of detailed table of contents proves to the publisher that your topic is appropriate for a book, not just a magazine article.

### **3. What's different—or better—about your book?**

The first page or two of your book proposal must contain an overview of your idea. This describes what the book is about, who it's written for and what's in it.

Your overview must also tell the editor why and how your book is unique, different, or better than other books already published on this topic. And you must do this within the first two paragraphs (if you don't, the editor probably won't read further).

The hook – the angle that makes your book different – can take many forms: It might be a slant toward a different audience, a better way of organizing the material, or inclusion of topics not covered in other books. The key is to make your book seem both different and better.

For instance, if the other books aren't illustrated, say that your book will be—and explain why that's important. If the other books are lengthy, promise to write

a more concise book. If the other books are incomplete, describe the topics they omit—and tell how you’ll cover them in your book.

When planning *How to Promote Your Own Business*, my co-author and I hoped to write a book on advertising that would appeal to small business owners rather than advertising agencies, PR firms and other advertising professionals. We used this as our hook; our proposal began:

*“How to Promote Your Own Business: is not a book for the professional publicist, promoter or advertising professional. Rather, it is a practical working promotion guide for the 10.8 million Americans who own their own businesses, and the 250,000 entrepreneurs who start new businesses each year.”*

We wrote a previous book, *Technical Writing: Structure, Standards and Style*, because we believed the existing technical writing books were too lengthy and dull to be suitable as references for working technical writers. We wanted to create a handbook for technical writers that emulated the concise, to-the-point style and format of *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk and E.B. White's popular style guide for general writers.

Our proposal called our book “the Strunk and White of technical writing,” which instantly communicated the key appeal of the concept. Our agent sold the book—within three weeks—to the first publisher who looked at it. Interestingly, McGraw-Hill also used the phrase “the Strunk and White of technical writing” in publicity and promotional materials describing the book.

Another section of your proposal that positions your book in relation to others on the same subject is the “Competition” section. Here you list and describe competing books; each listing should emphasize how your book is both different and better. Here is an example from our *How to Promote Your Own Business* proposal:

*“1. How to Advertise and Promote Your Small Business, by Connie McClung Siegel, John Wiley & Sons, 1978, 128 pages, \$4.95 trade paperback.”*

“This book is part of John Wiley's Small Business Series. The author neglects several vital areas of small business promotion, including mail-order, sales literature, trade shows, and displays, contests and newsletters. There are very few examples of actual promotions, and the author gives no indication of the costs involved or the results achieved. The book does not provide step-by-step instructions for selecting and implementing promotions.”

Include in the “Competition” section those books that cover the same—or very similar—topics as your book; that are published by a major publishing house; and that are no more than five years old.

How many books you list in this section will be important. The presence of two to six competitive books shows there's a market for this type of book, while still room for one more. On the other hand, if there are seven or more books a publisher may think the field is overcrowded, and you'll probably have a difficult time making the sale.

#### **4. Will people pay \$22.95 for this book?**

The average hardcover nonfiction book sells for \$22.95 or more; the average trade paperback for \$12.95. Your book must be interesting or valuable enough to make readers part not only with their money (remember, they can always read your book for free at the library), but with their time as well (many people would rather watch TV, go to the movies or nap than read a book).

When it comes to nonfiction, readers typically buy books to learn something, for reference or to be entertained.

A how-to or reference book proposal should stress the benefits readers will get when they buy the book. Will it help them save time and money? Make money? Look beautiful? Feel young? live longer? If your book will make readers' lives

better and easier, say so. In our proposal for *How to Promote Your Own Business*, we said:

“How to Promote Your Own Business is unique because it goes right to the heart of the problem: How can the owner or manager of a small business— a person with little time, money and promotion expertise— promote his business as effectively as his bigger, wealthier competitors?”

If your book is biography, journalism, history, or any other form of nonfiction written primarily to entertain, your proposal should highlight some of the more fascinating details of the book. Your aim is to make the editor want to read the whole story.

### **5. Why should the publisher hire *you* to write it?**

Your proposal must show why you're uniquely qualified to write the book. Such qualifications fall into two categories: writing credentials and expert credentials.

Writing credentials establish your expertise as an author. In an “About the Author” section of your book proposal, write a brief biographical sketch of yourself, being sure to include such information as:

- titles, publishers and dates of publication for any books you've written
- total number of books and articles written (if the number is impressive)
- names of major magazines and newspapers in which your work has appeared
- excerpts from favorable reviews about your work
- sales figures for your best-selling books (if they're impressive).

Expert credentials establish your position as an authority in the topic of your proposed book.

Actually, you don't have to be much of an expert. The trick is to make yourself seem like an expert to the publisher.

For instance, author Wilbur Perry wanted to write about mail-order. To make himself more appealing as a potential author for a book on the subject he started and operated a small part-time mail-order business from his home. This gave him the credentials he needed to convince John Wiley & Sons to publish two books by him on the topic.

In my experience, your expert credentials don't need to be in-depth. Editors understand you can research the topic, and they don't require you to know everything about it before buying your book. They just want to convince their editorial board—and buyers—that you know what you're talking about.

Of course, having a published book to your credit is one credential that always impresses publishers. And that's a credential I'm sure you'll soon have if you follow the five key points covered in this article.

## **The Making of a Winning Book Proposal**

A successful book proposal contains these sections:

### **Title Page**

A cover sheet. The book's title and the name of the author are centered in the middle of the page. In the upper left corner, type Book Proposal. In the bottom right, type your name, address and phone number (or, if you have one, your agent's).

### **Overview**

Summarize what your book is about: The topic, who will read it, why it's important or interesting to your intended audience, and what makes your book different from others in the field.

### **Format**

Specify approximate word length, number of chapters, types of illustrations or graphics to be included, and any unique organizational schemes or formats (for example, is your book divided into major sections or do you use sidebars?)

## **Market**

Tell the editor who will buy your book, how many of these people exist, and why they need it or will want to read it. Use statistics to dramatize the size of the market. For example, if your book is about infertility, mention that one in six couples in the United States is infertile.

## **Promotion**

Is your book a natural for talk radio or Oprah? (be realistic). Can it be promoted through seminars or speeches to associations and clubs? Give the publisher some of your ideas on how the book can be marketed. (Note: Phrase these as suggestions, not demands. The publisher will be interested in your ideas but probably won't use most of them.)

## **Competition**

List books that compare with yours. Include the title, author, publisher, year of publication, number of pages, price, and format (hardcover, trade paperback or mass market paperback). Describe each book briefly, pointing out weaknesses and areas in which your book is different and superior.

## **Author's Bio**

A brief biography listing your writing credentials (books and articles published), qualifications to write about the book's topic (for instance, for a book on popular psychology, it helps if you're a therapist), and your media experience (previous appearances on TV and radio).

## **Table of Contents/Outline**

A chapter-by-chapter outline showing the contents of your proposed book. Many editors tell me that a detailed, well-thought-out table of contents in a proposal helps sway them in favor of a book.

## Section 4

### Using Positioning to Sell Your Book

You can easily adapt “positioning,” an advertising sales technique that will make submissions stand out on the editor's desk—and in the editor's mind.

When I worked as a technical writer at industrial equipment manufacturer I decided to write a book of tips for fellow technical writers. Such a book hadn't been done before.

Or so I thought. Visits to bookstores and a look at *Books in Print* revealed that nearly a hundred books had already been published on this rather specialized subject. How could I compete?

When I read a few of the technical writing books, I was struck by how dull, lengthy and pedantic they were. “Engineers and managers don't want a 400-page treatise on grammar and syntax,” I explained to a writer friend over lunch. “What they need—and what I'd like to write—is a brief, easy-to-read style guide, a handbook they can keep on their desks and refer to when a question comes up. Something like the Strunk and White of technical writing.”

As soon as I said it—the *Strunk and White of technical writing*—we both knew I'd found the slant that would set my book apart from the competition and sell it to a publisher. Technical writing is unfamiliar territory to most trade book editors; by comparing my ideas to the immensely popular *Elements of Style*, I made the gist of my concept immediately clear.

My coauthor and I wrote a 22-page proposal and two sample chapters. We handed this package to our agent; within three weeks he sold the book to McGraw-Hill—my first sale anywhere. The book, titled *Technical Writing: Structure, Standards, and Style*, was published in hardcover and trade paperback and is now in its tenth printing. Interestingly, the publisher used the phrase

“the Strunk and White of technical writing” in its press release and in a promotional flyer on the book.

I’m convinced that the book sold because we had “positioned” it. Positioning is an advertising technique that identifies and targets a product’s potential buyers, demonstrates how that product differs from the competition, and summarizes the product and its benefits by comparing it to a concept or a product that people immediately understand. In sum, positioning creates a position for the product in the buyer’s mind.

Avis, for example, once positioned itself as a hard-working underdog—“We’re number 2, so we try harder.”

Although we may not be aware of it, many of us use positioning in everyday conversation. Describing a new word processor to a friend, we might say, “This machine is the Rolls Royce of personal computers.” The position of “Rolls Royce” connotes excellence, quality, value and high price. In the same way, a bookstore owner described *Megatrends* to one of his customers as “*the Future Shock of the 1980s*.” The customer, already familiar with Alvin Toffler’s work, could now picture John Naisbitt’s bestseller within the context of a familiar product.

In every book proposal, I now include a strong statement that defines the book’s position in the marketplace. My small business book, *How to Promote Your Own Business* (New American Library), was pitched as “the small-business guide to advertising, publicity, and sales promotion.” *Dream Jobs* (John Wiley & Sons), a career guide to such “hot” industries as cable TV, computers and genetic engineering, was positioned as “a dreamer’s guide to the most in-demand careers of the 1980s and beyond....”

For informational and “how-to” books, positioning can be based on the technical depth and audience interest in the subject. For example, when I wanted to write a book on computers for small businesses, I positioned my concept as management-oriented rather than hardware-oriented. I began the proposal:

“The philosophy behind HOW TO BUY THE RIGHT COMPUTER FOR YOUR SMALL BUSINESS is practical and straight forward. It is this: The purchase of a small business computer is a *business decision*—similar to the decision to rent office space, lease a copier, install a new phone system, or buy dictating machines for the sales force. The decision-making process for all of these situations is the same. Only the specific facts are different.”

So many “how to buy a small business computer” books were on the market that an even sharper position was needed to sell the idea. Eventually, the publisher bought the proposal on the condition that I aim the book at one specific industry. I chose a personal favorite—advertising—and my book, *The Personal Computer in Advertising*, was published by Banbury Books.

Sometimes, positioning can make the competition work for you rather than against you. When writer Frank Evans wrote a proposal for an encyclopedia of computer technology, he positioned the concept as complementing rather than competing with existing titles in the field:

“*Computers A Through Z: An Encyclopedia of Data Processing* relates to the two major computer dictionaries, *International Computer Dictionary* (Sybex, 1981) and *The Penguin Dictionary of Computers* (Penguin Books, 1970), just as the *Britannica* relates to *Webster’s*: it expands upon them. It is far more focused than such science encyclopedias as *The McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology* (McGraw-Hill, 1971) in that it provides complete coverage of one specialized area of technology—electronic data processing.”

To position your book, clearly identify the intended audience, show how the book differs from or complements any related books, and draw an analogy between the proposed book and something that will form a familiar, favorable image in the editor's mind.

And keep the position statement short. Someone once said that every good idea can be written on the back of a business card. By coming up with a single,

pithy sentence to summarize and slant your book idea, you break through the clutter and quickly communicate your concept to editors. As a result, you may find yourself in a fine position to be in: that of a published author.

## Section 5

### What to Do When Your Book Goes Out-of-Print

Practical tips for keeping your book available, even after the publisher takes it out-of-print, or even if the publisher goes bankrupt.

When Dodd, Mead published my *Secrets of a Freelance Writer* in July 1988, I didn't expect the company to go out of business four months later. (After all, it had been in business for 150 years.) People began complaining to me that they couldn't get the book in bookstores, and bookstores couldn't get it from the publisher. Finally, I received a letter from Dodd, Mead telling me it was having "losses and cash-flow deficits" and looking to sell its assets. In other words, it was going bust.

But even more shocking was the request that I buy back rights to my own book—for \$2,500!

Naturally, I had assumed the rights reverted to me. After all, it was in my contract. But Dodd, Mead felt differently. How we eventually settled the deal—and how you can protect yourself when your book goes out-of-print (meaning, it is no longer available to the public) or your publisher goes out of business—is the subject of this article.

A book represents a great investment of time, effort and energy—an investment rarely covered by your advance alone. Unfortunately, most books go out-of-print too quickly to pay substantial royalties.

But having the book go out-of-print does not put an end to its value. The physical inventory—the remaining unsold books themselves—have value to the

author, both as a product that can be marketed and sold on its own, and as a promotional tool (for consultants, doctors, psychologists, speakers, experts in various subjects, and others with professional practices in the fields their books cover).

Even more important are the rights to reprint and republish the work. Even if you never sell the book to a new publisher, you still want to be able to use the material—as chapters in other books, as articles, lectures, speeches, cassette programs, perhaps even in self-published material. If you don't have full and clear ownership of these rights, your material may remain unread and unused forever.

### **BEFORE YOU SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE**

To make sure you retain the rights to your book after it goes out-of-print:

- **Make sure the publisher copyrights the book in your name, and not in its own.** Although copyrighting the book in the author's name is standard practice, numerous smaller publishers (and a few larger ones) will make themselves the copyright holder—unless you insist otherwise.
- **Include a contract clause that states that rights revert to you when the book goes out-of-print.** In 1982, for example, I published a dictionary of computer words with a small press. When the press went out of business, I checked my contract and found that I had neglected to insist on a clause dealing with rights reversion (often called the “termination” clause in a standard publisher's contract). Now the books are out-of-print, the former owner of the publishing house won't return my phone calls, and my rights to reuse the material are probably lost forever.

- **Make sure the contract defines “out-of-print” so both you and the publisher know when you can request reassignment of rights.** One publisher’s contract says the book is out-of-print when “subsequent to one year from publication date, no earnings have been payable to the author during two consecutive accounting periods (12 months).” After that, the publisher must republish, resell or actively market the book within six months, or rights revert to the author.

Be careful of tricky clauses. Another publisher’s contract says that rights don't revert to the author until the work is out-of-print "in all forms of media." This means that if the book goes out-of-print, yet the publisher continues to sell a cassette version, a video-tape, or even a small pamphlet based on the book, I can't offer the book itself to another publisher.

- **Make sure the contract specifies what happens to the remaining inventory of books and the original camera-ready copy when the book goes out-of-print.** In my contracts with Dodd, Mead, this clause reads: "The Author shall have the right to purchase from the Publisher all copies remaining at cost of manufacture, and the plates and engravings (if in existence) at one-half their cost to the Publisher, including composition.

Getting the copies is important if you intend to sell them, use them as promotional giveaways, or simply want them as mementos. Getting the plates is even more important, because a new publisher can reprint your book directly from the existing plates or films, saving enormous amounts of time and money. And this, frankly, is a selling point when marketing the book to a new publisher.

- **Choose a reputable publisher with a good track record.** This, I admit, can be difficult. For instance, in the early 1980s, I published six books with Banbury Books, a small, entrepreneurial publishing

firm that was a successful pioneer in computer books. When the computer book market went soft, Banbury went out of business, and my six books went out-of-print.

I vowed to stick with major publishers. Then, after publishing two books with Dodd, Mead—a firm that had been in business since 1839—it folded in 1989, and two more books were out-of-print.

Meanwhile, my friend Roger Parker has completed some successful and lucrative books for a small publisher I had never heard of —Ventana. Roger's books continue to sell like gangbusters, and both he and Ventana are making a lot more money in publishing than I am right now.

Still, a large, established publisher like Random House or Simon & Schuster is probably less likely to disappear than a small press with only a couple of titles in its catalog.

### WHEN THE BOOK IS PUBLISHED ...

The best way to protect yourself from your book going out-of-print is to help the publisher sell it—so that there is a constant demand for it.

Some suggestions:

- **When filling out the author's questionnaire, give the publisher complete information:** on the book, its selling points, and any resources or media outlets for promotion. The staff at the publishing house gets its information from your completed author's questionnaire, not the book itself (which they don't have time to read). So don't take this document lightly.

If you're detailed in your answers, the author's questionnaire form won't give you sufficient room for your replies. I type the questions and answers on my word processor, which gives me more room and allows me to insert entire sections of my book proposal into the appropriate sections of the questionnaire. This gives the publisher's staff the same powerful material that sold my editor on the book in the first place.

- **Volunteer to write promotional copy for the publisher.** Write your own catalog blurb and press release, and give it to your editor and publicist. Usually they will be only too happy to use what you supply and have you do the work.
- **Cooperate with the publicity and marketing departments.** These days, the most common complaint among authors is that publishers don't do enough to promote books. So when the publisher does get you a speaking engagement or book you on a talk radio show, don't be difficult. And let everyone know you are eager and available to do more of the same. Getting publicity for an author makes the publicist look good, so she will work with you if you encourage it and if your book is promotable.
- **Conduct your own marketing campaign.** Politely find out what the publisher intends to do—and what it won't do. Then, consider taking up some of the slack yourself. If you have written a book on management, for example, and have some contacts at major corporations, see if you can sell the book in volume as a training tool or premium. Give seminars or lectures at which the book can be sold to attendees. This won't move large quantities, but it will help spread the word about your book.
- **Keep at least a dozen copies on hand.** If the book suddenly goes out-of-print, and you can't buy the remainders, you'll need these copies to send to prospective new publishers. And, once you find a new publisher, his production department will probably need two or three clean copies of the book to print from, assuming you can't get the plates or films.
- **Keep up with the publishing industry.** Subscribe to *Publishers Weekly* and *Writer's Digest*. If you read or hear rumors that your publisher is in financial trouble or is a target for acquisition, call your

editor and buy at least a hundred copies of your book (at your author's discount, of course). Once a publishing house's money problems are bad enough to become public rumor, financial collapse—which can result in inaccessibility of their inventory—can happen faster than you think.

Another warning sign that your publisher is having financial difficulties is late royalty payments and statements.

### WHEN YOUR BOOK GOES OUT-OF-PRINT ...

Sooner or later, despite your best efforts, your book will go out-of-print. Either the publisher will notify you, or royalty statements will indicate that the book isn't being sold any more. If you've protected yourself by including the contract clauses I suggested, you're in good shape.

Not sure what your contracts say? Go to your files and check all contracts for your existing books. There's a good chance your contracts contain these clauses. If you don't have a clause reverting the rights of your out-of-print book to you, the going will be tougher, but not impossible. Some publishers—especially financially sound ones—will be reasonable and give you the rights. Others—usually small ones going out of business—may not respond to your request at all.

Here's what to do:

- **Send a letter to the publisher requesting that all rights revert to you.** If your contract contains a reversion clause, say so.
- **Consider buying the remaining inventory of books and the printing plates or films,** but at a reasonable price. Include a sentence in your letter that indicates your interest without making you seem too eager. For example: "If you are interested in selling the remaining inventory and the plates, I may be a customer."

If all is well, the publisher should respond by offering you the remaining inventory at a reasonable price (we'll discuss pricing later). You should get the

books, the films or plates (if available), and a letter stating that all rights have officially reverted to you.

### **WHEN THE PUBLISHER GOES OUT OF BUSINESS ...**

A far more serious problem arises when the book goes out-of-print because the publisher is going out of business. You might think that, because the book is out-of-print, the rights automatically revert to you. But beware. “There appears to be a general misconception in the publishing industry that if a publisher fails to remit royalties or becomes the subject of either voluntary or involuntary court supervised liquidation proceedings, authors' contractual rights revert to the authors,” stated Dodd, Mead in a letter to me concerning my books. “We believe that the rights under the authors' contracts do not revert to him. In fact, in such recent proceedings as the Stein and Day bankruptcy case, authors' contracts were sold to the highest bidder. Therefore, you should not rely on any automatic right of reversion.”

Dodd, Mead sent me a notice offering to sell me the rights to my two books, *Secrets of a Freelance Writer* and *The Copywriter's Handbook*, for \$2,500 apiece—\$5,000 total.

My immediate reaction was to get my attorney to threaten a lawsuit, which was a mistake. A company hounded by creditors isn't afraid of one more complaint. My lawyer got out of it, and my agent took over. The final deal was that Dodd, Mead granted me all rights to both books in exchange for a payment of \$2,000 (\$1,000 per book) plus forgiveness of back royalties (which I never would have seen anyway). I could have gotten it cheaper—I believe that those Dodd, Mead authors who negotiated early, instead of fighting as I did, paid somewhere around \$250 per book for rights.

Conclusion? If the publisher offers to sell you the rights, respond immediately with a much lower figure and begin negotiations. The authors who act first can get

back the rights at the lowest price. Later, when the publisher realizes how badly it needs cash, it becomes more demanding and less open to negotiation.

Determine whether to accept the publisher's final offer based on what the book means to you—personally, emotionally and financially—as well as its sales potential. With my children's book, *Ronald's Dumb Computer*, the book is financially unimportant to me and I never bothered to pursue the rights. But *The Copywriter's Handbook* is an ongoing promotional tool for me and a major source of new consulting business, so getting back the rights was crucial—and well worth the \$1,000 I paid.

My story has a happy ending. My editor at Dodd, Mead moved to another publishing house. She got in touch and expressed interest in republishing *Secrets of a Freelance Writer* and *The Copywriter's Handbook* if I could get the rights back. My advance from the new publisher more than covered what I paid out to Dodd, Mead to recover the rights, and new editions of both books are now in bookstores.

## BUYING THE INVENTORY

When Dodd, Mead offered to sell me the rights to my books, it also asked if I wanted to purchase the remaining inventory. While most book contracts offer the remainders to the author at manufacturing cost, Dodd, Mead wanted cost plus \$1 per book. This was \$3.16 per book for 629 hardcover copies of *The Copywriter's Handbook* with a cover price of \$17.95, and \$3.91 per book for 406 paperback copies of *Secrets of a Freelance Writer* with a cover price of \$9.95. This meant I'd write Dodd, Mead an additional check for \$3,575.10 in exchange for 1,035 books with a retail value of \$15,330.25—assuming I could sell them.

In my case, I wasn't especially worried about being able to sell the books. I use *The Copywriter's Handbook* as a premium, giving it to clients and prospects for my consulting and copywriting services. In addition, I receive several calls each week from people wanting to know where they can get a copy. As for *Secrets of a*

*Freelance Writer*, I knew from running a test ad in *Writer's Digest* that I could sell the book profitably as a mail-order item.

However, by the time I decided to buy the books, Dodd, Mead's inventory was frozen for legal reasons. Eventually I bought the books at an even lower price from a remainder house (a distributor that buys and sells inventories of out-of-print books).

Make an offer and get the books shipped to you right away. Otherwise, you may never get them.

This assumes, of course, that you want the inventory. You may not. Storing hundreds or thousands of books presents problems in itself. The best place is the garage, attic, basement or spare bedroom, but you may not want to live with the clutter. The alternatives—warehouse or other storage facilities—are not inexpensive. I got a quotation from a "fulfillment house," which would not only store the books but also handle incoming mail orders and ship books to customers for me. Storage alone for the 2,000 books was in the range of \$55-\$100 per month—which would quickly eat into my profits. I stored the books in my basement.

Selling the inventory is a challenge. But, being a writer, you may be able to find creative and profitable ways to do it. Many authors sell their books by mail.

The selling method you use determines the maximum you can afford to pay for your out-of-print books. If you sell them at seminars, for example, where selling costs are low, you can pay up to 50% of the retail price and still make a handsome profit—because your only advertising cost is holding up a copy of the book from the podium.

But, if you want to sell the book through mail-order advertising, you need a higher profit margin to cover the cost of advertising (classified is best), mailing sales literature, and shipping books to customers. The most you can afford to pay is 25% of the retail price, and you really should be looking to pay 10-20% of retail or less.

For most trade paperbacks, this comes to \$1-\$3 per copy. When selling the books mail-order, add \$2 to the retail price for shipping and handling. This helps relieve some of the burden of your high selling costs.

### **KEEPING THE BOOK IN PRINT**

Assuming you are successful at selling your books, the inventory will soon be gone. Then what?

If the rights belong to you, you have two choices. You can sell the book to another publisher. Or, you can publish it yourself.

The author who wants to self-publish his out-of-print book has a big advantage over other self-publishers: Namely, the book has already been designed and set into type—eliminating thousands of dollars in typesetting and composition costs.

Ideally, your printer should print from the publisher's original plates or films. But in most instances the printer can produce an acceptable finished product using existing copies of the published book as his camera-ready artwork. For this, he will need two clean copies in good condition.

How many copies should you print? Most self-publishing experts I talked to recommended a first print run of 3,000 copies. Printing fewer copies drives up the cost per copy, while printing more could leave you with a warehouse full of books if it doesn't sell.

For a 128-page trade paperback, trim size 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches, a book production house quoted me a price of \$6,488.09 for 3,000 copies, or \$2.16 per book. I could probably have gotten a lower price going directly to a printer and handling the production details myself. Be sure to go to a printer specializing in books.

Self-publishing offers you the advantage of control – control over jacket design, pricing, marketing and distribution. You might want to get into the book-selling business this way. I didn't. And where would I store 3,000 books?

So instead, I chose to resell the rights to the publisher where my Dodd, Mead editor now worked.

Will you be able to resell your book to another publisher? It may be difficult. Publishers are more interested in something new than something old. Unless your book was a big seller, most editors won't get excited about it. But if you query publishers, you may find one looking to fill a slot in its catalog with a book just like yours. Or maybe an editor who praised the book in the past would be happy to acquire it now. If your original editor has moved to another publishing house, he or she would be your best bet for a resale.

What kind of advance can you expect? Probably 50% or less of the advance you would get for the book if it were new. On the other hand, it's easy money; unless your book must be revised and updated, there's almost no work involved for you.

If there's one piece of advice to follow above all else, it's act quickly. Those authors who take immediate action and persist until the deal is made suffer least and profit most when their books go out-of-print.

## **Section 6**

### **Make \$10,000 a Month Selling E-books**

Before the Internet, there was a niche in mail-order marketing that involved selling books on how to get rich in mail-order, the audience primarily composed of business opportunity seekers.

Now the Internet has created an equivalent market of people who want to get rich on the Internet, and an equivalent niche: selling e-books on how to make money writing and selling e-books.

Most of these e-books are specifically on how to make money on the Internet, and deal with various aspects of selling information online. A few are on more

general marketing and selling topics. Hardly any deal with subjects outside of business and business opportunities.

The business model works as follows: You write an e-book on a topic of interest to your potential buyers (Internet millionaire wanna-be's) and format it as a downloadable PDF file.

Next, you write a long, powerful sales letter to sell the e-book and post it on the Web as a microsite. Unlike conventional Web sites, which have a lot of buttons and clicking options, the only thing you can do on a microsite for a single e-book is read the sales copy and, if interested, order the product.

(E-books are typically covered by a 30-day money back guarantee. Even though the product can't be "returned," anyone who says they are dissatisfied gets a refund.)

Finally, you drive traffic to the e-book site through a variety of promotional methods, including ads and articles in other people's e-zines, announcements in your own e-zine, banner advertising, co-registrations, pay-per-click advertising, making affiliate deals with other online marketers, and sending e-mails to your house file (renting a traditional opt-in list does not typically work for e-book offers because of the high cost).

An "affiliate deal" involves arranging with another online marketer to sell your e-book to his audience in exchange for a cut of the revenue ranging from 30% to 50%. "Affiliates are my most successful method of selling e-books," says Joe Vitale, author of numerous e-books including the best-selling *Hypnotic Writing* ([www.hypnoticwriting.com](http://www.hypnoticwriting.com)). Vitale recommends searching the Internet for online marketers who sell other people's products on their site.

"Recruiting people who buy your e-book and love it is the best way to get affiliates," says Fred Gleek, an online information marketer ([www.seminarexpert.com](http://www.seminarexpert.com)). Include a section in every e-book explaining how the buyer can become an affiliate and sell your e-book to his audience.

“With a new e-book, your own list represents the absolute best way to sell a whole lot of e-books really, really fast,” says e-book author Jim Edwards, “People who have bought from you before are highly likely to buy again.”

The “model” for this genre of “how to get rich online by selling e-books on how to write and sell e-books” is *eBook Secrets Exposed* (www.ebooksecretsexposed.com) by Jim Edwards and David Garfinkel.

Edwards makes a handsome living writing and selling e-books; he has sold 5,000 copies of various e-book titles ranging from \$29 to \$49 over the last 12 months. Keep in mind that the manufacturing and shipping costs for e-books is zero, which is what makes them such an attractive, profitable information product.

“I have two e-books that each generate \$10,000 to \$12,000 gross each per month,” says Edwards. “Another does \$3,000 per month in sales, and two others generate \$1,200 per month each. One e-book sold \$43,000 in 30 days.”

What topics works best? “Topics that address an urgent need that the prospect is aware of, and that you can market to pre-formed Internet groups of prospects,” says Garfinkle. “These groups are usually composed of e-zine subscribers and affinity groups that spends a lot of time on a single Web site or discussion groups that allows production promotion.” He says that e-books on marketing and big-ticket consumer item topics (e.g., how to negotiate the best price for a car, or how to buy or sell your house) work well.

And what won’t sell in the e-book marketplace? “Informative, even valuable topics around which there is no pressing need most of the time,” says Garrfinkle.

He recently advised another online marketer not to go forward with a planned e-book for junior executives on how to sell their ideas to others. The reason? He couldn’t find an interested community on the Web of junior managers that have spent money on career-improving topics. “Also, except in rare situations,

most junior managers don't feel urgency about selling their ideas to others," David notes.

A word of caution to the buyer: Some e-books are quickly compiled, shoddily researched, recycled trash, and a rip-off of their \$19 or \$29 selling price. Reason: The barriers to entry in e-book marketing are so low, anyone can do it. And so the market is flooded with thin PDF documents written by amateurs hoping to make a quick buck.

Your best bet if you want to buy and read marketing e-books: Buy from the proven authors mentioned in this article—Jim Edwards, David Garfinkel, Fred Gleek, Joe Vitale—as well as other known experts in entrepreneurial online marketing including Terry Dean, Corey Rudel, Jeffrey Lant, and Jim Straw.

## **Section 7**

### **Write, Design, and Publish Your Own Free E-zine**

My monthly e-zine, The Direct Response Letter (go to [www.bly.com](http://www.bly.com) to subscribe or view back issues), is not the most successful or widely read e-zine on the planet. Far from it.

But marketing results and comments from subscribers tell me my simple formula for creating the e-zine—which, including copy and layout, takes me just an hour or two per issue to complete from start to finish—works.

In this article, I want to share the formula with you, so you can produce an effective e-zine of your own, sitting at your computer, without hiring a writer or designer, in just a single morning or afternoon.

If you want to market your product or service over the Internet, I strongly urge you to distribute your own e-zine free to your customers and prospects. There are several reasons for doing so.

First, the e-zine allows you to keep in touch with your best customers—indeed, with all your customers—at virtually no cost. Because it's electronic, there's no printing or postage expense.

Second, by offering potential customers a free subscription to your e-zine, you can capture their e-mail address and add them to your online database. You can then market to these prospects, also at no cost.

Whether you are generating leads or direct sales, there are two ways to sell your products and services to your e-zine subscribers. One is to place small online ads in the regular issues of your e-zine. These ads are usually a hundred words or so in length, and include a link to a page on your site where the subscriber can read about and order the product.

Or, you can send stand-alone e-mail messages to your subscribers, again promoting a specific product and with a link to your site.

When you are dealing with a free e-zine (as opposed to an online newsletter which the reader pays for), people spend just a little time reading it before they delete it with a click of the mouse.

I am convinced that most subscribers do not print out the e-zine, take it home, and curl up with it on the couch later to read. Therefore, I use a quick-reading format designed to allow the subscriber to read my e-zine online right when he opens it.

In this formula, my e-zine always has between 5 and 7 short articles. They are usually just a few paragraphs each.

Every article can be read in less than a minute, so it never takes more than 7 minutes to read the whole issue, though I doubt most people do. You can see the most recent issue at [www.bly.com](http://www.bly.com) to get a feel for the length and content of these articles.

I advise against having just a headline and a one-line description of the article, with a link to the full text of the article. All this clicking forces your subscribers to do a lot of work to read your articles, and that's not what they want.

I do not use HTML; my e-zine is text only. This way it is easy and inexpensive to produce.

I don't "make a production" out of it; it's just straight type. Many readers have told me they like it this way, and that they don't like HTML e-zines, which look (a) more promotional and less informational and (b) seem to have more to read.

When preparing your text e-zine for distribution, type your copy, in a single column, in Times Roman or another easy-to-read typeface.

The column width should be 60 characters, so you can set your margins at 20 and 80. However, to make sure the lines come out evenly, you must put a hard carriage return by hitting "return" at the end of each line.

There are a variety of services and software programs for distributing your e-zine as well as your e-mail marketing messages to your online database. I use and recommend [www.globaltrafficpros.com](http://www.globaltrafficpros.com).

My frequency is monthly, though occasionally I do a second issue if there is major news that month.

I am a freelance copywriter. Let me show you specifically how having an e-zine helps bring in business for me.

I recently gave a speech on software direct marketing. It was recorded, so I had audio cassette copies made. In my e-zine, I offered the cassette free to any subscribers involved in software marketing—potential clients for my copywriting services.

Within 24 hours after I distributed the e-zine, we received over 200 inquiries from marketing managers at software companies requesting the tape, many of whom needed copy written for direct mail and e-mail to promote their software.

By comparison, most copywriters tell me that when they send postal direct mail to a list of prospects, they average a 2% response. At that rate, they would have to send out 10,000 pieces of mail to generate the 200 leads I got in an hour for free.

That's what an e-zine can do for you. Once you build your subscriber list, you have an incredibly powerful marketing tool and the most valuable asset your business can own: a database of buyers with e-mail addresses and permission to mail to them at any time.

## **About the author:**

BOB BLY is an independent copywriter and consultant with more than 20 years of experience in business-to-business, high tech, industrial, and direct marketing.

Bob has written copy for over 100 clients including Network Solutions, ITT Fluid Technology, Medical Economics, Intuit, Business & Legal Reports, and Brooklyn Union Gas. Awards include a Gold Echo from the Direct Marketing Association, an IMMY from the Information Industry Association, two Southstar Awards, an American Corporate Identity Award of Excellence, and the Standard of Excellence award from the Web Marketing Association.

He is the author of more than 50 books including *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Direct Marketing* (Alpha Books) and *The Copywriter's Handbook* (Henry Holt & Co.). His articles have appeared in numerous publications such as *DM News*, *Writer's Digest*, *Amtrak Express*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Inside Direct Mail*, and *Bits & Pieces for Salespeople*.

Bob has presented marketing, sales, and writing seminars for such groups as the U.S. Army, Independent Laboratory Distributors Association, American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and the American Marketing Association.

He also taught business-to-business copywriting and technical writing at New York University.

Bob writes sales letters, direct mail packages, ads, e-mail marketing campaigns, brochures, articles, press releases, white papers, Web sites, newsletters, scripts, and other marketing materials clients need to sell their products and services to businesses. He also consults with clients on marketing strategy, mail-order selling, and lead generation programs.

Prior to becoming an independent copywriter and consultant, Bob was advertising manager for Koch Engineering, a manufacturer of process equipment. He has also worked as a marketing communications writer for Westinghouse

Defense. Bob Bly holds a B.S. in chemical engineering from the University of Rochester and has been trained as a Certified Novell Administrator (CNA). He is a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and the Business Marketing Association.

Bob has appeared as a guest on dozens of TV and radio shows including MoneyTalk 1350, The Advertising Show, Bernard Meltzer, Bill Bresnan, CNBC, Winning in Business, The Small Business Advocate and CBS Hard Copy. He has been featured in major media ranging from the LA Times and Nation's Business to the New York Post and the National Enquirer.

For a FREE Copywriting Information Kit, or a free, no-obligation cost estimate on copywriting for your next project, contact:

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