

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK

Proven Success Tips, Strategies, and Resources
for Enterprising Authors

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Skyhorse Publishing

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I

Stop! Don't Write that Book ... Yet

This book is designed for authors at any stage of a book project. But I am most eager to address those of you who have yet not finalized your manuscripts. To you, I would like to say:

Step Away From the Keyboard, Now!

You probably didn't expect to read this statement in a book about how to become a published author. Of course, I want you to write the book that's rolling around in your head and your heart, but not quite yet. There's work to be done before you put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. First, you need information so you can develop a strategy.

You wouldn't open a retail sporting goods store or start a telecommunications company unless you had at least a basic understanding of the industry. You'd become familiar with your customers, your competition, your suppliers and distributors. You'd develop a marketing plan and you'd probably make sure you had some financial backing. Like it or not, publishing is a business and your book is a product. While writing can be a marvelously delightful creative endeavor, the process of publishing involves a generous dose of marketing savvy and business sense. Launch blindly into the publishing field and use a scattershot method of producing and promoting a book and you'll likely fail. There are hundreds of thousands of disappointed authors out there who can back up this statement.

As I said in my Introduction (which you should read, by the way), it is estimated that over eighty percent of all adult Americans have the desire to write a book. More and more of these people are actually doing it.

Technology is certainly in the author's favor. Anyone who can construct a sentence can turn out a manuscript. If you have a computer and printer, you can even produce a book. Those who don't want to be the publisher can hire a publisher. Of course, if you're diligent (or lucky) and have a viable manuscript, you have a good chance of landing a traditional royalty publisher. The opportunities for hopeful authors are amazingly vast. Most new authors, however, short-circuit their chances of publishing success by going about the process of producing a book all wrong.

Okay, you've written a book and you want to have it published. What more is there to consider? Nothing, if you wrote the book to give as gifts to your immediate family members and a few friends. If you want your book to sell in large quantities, however, you will need buyers. You know, customers—folks who will purchase your book. It's only after publication—when sales are practically nonexistent—that many first-time authors realize they must have made a mistake.

One disheartened author told me, "I was so eager to get this book published, I'm afraid that I didn't take time to learn the ropes. Now I have forty-two boxes of books in my garage and no idea how to sell them. I guess I was naïve to think that I could distribute them through bookstores, because that is just not happening. I learned too late that bookstores are not there for the author—that is, unless your publisher is Simon and Schuster."

What? Bookstore managers aren't eager to carry newly published books? Why? Consider this: One reason is logistics. According to RR Bowker, the keeper of book publishing statistics, there are 7.5 million American book, audio and video titles listed in their database. Even the largest bookstore can accommodate only around 150,000 titles. That's less than two percent of all titles.

Additionally, there have probably always been poorly written, shoddily bound books produced, but never as many as since the most recent technological revolution. Along with some wonderful books, a proliferation of low quality books began appearing throughout the mid to late 1990s—most of them coming from pay-to-publish companies and lackadaisical independent publishers. What choice did credible bookstore managers, book reviewers, and distributors have? How would they avoid endorsing inferior products while embracing and recommending only those books of superior quality? Rather than taking the time to consider the merit of each individual book, many of them decided to

accept only books published through traditional channels. They would exclude books produced by pay-to-publish (subsidy publishing) services and independent publishers (self-published authors).

Some bookstore managers, reviewers, and distributors even began to shun books produced by legitimate royalty publishers if they used digital printing technology. For several years, the doors to traditional marketing opportunities were closed for many digitally produced books. Fortunately, this stigma is lifting and, in 2011, key players within the bookselling realm are using more reasonable criteria for evaluating the worth of all books.

I met Frances at a writers' conference in St. Louis where I spoke on book promotion. She had published her novel through one of the many pay-to-publish companies two years earlier and was still struggling to recoup her investment. She paid extra for one of the promotion packages they offered, but said, "I've sold fewer than 100 books and that was without their help. They haven't actually sold any." According to Frances's calculations, she needed to sell 100 more books in order to break even. But she was at a loss as to how to do it. She bought lists of bookstores nationwide and mailed flyers to 1,000 of them with no success whatsoever. She visited every bookstore within a fifty-mile radius of her home and managed to place a few books on consignment. She also arranged for a few book signings which weren't all that successful.

Frances told me, "If it wasn't for the fact that I need to replace that money, I'd forget the whole thing and chalk it up to a bad decision. But I'm facing retirement and I need the money. If I had it to do over again, I would never have gotten involved in publishing."

Frances was a paraplegic and her novel featured a paraplegic couple, yet she hadn't even considered soliciting reviews in disability and senior magazines or giving readings at rehabilitation hospitals and nursing homes. I suggested that she write a provocative press release and send it to newspaper editors, radio talk show hosts, and website hosts nationwide. I asked her to do some research, and she discovered that there are approximately one million Americans using wheelchairs—or one in every 250 people. This should be a significant enough number to warrant national coverage for a book related to personal disabilities.

The last I heard, Frances had sent out review copies to several magazine editors and newspaper columnists. Her book was being featured on a couple of appropriate websites. She had done some radio interviews by

phone and was scheduled to make a TV appearance locally. Her total sales to date were 350 and counting.

Few first-time authors think beyond the bookstore when considering book promotion. Even fewer consider book promotion at all until they're faced with a book that no one is buying.

NEWS FLASH!!! It is up to the author to promote his/her book, and the time to start planning your promotional strategy, fellow writers, is BEFORE you write the book.

Before you invest your time, energy, and money into a project, you need to know whether there is a market for your book. Is your idea valid? Is there a need for this book? Is there room for another book on this topic? Exactly who is your target audience? Who do you want to educate, influence, affect, or entertain? What books would compete with yours? This is also the time to think about building promotional opportunities into your book. (Learn how to make your book more salable in Chapter Six.)

Dismiss Those Discouraging Words

You may feel as though I'm trying to dissuade you from pursuing your writing/publishing dreams. On the contrary, my purpose in writing this book is to guide you toward a successful publishing experience. In so doing, I must squelch some of your preconceived ideas and burst your bubbles—at least those bubbles that are blocking your success.

Some readers will decide not to follow the suggestions in this book and a few of them will stumble blindly into a sweet publishing deal that makes them a lot of money. I've seen it happen. I've also watched inexperienced authors blow their money and their chances for success by refusing to adhere to some measure of publishing protocol. Unfortunately, the latter is the more common scenario.

There are people out there who will try to discourage you from writing a book. Sour Sallys and Gloomy Glens in your writers' group will tell you that the manuscript market is saturated. They'll say that it is next to impossible to get your book published, let alone get it into bookstores or have it reviewed through the most prominent channels. Is this true?

It was true when I produced the first and second editions of this book (2006–2007), but things are changing in favor of the savvy author. And that's why I have decided to revise and update this book for you. However, while quality self-published and pay-to-publish books are more well-received in 2011, publishing is still a fiercely competitive business that requires a strong business head. The playing field has changed, there are new players entering the game, and the opportunities are greater. But it is still tough to succeed in this business. Should this stop you from bringing out your amazing book? Emphatically, No!

As you will discover while studying this book, there are abundant opportunities for authors outside of the antiquated publishing mold. There are numerous publishing options and countless avenues for book promotion and distribution. However, if you're still following the publishing model established in the 1960s and '70s, you are in for a culture shock. It's time that you learn some new concepts and strategies. My intent is not to offer encouragement where there is no hope, but to inspire you to become educated about the publishing industry and to do the research necessary on behalf of your project.

For those of you who are still questioning today's publishing climate and your chances of breaking in, I'd like to bust some popular myths for your benefit. Read on.

Myth Busters for Hopeful Authors

Myth #1: It's impossible for a first-time author to land a traditional royalty publishing contract.

Myth Buster: You'll hear people say this and you may even see it stated on writers' online forums. And then you'll read in a newsletter or in a book such as this one that there were 1,052,803 books published in 2009. Believe it or not (actually, I prefer that you believe it), over 288,000 of those books were published by traditional royalty publishers. Do your homework and produce a viable product and you, too, could land a traditional royalty publisher.

A student in my online book proposal class had her first book published by Houghton-Mifflin. One of my clients landed a contract with Scholastic Books for her first young adult fantasy. A thirty-something author I met recently had his first book—a memoir—picked up by HarperCollins. Yes,

Virginia, there is a royalty publisher for your excellent book—that is, if it is timely enough, has a wide enough audience, and there's a strong marketing plan in place.

Myth #2: Most publishers accept manuscripts only through agents.

Myth Buster: Wrong. There are oodles of publishers who prefer to deal directly with the author. My student—the one who landed a book deal through Houghton-Mifflin—did so without the assistance of an agent. The 2012 edition of the *Writer's Market* (a directory of publishers and magazine editors) lists over 500 traditional publishing companies. Approximately ninety percent of them do not require that you engage an agent.

Myth #3: If I have an agent, I will definitely get published.

Myth Buster: Not necessarily. Unfortunately, while there are some very good agents, there are also some who are ineffective and unscrupulous. Even a good agent can't always second-guess publishers. (Read more about locating and successfully working with an agent in Chapter Eight.)

Myth #4: I don't have to worry about fine-tuning my manuscript. If the publisher is interested, he will have it edited.

Myth Buster: Don't EVEN go there! It may surprise you to know how many hopeful authors believe this. Of course, publishers hire editors and, if accepted, your manuscript will probably go through a stringent editing process. But it is your responsibility to present to the publisher the very best possible manuscript. You need to hire a good editor before you submit your work to any publisher. Adopt this motto: *Make a good impression the first time and every time.* This goes for every email, letter, and manuscript you send to publishers, book reviewers, and even fellow authors. You are a writer—let it show.

Myth #5: Bookstores won't carry self-published or pay-to-publish books.

Myth Buster: Have you contacted any of your local, independent bookstores about your self-published or subsidy published book? Have you

approached specialty bookstores related to the topic of your book? Do you stop by independent bookstores to introduce yourself and your book when you're traveling? Stop focusing on the mega-bookstores and see if you can entice their smaller counterparts to carry your book. In fact, I recommend that you do business with independent bookstores the next time you want to purchase a book. They are your friends. Support them and they will be able to support you.

Myth #6: No one will review self-published or pay-to-publish books.

Myth Buster: Most new authors tend to focus on one segment of book reviewers—prepublication reviewers through prestigious library journals. These reviews are difficult to get even when you've gone through the right channels. Some of these reviewers are opening avenues for self-published and pay-to-publish books for a fee. From what I hear, however, authors/publishers are not getting their money's worth for these paid services.

In the meantime, there are tens of thousands of editors for legitimate magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and websites hungry for good books to review. You're probably already aware of magazines that relate to your book topic or genre. Contact the editors of these publications and offer to send them a review copy. Visit online directories to locate other possibilities. This is another case of thinking outside the box.

Myth #7: Writing the book is the hardest part of the process.

Myth Buster: How many of you thought this to be true while you were involved in researching and writing your book? Those of you with published books feel differently now, don't you? To avoid author shock, always, I mean ALWAYS write a book proposal first. Once you've properly and thoughtfully completed a book proposal, you will be, at least, somewhat prepared for the work and the stress that lies ahead.

You Want to Write a Book Because?

Have you ever asked yourself why you write? I often interview writers who thank me for asking this question because it causes them to reflect

and helps them to set more meaningful goals. We don't always consider the reasons why we write (or paint or sculpt). We just do it. Likely, you're in touch with what inspires you to write—your muse. But what motivates you to write for publication: Money, prestige, fame, a yearning to share your joy or grief, the desire to help people or to facilitate change, or a need to establish credibility in a particular field?

I write for publication in order to justify my passion for writing. I tell people that *I can't not write*. Since I have to earn a living, I've established a business around my love of writing.

Most writers have this innate (or is it insane?) desire to be read/heard—maybe even understood. Elizabeth K. Burton is the author of *Dreams of Darkness*, *Shadow of the Scorpion*, and *The Ugly Princess*. She writes to be read. She says, "I love telling stories; if I make money at it, all the better. It's getting it out to the readers that compels me."

Some writers are eager to fill a void. Sandra J. Cropsey wrote her children's book because she perceived a need. She was already writing plays and short stories when, one December several years ago, while watching Christmas specials with her children, she realized that none of the popular Christmas stories involved trains. "What is Christmas without trains?" she reasoned. And she created *Tinker's Christmas*, a children's storybook featuring a train.

Many authors today write books designed to help others. They've endured something or learned something they feel is of value to a segment of the population. Sharing, for most of them, serves two purposes. In the process of helping others, they are helping themselves. Writing can be healing—therapeutic. It's a way of purging, after all.

I met one author online who was promoting a book for a very specialized audience—dialysis patients. She said, "I wrote this book in hopes of reaching a very select audience and to offer some help based on my own personal experiences."

Other authors write in order to establish credibility in their fields. And then there's the writer who has a story dancing around in his head and he feels somehow compelled to share it with the world.

Once you've decided to write a book and you know why you are writing, how do you choose what to write? Will you follow your heart and write a children's story, a book of poems, or a novel? Perhaps you'll lead with your head and write a how-to book related to your business or your favorite hobby. Many professionals suggest writing a nonfiction book

first. Yes, even if your heart's desire is to pen the next greatest novel, consider breaking into the publishing field with a nonfiction book. Why?

A nonfiction book is easier to write, and it's easier to sell both to a publisher and to readers. It doesn't have to be a huge tome. Produce a simple booklet featuring something you know well: a children's guide to recognizing constellations, 100 things you can fix with fishing line, what to do when you find an injured bird, a knitting guide for youngsters, tips for writing love notes, or the history of your local Independence Day celebration, for example.

Whatever your genre or topic, in order to obtain some level of success, you must enter into the project with ample knowledge and appropriate expectations.

Julie began writing for relaxation while working in the corporate offices of a banking company. She enjoyed writing so much that she decided to quit her job and write full time. It wasn't hard for Julie to choose her topic—she writes suspense novels related to the banking industry.

Sometimes the topic chooses the author, as was the case with Cindy. Her book captures her experiences as an island dweller living in a sub-standard cabin in a remote area with an array of animals (only some of them domesticated). Cindy wanted to share her unusual experiences with others. She told me, "I was bubbling over with this story. It became terribly important to me to share the lessons I learned as well as to entertain, enlighten, and inspire anyone who might venture to *drop out* as I did."

Get in Touch With Your Unrealistic Expectations

Most authors have an ideal or a standard by which they measure success. For some, success means becoming a published author. For others, they haven't succeeded until they've sold 100,000 copies of their books. I'm sure that some of us are never satisfied with what we achieve. The more we obtain, the more we desire. Isn't that what goal-setting is all about? Set a goal. Reach the goal. Raise the bar. It works for me.

The Author's Guild has determined that a fiction book is successful if it sells 5,000 copies and a successful nonfiction book sells 7,500 copies.

Publishing isn't necessarily a money-making venture. If you self-publish a book that sells 5,000 copies, you might realize \$25,000 to \$75,000 in profits. If you published that book through a pay-to-publish company, you could earn anywhere from \$5,000 to \$10,000. And if you had collected royalties on that book, your earnings might be just \$5,000 to \$20,000. Keep in mind that sales could spread out over a five or ten year period.

Embracing unrealistic expectations generally results in an unsuccessful and very disappointed author.

How does a hopeful author establish realistic expectations? By understanding something about the publishing industry. This is not to say that I (or any other professional) can teach you how to predict which book ideas will pay off in big bucks and which ones won't. Even the most experienced publishers sometimes miss the mark. But at least they make educated decisions. They're not apt to lead with their emotions (as an author will often do). Understanding the possibilities will give you enough wiggle room to help keep your expectations well within the realm of reality.

A book of poetry, for example, is extremely difficult to sell. If you want to share your poetry for the pure joy of sharing, that's okay. Just understand that this will be more a labor of love than a commercial venture through which you will receive enough royalties to retire on next year.

Having said that, I'd like to recommend two books designed to help poets sell their work: *Poet Power, The Complete Guide to Getting Your Poetry Published* by Thomas A. Williams, (Sentient Publications, 2002) and *How to Make a Living As a Poet* by Gary Mex Glazner (Soft Skull Press, 2005).

The author of a children's book said to me once, "The experience of publishing fell far short of what I initially thought it would be, and that was largely due to my unrealistic expectations and perceptions about publishing. Marketing is so far removed from the experience of writing that it is like this constant stranger who speaks a different language with which I am neither equipped to nor have the desire to understand. Had anyone explained to me the ins and outs—the ups and downs—of marketing, I'm not sure I would have ever published."

Too many authors fail solely because they give up. Authorship is not designed to be a hobby. It isn't something that you can successfully manage as an afterthought. It demands your full attention. Your future in writing and publishing is almost completely up to you. If you do the necessary research and work, if you approach authorship as the business that it is, and if you exercise persistence, perseverance, and patience while maintaining realistic expectations, you will experience success.