

The Real Value of Publishing a Book

by Charlotte Cutter

Most of us can't help but wonder what it's like to publish a book. When we meet someone who has published, there's an aura about them, an admiration for having taken the time to write (much less publish!) an entire book. The questions are unavoidable: What does it take to publish a book? How can you find a publisher, or an agent? Should you publish a book yourself? It's a mysterious process, yet decidedly worthwhile in the end because publishing a book can bring about numerous business opportunities difficult to obtain any other way.

For one thing, having a published book validates the author as a true expert. "Very few individuals have ever written and published a book," explains Robert Simpkins, author of two books including the forthcoming *Strategic Planning: Creating an Integrated and Actionable Strategic Plan* (HRD Press 2008). "It is considered a fantastic achievement by everyone else."

As a result, there's a timeless esteem for someone who has done it. It may seem easier to simply release articles on the Internet, but nothing can top the respect for a physical and published book. In fact, the Internet can at times feel a bit like the "Wild West, where just about anything goes," says Drew Yanno, author, screenwriter and screenwriting professor at Boston College. Published books instead have an air of reliability. Plus, nothing can replace the physical charm of an actual book.

Yanno's new book in fact exemplifies a second opportunity available to book authors, i.e., that some books can make their authors experts on a whole new level by exploring a subject no book has previously explored. Yanno's *The Third Act – Writing a Great Ending to Your Screenplay* (Continuum Books 2006) focuses on how to compose the final act of a screenplay, a screenwriting skill that has never been explored before in a book, at least not in any depth. As a result, Yanno is now perceived as a pioneer on this subject, stretching beyond what previous authors of screenwriting books had offered up to now.

Jim Masciarelli, author of *PowerSkills: Building Top Level Relationships for Bottom Line Results* (Nimbus Press), recalls experiencing a similar benefit following publication of his book: "I was one of the first to write about relationship capital and now the topic is ubiquitous," he says. "I was thus fortunate enough to be one of a very few creating the wave which our company is now riding." Masciarelli exemplifies the author who actually effects change just by publishing his ideas, thereby authenticating them and giving his readers a reason to take action.

Should you decide to commit yourself to writing a book, how can you know what to write and get the process started? There are many ways, but for some

business authors, the perfect idea may come to them all of a sudden. For instance, after toying with the idea of writing a book for a few years, Vicki Donlan, author of *Her Turn: Why It's Time for Women to Lead in America* (Praeger Press) remembers that “the topic (finally) hit me and from that point on I couldn't *not* write a book.” Other authors plan out their topics, based on the marketplace expert they wish to become. Still others get the idea given to them, a suggestion from a friend or colleague.

However it happens, once it does, most authors become passionate advocates of their topics, the finished book providing “space to delve deeply into the issues and explain the way I see the problem and outline my thoughts on solutions,” explains Frank Hone, author of the forthcoming *Why Healthcare Matters: An Employer's Guide to New Strategies for Competitive Advantage* (HRD Press 2008). In contrast to a mere article, a book creates a permanent source of valuable detailed information, serving up a level of knowledge difficult to put forth in any other format.

Once your book focus is settled upon, you're not done yet. If you choose to work with a publisher, you must seek out an agent first and then structure a book proposal. This introduces the matter of feedback, or, as it's more commonly called in book circles, “constructive criticism.”

“Going from an idea for a book to published output involves a highly disciplined process, which many prospective authors may not appreciate,” admits Hone, explaining that the task of doing even a shorter book proposal demands much time, effort, and dedication. In this process, you must be willing to take whatever criticism comes your way as well as be able to revise.

Laura Leist, author of *Eliminate Chaos: The 10 Step Process to Organize Your Home and Life* (Sasquatch Books 2006), explains further: “When I first submitted my book, I was told to “keep writing' even though my publisher ended up cutting all of that last material.” Criticism, however, can be invaluable: Reflects Jim Masciarelli: “Positive reviews and thoughtful negative comments are very validating in that you have broadened other peoples' thinking as well as your own.” This ability of a book to broaden even its author's perspective strikes most authors as another of the many worthwhile personal benefits that publishing permits them to take home.

Once your book is finally published, you have yet another hurdle to face. Even with a publisher, authors are primarily responsible for promoting and selling their book. Most authors have a rude awakening when they find that their publisher does much less promoting of their book than had originally hoped for or expected. One reason a publisher will not be overly aggressive has to do with a lack of deep understanding of the book's targeted market. Cautions Robert Simpkins: “Always remember that *you* know your audience better than anyone

else.” Thus promoting your own book will give your book sales the best chance of reaching high numbers.

But don't expect your book to earn you recognition where none has existed before, warns Michael Shenkman, author of *The Arch and the Path: Leading Life Greatly* (Sandia Heights Media) and two previous books. “A book can multiply or amplify existing recognition, but not create it,” he insists. “Your book may add to your appeal but you must use it to underline the authority you already have.”

John McQuaig, author of *Parallel Peaks: Business Insights While Climbing the World's Highest Mountains* (HRD Press) agrees, saying, “Your book is only a ‘support mechanism’ for recognition. You still have to have an interesting and compelling story when they look behind the cover!” Along with the knowledge and expertise that enabled you to write an entire book, it's crucial to promote and emphasize its exceptionalism (and thus your business's value proposition) in addition to your qualifications for writing it. Translation: You will be recognized more widely in direct proportion to how hard and how well you yourself go out there and make your book known.

Finally, in addition to attracting readers and attaining new respect for its author, your book can open the door to numerous new business prospects. Suzanne Bates, author of *Speak Like a CEO: Secrets for Commanding Attention and Getting Results* (McGraw-Hill), suggests giving away your book (for free!) to prospective clients, i.e., using it as a very impressive marketing tool. “No matter how it sells,” Bates explains, “the real value of a book is in all the business it can generate.” The mere fact of your authenticated expert status will motivate organizations and individuals to seek out what you have to offer.

For business authors, then, the best reason to publish a book is not necessarily the revenue that book sales can provide. Instead, priceless opportunities will burst forth for the promotion, credibility and recognition of the author's business itself. A published book will allow one to increase overall business and annual revenues dramatically, pushing the author's company far ahead of its competition.

For those authors who continue actively leveraging their book as a sales/marketing tool year after year, and publish even more books in the future, their business's success will keep climbing upward, as the old days of struggle fall away, never to be seen again.

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