

Writing Your Book is Just the Beginning

By Dan Poynter

One of the greatest misconceptions harbored by writers is that the job is done when the book manuscript is mailed. While manuscript completion is a time to celebrate, it is also the time to switch hats. The book *writer* now becomes the book *promoter*.

A book is like an iceberg. The writing is the easier part; the 20% visible about the waterline. The promoting is the most important part and usually consumes even more time and money. The promoting is also often the part not anticipated by the author.

Bringing a book into the world is like bringing a child into the world—you are presented with an obligation to raise it. Now, fortunately, the obligation to your book is not a 20-year commitment and you do not have to send the book to college. But, you do have to let people know that you have books in your garage—or they will remain in your garage.

Any fool can write a book, it takes a genius to sell one. –Anon

As the author of the book, you have few choices. You are responsible for the promotion whether you self-publish or sell out to a publisher. If you abdicate your promotion responsibilities, your book will become an orphan. Yes, if the book is to be successful, the promotion is up to you.

Each book goes through four distinct stages. The author's responsibilities are to create the manuscript and promote the book. The publisher has the book manufactured then distributes it to the Book Trade (wholesalers, bookstores and sometimes libraries).

Publishers do not promote books; they do little more than list your title in the catalog. Ask any author who has been published by a publisher and her or she will probably complain "they didn't do anything!"

The Four Stages of a Book

Stage:	Writing	Producing/Distributing	Promoting
Responsibility:	Author	Publisher	Author
Subcontract:		Printer/Distributor	

By now, you are wondering why you need the services of a publisher. You really don't. You can deal with one of the twelve digital book printers or the 42 offset book printers across North America. They will print and bind your book. These book printers specialize in manufacturing books. They will provide price, service and quality because they know what a book is supposed to look like. Any printer can produce a book, one way or another, but book printers specialize. They manufacture books only.

Next, you can use one of the 85 book distributors to get your book into the Book Trade. They will serve the book wholesalers such as Ingram and Baker & Taylor, the chain stores such as Borders and Barnes & Noble, the online stores such as Amazon.com and B&N.com and lots of independent book stores. The five larger publishers have sales reps to take their books to the stores. Many of the 55,000 smaller publishers use distributors with sales reps to take their books to the stores.

There isn't any reason why you can't shepherd your book through all four stages yourself. With help from a book manufacturer, your book will look the same as others in the bookstore. Your distributor will get your book into the bookstores. So the playing field is level. In fact it is now less expensive to print and bind your book and is easier to get into stores because the larger publishers have cut back on their output. Paper prices are down and the stores have more shelf space waiting for your book.

By now you are probably wondering whether the well-known celebrity authors have to promote their own work. The ability to promote is one of the criteria a publisher assesses when considering a submission. Publishers want mediagenic authors.

For example, Frank McCourt, (*Angela's Ashes, Tis, Brotherhood*) says he spends six months of each year on the road. By the way, he is very entertaining so try to catch his act.

Most people being interviewed on radio and television are recently-published authors. And, why not? They are celebrities and are experts on their subjects. People find authors fascinating.

You should devote a minimum of one year to the distribution and promotion of your first book to make sure it gets its fair share of your time and energy. Too often, an author will write a book, have it printed, start on the distribution and then get distracted with the writing of another book. The first book then becomes an orphan and it does not get into the hands of the willing, potential buyers.

Every one of your books will provide a learning experience in each the four stages. The second time around will be easier and the third time easier still. So you may put just nine months between books two and three, and six months between books three and four, and so on.

The secret to successful publishing is not to produce more books but to effectively market those books already published.

Writing the book is the easy part of the process. As the author (and the parent) of your book, you have an obligation to provide it with the best opportunity for growth. You must do more than just write the book. Look under the water.

Dan Poynter, the Voice of Self-Publishing, has written more than 100 books since 1969 including “Writing Nonfiction” and “The Self-Publishing Manual.” Dan is a past vice –president of the Publishers Marketing Association. For more help on book publishing and promoting, see <http://ParaPub.com>.