

So, you want to write a book?

FREE INSPIRATION

FROM

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SUMMERTIME PUBLISHING SERVICES

Publish to impress

I can recall, to this day, the thrill I felt when my first book was published back in 1985. Since then nothing else has compared to that moment. And now with almost 20 books in print and countless hundreds of articles published, I have become quite blasé about my books. But nothing will ever make me undervalue their effect on me, on my life, on my reputation, my career and my self-confidence.

You may be passionate, experienced or learned in a particular area, but until you have published a book, you will not feel that your work has proved its value. Instinctively, most of us do not want to keep our knowledge to ourselves. We want to tell the world, we want other people to be able to share what we know. We want to see our thoughts and ideas on the printed page, and better still, on the shelves of a bookshop.

My first book was a cookery book, entitled *French Tarts*. I was not an experienced cook, but I had conceived an original idea and a catchy title. The first publisher I approached agreed to publish it. All I had included, in my original communication with the publisher, Octopus, was a one page letter outlining my idea. I did not let on that I had never had an article, let alone a book published before. Once they had communicated their interest, my next step was to submit a contents list and three sample recipes. And within a few weeks I had

a contract. Only the contract obliged me to sell the outright copyright for the book and, being a novice, I was too keen to be published and did not much care that I had relinquished future rights. When the book was later reprinted in Australia, translated into French and sold in France, I kicked myself.

Along the way I have learned so much about being published by other publishers. I saw many of my computer handbooks being published by giants such as Macmillan and McGraw-Hill. I sold a book called *How to Get There From Gatwick* to British Caledonian airlines (now British Airways). I wrote and published in-house manuals and then, in 1995 started to publish my own books under my own imprint Summertime Publishing. *A Career in Your Suitcase 2*, is my fourth title, but there is also a cookery book, entitled *Dates*, on my list.

It's funny, that even though I have no cookery qualifications, people believe that I can cook, simply because I have written two books on the subject. I even persuaded a Norfolk pub to let me run a French restaurant for them one summer, because I was 'thinking of writing a book'. I was 21 years old. I created a number of successful businesses in computer training and people signed up because they knew I was a published computer author. And now I also speak about portable careers, and my books stand as proof that I am an expert.

Nothing has helped my businesses more than being able to show potential clients that I have already been published on the subject. And now that I publish my own titles, the fact that no third party publisher had chosen to invest in my work, and that I had produced them myself, has not lessened their impact.

No matter what business you may be involved with, there is little doubt that you would benefit from having some of your work in print. Find an outlet for an article you can write, even if you are not paid for it, and immediately, you will increase your kudos. People are impressed when you are in print.

I have been teaching writing skills for years and have helped countless expatriates to start a new career as a journalist, writing about the things they know, the people they have met and the places they have lived. Then, over the last year or so I have found that

people have been approaching me for help regarding publishing complete books. I helped Robin Pascoe to edit her great book on repatriation, entitled *Homeward Bound*. I helped Maria Paviour work on first a novel about energy vampires, and then, later wrote the foreword for *Changing Vampires into Angels*, which she has now been published. I have helped Huw Francis with his book on the trailing male. And now I help a range of speakers, presenters, coaches and professionals to turn their ideas into words that sell too.

Speakers realise the value of being published. They benefit from the passive sales, that occur at the end of every presentation too, and increase their earnings as a result. When you are published people believe that your presentation will have added value. And at the same time, when you give a great presentation, people believe that your book will be exceptional too.

I find that I sell books to between 25 and 75 per cent of the audience each time I speak. Other presenters report the same figures. No speaker should be without a book or other item, such as an audio tape or CD, to sell at the back of the room, when the presentation is over.

But you do not need to be a presenter to benefit from publishing a book. Sue Valentine, helped me to produce the date book. As a food scientist, her interest and involvement has increased her potential in product development and consultancy. It also led to her being given a monthly cookery column in her local magazine. Beth Koestal is an artist, but she has produced a simple booklet about how to tie and wear a scarf to endorse the work she does as a Wardrobe Witch.

You do not need to produce a 100,000 word manuscript to be published. Think about producing a product that will endorse and enhance your business. A product that will stand as proof of your expertise and make you a useful profit at the same time.

Let's look at the fundamentals

What makes a writer?

A writer must be a reader. You can only write what you like to read yourself.

A writer must write. A writer must feel at home with a pen or keyboard and be able to keep his fingers going at a speed that matches his thoughts. A writer may write poetry, prose, copy, keep a diary, write stories, fact or fiction, but he must write.

A writer must have a passion for his subject. Passion shows through and allows writing be the transference of energy. Without an enthusiasm and understanding of the subject your work will not be able to come alive.

A writer must have humility. He must welcome and accept criticism. The best way to learn is through our mistakes. It is rare that an editor will not want to make changes, often they will be devastating. A writer must be prepared to accept this.

A writer must be patient. It can take weeks for an editor to reply to a submission. It can take months for a publisher to respond. It takes at least 18 months for a publisher to take a book from first draft to bookshelf. Sometimes it can take years to be accepted. A writer must not need the money. Only bestsellers make real money.

A writer must love words and enjoy expressing them. A writer should be able to *show*, rather than *tell*. Ideally, he, or she, should be like a tourist in their own town and be able to retain objectivity and fresh eyes when describing people, places or events.

So, why do you want to write a book?

Do you want money, fame or reputation? Do you have something you are burning to share? Do you have a great idea and the perfect target market? Do you want to create passive, back of the room sales for your business? Do you just want to leave a legacy? It is important

that you recognise your reasons for writing a book right from the start.

What does being published mean?

Watch out? Some publishers pay an advance in three stages and then royalties of 7% of net receipts. But, thanks to the net book agreement, this means your book can be sold for less than you expect. Did you know that Amazon.com take 55% commission on each sale and you pay to post your book to them? In some cases this is a good deal. Book clubs and mail order firms sometimes take 75% commission.

If you self-publishing then you will be able to sell your books and reap up to 100% of the profits. Printing is cheaper than you think and the unit cost gets progressively cheaper the more you print. If you know your market and can target it well, then this can be the most lucrative option. We sold 4,500 copies of *Dates* in Oman alone in the first year. But remember, self-publishing means you have to do the marketing, distribution, publicity, invoicing, purchasing of Jiffy bags and the sticking on of stamps. Still, all you need to do is purchase a batch of ISBN numbers from Whitaker in Guildford for a few quid and organise a bar code, which costs about a tenner, and you are off.

Some self-publishers are now exploring print on demand. This method means that an online publisher will take, and often design, your book for a fee that can be as little as \$159. The POD publisher puts his own imprint name on your book rather than your publishing company, registers it with online bookstores, does the distribution, printing and all administration and simply pays you a percentage for each book sold. Some POD companies give 20% royalty, others give up to 60% so it pays to shop around.

An ebook, of course means you have no printing costs and all your distribution is done online. All you need to do is write your book and convert it into PDF format and you are ready to go. Proper software that allows your book to be read online only and can simulate page turning, costs much more. I notice that ebooks can be as short as 10 pages, or as long as 250. More even. For many, this is a good option.

Do not, however, consider vanity publishing. If you bear in mind that the RRP of a book should be about five times the unit cost of printing it, then beware of any 'publisher' who accepts your manuscript and charges you more than a fifth of the RRP for each book he prints. If he does, he is a vanity publisher.

First steps to stardom

Forget creativity, the best books are written to a formula. So your best bet is to mind map your book, then create an outline before you start writing. Do all your research beforehand too. Inspire your vision by looking at other books. And read like crazy.

Forget writing the whole book and then submitting it to a publisher – a synopsis will do. If you can't write a synopsis you can't write a book. A synopsis consists of a cover letter, your book's contents list, introduction and a sample chapter or two. You can also increase your chances of selection by adding a marketing summary, or overview which evaluates and describes your market and the competition.

And don't try to do it alone. You need support, advice and critique. If your friends love your book, but your acquaintances hate it, consider whether you have a winner or not. Is it really helpful, when your mother reads your book and says 'that's nice, dear'?

Further Information

Try these books

The Artist's Way
Julia Cameron
Pan Macmillan

Writing Down the Bones
Natalie Goldberg
Shambala

The Writers and Artists Yearbook
A&C Black

The Writer's Handbook
Barry Turner
Macmillan

How to Write and Sell a Synopsis
Stella Whitelaw

Becoming a Writer
Dorothea Brande

Resources

There are many websites that are bursting with free information. Lots of them will give you free ebooks or free newsletters. Here are just a few:

Writing World
www.writing-world.com

Absolute Write
www.absolutewrite.com

Writers Weekly
www.Writersweekly.com

SPAN

www.spannet.org

Writers Digest

www.writersdigest.com

Courses

<http://www.digital-e.biz/freecourses.html>

www.teleclass.com

www.wirting-wrorld.com

electronic newsletter subscriptions

Your EveryDay Write

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www.albooktross.com

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www.amazon.co.uk

Print on demand sites

www.iuniverse.com

www.trafford.com

www.firstbooks.com

www.xlibris.com

Articles online

Do You Really Need an Agent?

<http://www.fictionfactor.com/articles/agent.html>

How to Write a Computer Book Proposal

<http://www.adlerbooks.com/howto.html>

Publisher's guide to doing business with Amazon

www.julieduffy.com/writing/amazon_a.htm

How to publish –a guide to finding your market

www.pw.org/info1.htm

Ebook Starter Kit

<http://hop.clickbank.net/?absolutewr/wsnet>

Basic Book Marketing Planning Form

<http://www.bob-erdmann.com/MarketingPlanning.pdf>

Beat writers' block

<http://www.digital-e.biz/newsletter.html>

What is a Manuscript Evaluation Service and Why in the World Would You Need One?

<http://www.booktalk.com/agentstopic6.html>

Rejections (listed by publication)

<http://www.debcentral.com/rejections.html>

This free ebook comes to you from Jo Parfitt. Publishing consultant, author, journalist, writer and teacher.

Her courses **Release the Book Within** and **Definite Articles** are run all over the world and by correspondence. For more information please go to <http://www.career-in-your-suitcase.com/summertime.htm>

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