

HOW TO WRITE AND PUBLISH A MARKETABLE BOOK

**A supplement to Grassroots Marketing for Authors and
Publishers—Especially for Self-Publishers and Small
Presses**

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Chapter 1: Determine Your Audience, Find Your Market

- *How to figure out who needs your book*
- *Where to locate these people and how to market to them*
- *Special considerations for fiction and poetry*
- *Pricing your book for your market*

Note to authors with a traditional publisher: This e-book is primarily for publishers and self-publishers. I recognize that authors publishing with a traditional house, you have little or no control over your publishing technology, title, and cover. However, you probably will have input, and these chapters will prepare you to argue intelligently for changes that can make a real difference in your book's sales performance. Also, this e-book can help you provide a winning title not only for a finished book but also at the proposal stage. Whether or not it is the final published title, a strong title on the proposal dramatically increases your odds.

Is There a Market?

Most books fail. I wrote *Grassroots Marketing for Authors and Publishers* and this supplement to help your book succeed.

For every smash runaway hit, thousands of books arrive at the marketplace filled with the hopes and dreams of their authors and publishers—only to fall flat.

Why? Because their authors go about things backwards.

For most of this section, I'm talking primarily about nonfiction. Those who write to satisfy a creative muse still need to market, and there's a section of this chapter just for you. But the kind of market analysis I'm suggesting is not about following your muse; it's about finding people who will pay you for the expertise you've acquired, and for your skill in conveying it through the written word.

I believe very strongly that great literature, created for the sheer joy (or maybe the sheer sweat), is a crucial part of the culture, and nothing I say below is intended to disparage that in any way. You folks, you novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and poets, can skip directly to the section entitled "Special Considerations for Fiction and Poetry."

But for the nonfiction writers...

What is the Market Looking For?

So many authors go and write a book, and then try to figure out who might buy it. It's the "easy," obvious way; I've done it myself. But it's a lot harder that way!

It's much better to figure out what the market wants and then give it to them.

Traditional nonfiction publishers understand this; they generally want to see a book proposal (including an outline, market analysis, and a couple of sample chapters), rather than the whole manuscript. Then, once an agent sells the proposal, the author and editor shape the book together. The author writes the book that the editor wants to buy, which may or may not be what the author originally wanted to write.

If you're creating a nonfiction book that you'll publish yourself, or that someone else will publish but you'll have to market, it works the same way. Let your market influence the way you write your book.

The good news: it's never been easier to actually find out what a market is willing to pay for.

The Internet is packed with easy ways to find and survey an audience: forums, discussion groups, blogs, surveys, and feedback forms make it ridiculously easy to discover what people think they want, usually with little or no expenditure—so you can get real-world data on what people will actually purchase. Pay-per-click advertising, teleseminars, ask-me websites, and other tools help you understand what will cause your prospects to open up their wallets. (We'll talk more about some of these tools in the Internet chapters.)

The content of this book is quite different from my original vision—because I asked readers of three discussion lists and two newsletters what they'd look for in a book on marketing for authors and publishers. For instance, a number of people wanted to know specifically about distribution. Since most of my emphasis for my own titles is on selling through non-bookstore channels, I might not have covered that in very much detail. But I asked, and I shifted the focus to cover that subject adequately.

You can start asking by playing on Google for detailed, specific phrases. For a book on pet care, you might search for word strings like [iguana indoor climate], or phrases like "sick iguana"; for a book on accounting, search for a phrase like "debit analysis." When you follow these links, sign up for newsletters or discussion groups, read archives, and begin to learn what your market wants to know.

How Can You Give it to Them?

As the author, it's your job to distill the best information on your subject, and express it clearly and accessibly for the audience you've identified. Then your website and other marketing materials provide clues that the information is worthwhile, and if the gods are smiling on you, you make the sale.

Successful authors over-research their subject, so they can pick and choose the best ideas. It's not your job to share absolutely everything you know, but to sift through the vast amount of information and present things so they're easy to understand and have some sort of progression.

And keep in mind that a book is only one among many ways to do this. Offering the information through multiple channels may significantly increase your profitability, without necessarily adding much to your workload. See Chapter 17 of *Grassroots Marketing for Authors and Publishers* for a long list of other possibilities.

Of course, there are plenty of reasons to offer a traditional, printed book. To name a few:

- A published book establishes you instantly as a credentialed expert—the one who wrote the book on it. This is especially true if you're published by a recognized house—but holds on a self-published book with design and production values as good as a major house's products. Subsidy-published books will impress people in

most market sectors, but not those whose industry is publishing-related.

- Books are an entry-level info product that allow people to take a chance on you inexpensively, and if they like what they get, you can transition them easily to much more lucrative products. This is one of the secrets of info-marketing geniuses like Dan Kennedy, Joe Vitale, and Jay Abraham, all of whom sell inexpensive books along with their multi-hundred-dollar info products and multi-thousand-dollar seminars and bootcamps.
- Books open access to markets you wouldn't reach otherwise, including bookstores and libraries, and perhaps universities.
- Books can help you get hired as a speaker—and to substantially increase your compensation for the talk, either by selling copies afterwards or—even better—by arranging with the meeting planner to buy a copy for each attendee.
- Books can be used to drive traffic to the web for updates, to gather addresses for mailing lists, and to sell other books and products directly.

Many people use their books to increase their status in a different marketplace. Consultants and speakers of many stripes seek the automatic expert status you get as the author of a book, and leverage that to get gigs, media coverage, and other benefits.

For example, here's Yvonne Phillips, Feng Shui consultant, landscaper, and author of *Feng Shui ABC* <<http://www.Fengshuipublications.com>>:

Since I am really selling my consulting business and not really the book, I wanted to do it to help me establish my credibility...I got trained by a local conservatory as a Master Gardener. I got free publicity from them and an opportunity to teach a class—and I sold many books to them as well.

Competitive Analysis: Who Else is Out There?

Before rushing to print, you need to not only know the market, but also know who else is writing to that audience. You want to know how your book is different—what new and fresh and different slant it offers—and how you will penetrate that market.

For a bookstore book, you'll also need to know the "sweet spot" for pricing. Price tends to be a factor in the bookstores far more than other channels, because your title is shelved right next to a bunch of other ones on the same topic. Bookstore browsers will compare pricing, number of pages, visual appeal (perhaps not consciously, but it will be a consideration), relevance to their needs, and other factors. They may also look through the index, the Table of Contents, a few random chapters.

If you're planning to publish traditionally, this market analysis should be included prominently in your book proposal. Here's my analysis of one of the ten competing books I list in my successful proposal for *Marketing Without Megabucks: How to Sell Anything on a Shoestring*, which was published by Simon & Schuster (this was well before Amazon.com; these days I'd probably examine at least 20 books, all with copyrights within the last few years):

Kuswa, Webster. *Big Paybacks From Small-Budget Advertising* (Dartnell, (year). \$99.00) His definition of small-budget is \$50,000-\$1,000,000; MWM focuses on \$0-100,000. A good book but not applicable to my audience. Also, he glosses over low-cost/no-cost, ignores classified ads, uses 30-year old examples. Book is wildly overpriced.

Do this market analysis no matter what publishing model you use. The needs and desires you address in your book should overlap with what's already out there, because you want to know that a market has been established and that you can reach it. But you also want to be different enough to convince people they need your book as well as the others. This means you have to understand what makes yours unique, and use this information as you craft every single marketing piece.

Special Considerations for Fiction and Poetry

Creative writing is different; you're writing to move people, or to entertain them, rather than to inform. So the question of whether an audience exists may be a bit harder to determine. You can't pigeonhole a work like *The Time Traveler's Wife*, and you can't really predict if there's an audience for it. But you can definitely do some market testing. Set up readings, publish shorter work in magazines and on websites (including your own), and do what you can to measure audience reaction. On websites, offer a brief survey and request permission to quote the response; this way, you can start building testimonials—among the most powerful book promotion tools in existence.

Also, almost every book of fiction or poetry has some "hooks" that you can use to market similarly to nonfiction. A few among many examples:

- *Setting*. If the book has scenes in New York City, rural Wyoming, and the Florida Keys, all of those locations can be pitched with a local angle for media interviews and personal appearances.
- *Author's present and past places of residence*. When you send out a press release with "Former Area Resident" or, better still, "Local Author" in the headline, it's automatically going to get a second look. And the more geographically defined a publication or broadcast station is, the more it matters how tightly you draw the ring. For instance, "Massachusetts Author" would work well in approaching the Boston Globe, a state-wide paper—but that would be useless in approaching my daily papers, the Daily Hampshire Gazette of Northampton, MA, and the Republican of Springfield, MA. But a headline including "Hadley Author" would make those two papers notice, whereas a staffer on the Globe might not even know Hadley is part of Massachusetts.
- *Schools the author attended* (most of which will be glad to feature the title in their alumni magazines)—and also, schools the characters attend.
- *Ethnic and subculture heritage, hobbies and interests* of both the author and the characters. This would include ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, etc., as well as interests such as model railroading or antiquing that involve either the author or one of the characters. I know a woman who wrote a novel whose main character is the

straight wife of a gay man. She was a constant guest on talk shows, talking as an expert about straight spouses.

- *Topical or historical tie-ins.* If your book involves questions of politics, philosophy, human relationships, prejudice, historical events...(that list could go on for quite a while), you have “hooks.” Go and exploit them.

Poetry is a hard sell through bookstores. Even most of the best-known poets make a big chunk of their livelihood teaching, speaking, and giving readings—not on bookstore sales. The unfortunate reality is that there are an awful lot of people out there writing poetry, and even most of them don't buy very much. If I were marketing poetry, I'd print in small quantities and sell primarily through personal appearances. I'd read at every local open poetry reading, do public performances in the park, and once I had a reputation, approach colleges and arts organizations to sponsor me for larger readings.

Work the Numbers, Set Your Price

If you have a publisher, skip this section—but if you're publishing on your own and plan to sell in bookstores or online, read it carefully. (Non-bookstore channels such as direct-mail and selling at author events are far less-price-sensitive.)

One final consideration in determining your market: What is the right price for your book? You need a price that is neither too high nor too low for your market, but also one that allows you to make a decent profit. And that depends to a large degree on the prices of other books next to yours on the shelf.

There are no hard and fast rules for this. If most of the popular books in the category are between \$15 and \$20 and you come in at \$25 or more, you'll lose sales unless you have a way to justify the higher price in the reader's mind (examples: many more pages, a famous author, exclusive information). But a book under \$10 or \$12 would probably also lose sales in this category, because it would face a perception that it wasn't as informative or useful.

Of course, the numbers have to work. Subtracting all the costs of editorial, design, production, and expected returns, you should still be able to make a profit. In publishing, people like to say you should charge 8 times your production cost—but that doesn't factor in the market's willingness to pay. 8x production cost may be a workable formula for working with wholesalers and distributors, but it could price your book far too high or too low.

I published one book, *The Penny-Pinching Hedonist: How to Live Like Royalty with a Peasant's Pocketbook*, that was overpriced at \$17.00 for 280 information-crammed pages—but it was in the frugality market, where the best price turns out to be under \$10. If I had priced according to the 8x rule, that would have resulted in the ridiculous and totally unmarketable price of over \$20—in a market that didn't want to pay even \$17. Ever since I finally sold out the print run and converted it to an e-book, it has sold steadily at \$8.50—even though the cost to the reader of printing out 280 pages is substantial, a printout is far more awkward to store or use than a bound book, and the information is pretty old by now.

But I have another book, for the business market, that's only 160 pages and costs \$17.50. I got that figure after figuring out my costs and knowing the

minimum I needed to charge (around \$9)—but then going to bookstores and researching the price to similar titles. They ranged from \$15 to \$25, but most of those at the higher end were either hardback editions, or written by extremely famous authors, or both. I am not nearly as well known as, say, Ken Blanchard, so if my book were shelved next to his, it wouldn't hurt to have some price advantage.

Despite this research, I've been told by several book-industry professionals that the price is too high for the impulse market in bookstores. I don't think that's true, but bookstores are not my primary market.

For this book, *Principled Profit: Marketing That Puts People First*, I probably could have charged \$19.95. Bookstores don't want the book anyway, but it has happened over and over again that people have actually grabbed it out of my hand and pulled out their wallets. Often they hand me a \$20 bill and tell me they've got to have the book and not to worry about the change.

Too low a price can be a problem as well. I think even though the unit costs would allow me to make a profit at \$9 a copy, I would start to lose sales if the list price were \$12 or under. Similar books are not priced that low, and it could create a perception that this book has little value. I have heard stories of publishers whose books limped along, and then they added several dollars to the price and the title started moving briskly.

There are exceptions. My friends Jeff and Bryan Eisenberg, of Future Now, Inc. <<http://www.futurenowinc.com>> produced an elegant clothbound (hardback) book called *Call to Action*, with 313 oversize pages—and sold bucketloads of them for the absurdly low price of \$13. But their situation was unique for a number of reasons. The Eisenbergs:

- Are the leading voices in their field (website conversion of visitors to buyers), and have an intensely loyal following.
- Are extremely well-networked, with all kinds of strategic alliances with various powerful movers and shakers, all of whom were happy to promote their book as a great value.
- Made a tactical decision that they wanted to be best-selling authors and did not want price to be a barrier.
- Expect that the book will lead to dozens if not hundreds of consulting clients, who will more than make up for the revenues they've left on the table by underpricing.
- Actually used the low price as a marketing point to establish value, pointing out that it had been decades since a serious hardcover business book had been available at that price.

Dave Marx, travel guidebook publisher of PassPorter Press <<http://www.passporter.com>>, found that in his case, raising the price added to profits and didn't hurt sales:

We thought there was a \$20 barrier, above which there would be substantially greater purchaser resistance. Hence, the first couple of editions of *PassPorter Walt Disney World* were priced at \$19.95...I don't recall seeing one complaint about our price increase to \$21.95. Besides, at either SRP [Suggested Retail Price], a 15% discount drops the price below \$20 (Amazon, our online store, etc.)

My friends and colleagues Marion Gropen <<http://www.GropenAssoc.com>> and Brian Jud <[http://www.bookmarketingworks.com/news_copy\(1\).htm](http://www.bookmarketingworks.com/news_copy(1).htm)> offer some handy spreadsheets and guidelines for price-setting.

Chapter 2: Which Technology Should You Use?

- *Pluses and minuses of traditional offset, P-O-D (Print-On-Demand), e-books*

Your book will usually go into production with one or more of these options: offset printing for quantities of 500 and above, print-on-demand (P-O-D) for quantities up to about 1000 (do not confuse P-O-D *printers* with the so-called P-O-D *publishers*—subsidy houses who use P-O-D technology), e-books, and/or audiobooks. While other options exist, very few of you will be using technologies such as letterpress. The nice thing: these four technologies are not exclusive. I'll explain these options in more detail in a moment.

For offset, P-O-D, and e-books, the process starts with creation of a PDF file: a document created in Adobe Acrobat that contains all your book's formatting and fonts, looks the same on any computer, and is used by any printer to create the final output. PDF files provide the best results when created by a skilled designer using page layout software (*not* a word processor), who knows exactly how to prepare the file to meet your printer's technical requirements.

Thus, you can easily mix and match the technologies to get the perfect fit for your book. For instance, you might create a single PDF and use it to generate advance galleys using print-on-demand, sell the PDF directly as an e-book with hyperlinks enabled, use it as the master for an offset run of several thousand, and then go back to P-O-D to fill small orders at the end of the book's lifespan.

Fern Reiss points out that you can even use P-O-D printing to test the most salable version of your product (e.g., put out the same book with two different titles or covers) and then go to offset once you've settled on the most marketable version. (You can test with e-books too, of course, but the audience is somewhat different and thus the results will be less accurate.)

If you do this, set up your order form so that if someone tries to order both, the buyer sees a message explaining that it's the same book with different titles. Otherwise, you'll face disgruntled customers and a lot of unnecessary returns.

Offset

Because much of the cost involves set-up, the more you print, the less you pay per copy. For quantities above 500 or 1000, it usually makes sense to use a book-printing specialist with offset equipment. A book that costs \$4 a copy in a P-O-D run might cost \$2.75 each for 1000 copies and \$1.10 each for 5000 (these are arbitrary numbers, but based on recent research). However, don't get suckered in by the discounts. Start with smallish runs, and get bigger as you're successful. You really don't want to be warehousing 10,000 books and tying up that much capital—especially once you discover the inevitable errors! In most cases, I'd recommend starting with no more than 2000 or 3000 copies (full-color art or cookbooks being a possible exception, just because of printing costs).

And if there were no other reason to join the trade associations (there are quite a number), the shipping discounts they've negotiated will pay the cost of your PMA or SPAN membership on your first offset run.

P-O-D

Using a technology similar to photocopying, but using a digital computer file instead of a paper original, P-O-D allows reasonably priced printing in quantities

as little as 25. While it is technically possible to produce even a single copy, it's generally worth getting at least a couple of dozen at a time.

P-O-D is therefore a great choice if your book is updated frequently. However, if you use a lot of illustrations, you may run into some quality issues.

P-O-D is the secret behind the subsidy publication model; most of the subsidy publishers print P-O-D via LightningSource (LSI), a printer owned by the wholesaler Ingram. Some, including Infinity, have their own digital printing equipment. But you can print directly with LSI, which has the huge advantage of getting you into the Ingram book wholesale system so bookstores can order easily—typically at about half the price per copy you'd pay through a subsidy house, plus some fairly nominal set-up fees. LSI also automatically gets your book set up with Amazon and BN.com. You can find current information about this at <http://www.lightningsource.com/ServicesHowPublisher.htm>.

You can even set yourself with both LSI and one of its competitors: LSI gets you into Ingram, while a different vendor might supply higher quality, lower cost books to nonbookstore channels.

Consider running your covers with an offset printer, for best quality, in runs of maybe 1000 at a time. 1000 covers don't take up very much room, and then the P-O-D printer can take the covers as needed.

E-books

Absolutely the cheapest way to get started is by doing e-books. You have no cost of inventory, minimal cost for design, you can convert your manuscript directly to a PDF using free software, and any computer owner can read it with free software. If you want hotlinks, a clickable Table of Contents, or other features, you'll have to either buy a copy of the full Acrobat program or contract with someone who has it (shouldn't be a large cost). And of course you'll need a way to get the file to your buyers. I recommend setting up an instant-download system, but there are other, cheaper ways, as well. You will also need to be able to process credit cards.

E-books are also great if you need to update the information frequently (you can even sell a subscription to the updates), or if you rely extensively on hyperlinks. Clicking sure beats typing in a long and complicated web address, so you may even want to bundle your book as a paperback and a CD-ROM containing the "live version" with clickable web addresses, just for your customers' convenience.

But does anyone actually *purchase* e-books?

In 2005, the International Digital Publishing Forum (trade association for the largest e-book publishers, formerly known as the Open eBook Forum) reported sales of 1,692,964 units, earning \$11,875,783ⁱ—a tiny fraction of print book sales, but not exactly chump change. This number is compiled from only 18 large publishers, and obviously doesn't count sales from the thousands of non-member e-book publishers—including hundreds (possibly thousands) of very successful solopreneurs like Joe Vitale and Mark Joyner.

If you're only doing an e-book version, there are quite a few vendors who can do a cover very cheaply (typically in the \$50-\$100 range, compared with \$300-\$3000 for a traditional printed cover design). Of course, if you're also going to print, you'll simply use the same cover for your e-version.

Why do you even need a cover for an electronic file that is downloaded or e-mailed? Only to give your prospects something tangible that they can look at and be more easily convinced to buy. If you've got one for marketing purposes, it is customary to include it in the download file.

Unless you are just a super-duper salesperson, it's pretty hard to sell e-books outside of Internet channels—but you can take that PDF file to a P-O-D printer and get some physical copies for your speeches and personal appearances.

Warning: Avoid .exe and other formats; stick with PDF. Mac users can't run .exe files, and even PC users may be leery of a file format that often contains nasty viruses. And don't disable printing. Otherwise, you'll have lots of returns headaches and leave a bad taste in your ex-customer's mouths.

Not only can e-books be your main product, they can also be used as incentives to get people to buy your printed book, as Dorothy Thompson, self-publishing author of *Romancing the Soul* <<http://www.dorothythompson.net>> has done:

This Christmas, I'm running a special on *Romancing the Soul*, plus offering the free e-book, *How to Find and Keep Your Soul Mate*, an autographed bookmark and a bookplate to insert into their book when they get it and, also, a free postcard and magnet. People love free stuff and it helps to move your book, too.

Audiobooks

Audio is another low-cost way to get started, and perhaps a good choice if your audience spends a lot of time driving (salespeople, for instance).

Just as with written books, you have your choice of physical (CDs and, in the old days, tapes), virtual (MP3, podcast), or both.

When a printed book sells a lot of copies through bookstores, major audio publishing companies may be happy to discuss buying the audio rights—and often, you'd be smart to let them. But if you've only sold a few thousand copies and most of them are outside bookstores, you can pretty well guarantee that an outside company won't want to buy the rights. If you're doing it yourself, I recommend either using downloadable digital files or printing very short runs of CDs (between one and 25 at a time)—at least until you've established demand.

If You Want More Help

I am happy to consult with you on any or all stages of going from idea to rough manuscript to complete manuscript to finished book. I can help you determine which publishing process and formats are best for your book, craft a proposal if you're going the traditional route, manage any aspects of the process (including finding great vendors who keep their prices low and do a fabulous job), write you a marketing plan and assist in carrying it out.

If you're interested, please drop me an e-mail at <<mailto:shel@principledprofit.com?subject=HelpProduceMyBook>>. If you can't click on that link, the address is <shel@principledprofit.com>; please use the subject line HelpProduceMyBook so that my filter will mark it high priority and I won't accidentally delete it along with the buckets of spam I throw away every day.

My phone number is 800-683-WORD (9673). Outside the US and Canada, or if you have an unlimited calling plan, please use 413-586-2388. I welcome your call between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m., U.S. Eastern Time.

Chapter 3: Find the Perfect Title

- *Marketing functions of title and subtitle*
- *Personal experience with good and bad titles*
- *Advice from others*
- *Other factors*

The Job of Your Title and Subtitle

Titling is an art and a science. You want something that clearly conveys what the book is about, yet also creates excitement and perhaps an air of mystery and/or humor. In bookstores, at least for nonfiction, the title/subtitle is probably the essential factor that makes people pick up a book and look at it. A strong title pre-selects prospects out of the hordes of book buyers looking for other types of books—or even other books within the same topic area, but for a different audience. For fiction by known authors, it's probably the third factor, after a cover design that establishes the genre, and the author's name (since fiction is based heavily on repeat sales from loyal fans). Obviously, for a newer author, the title carries more weight even for fiction.

And keep in mind that you're unlikely to have the mega-resources to brand a less powerful title, such as *The Da Vinci Code*.

Good nonfiction titles may offer a concrete benefit, such as "24 Sure-Fire Techniques for Real Estate Success" ...the promise of a new slant on an old topic, e.g., "How Beethoven Changed the Piano," "Hidden Children of the Holocaust: True-Life Stories of Courage and Despair." (Note: I invented these examples as I'm writing this, which is why they're in quotes rather than italicized.)

Compare the Beethoven title above with "Beethoven's Influence on Early Piano Design"; they could be the exact same book, but they go after a completely different audience. The lively and somewhat alluring "changed the piano" version would draw a lay audience with some interest in classical music or 19th-century culture, while the second would speak to an academic audience of musicians, musicologists, and music teachers.

Dan Poynter has a list of books that did much better when the title was changed: When *The Rainbow Book* became *Free Stuff for Kids*, sales jumped from 25,000 over three years to 500,000 in two years. Selling 300,000 copies, *The Zucchini Book* had only sold 1500 under its previous title, *The Squash Book*. *Of Mice and Men*, *Peyton Place*, *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, and *The Great Gatsby* are among the famous books that started with lesser titles.

The originals: *Something That Happened*, *Blossom and the Flower*, *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, *Trimalchio in West Egg*.

In poetry, a collection may draw its title from the title or central image of one of the poems. In fiction and in some noninstructional nonfiction fields like memoir and biography, it could reflect: an overriding theme; an incongruity; twist; or deliberately mixed metaphor; a reference to popular culture, the Bible, or a major historical event; a key image—or perhaps be seemingly random. Sometimes you can get a verb in, though it seems most common to either use the -ing form or the past tense. Unless you're planning a series or writing about a well-known person, avoid naming your book for its main character. And use the fewest number of words that still creates a memorable title

Some actual fiction/creative nonfiction titles I personally find gripping:

- *The Time Traveler's Wife*
- *Exiles on Main Street*
- *The Robber Bride*
- *All the Fishes Come Home to Roost*
- *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*
- *A Spy in the House of Love*
- *Like Water for Chocolate*
- *The Long Night of White Chickens*
- *Atlas Shrugged* (I think the allusion is lost on most readers today, but at the time it was published, people knew that it was Atlas who held the world on his shoulders)
- *The Professor and the Madman*
- *Slouching Toward Bethlehem*
- *Al Capone Does My Shirts*

And some functional nonfiction titles that do a good job of identifying the topic, audience, and sometimes the slant:

- *How to Win Friends & Influence People*
- *Autokind vs. Mankind*
- *Dr. Bob's Painless Internet* (from 1996, when that was an issue)
- *The Complete Guide to Self-Publishing*
- *The Rise of the Rogue Executive*
- *The Mushroom Lover's Mushroom Cookbook*
- *Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service*
- *The Menace of Atomic Energy*

Personal Experience with Titles

My own journey with titles is illuminating. I've had good titles and bad titles, and they've made a difference. My first book was a 1979 rewrite of a 1969 title originally called *Perils of the Peaceful Atom*, which had some recognition in the market. The title adequately summed up that it was a book about the dangers of nuclear power. It had nice alliteration, had the strong word "perils," and alluded to the then-common phrase "peaceful atom." However, it didn't have much energy.

Still, it was with shock and dismay that I saw the publisher had changed the title to *Nuclear Lessons*. Since my contract was with the original authors and not the publisher, I had no voice in the matter—but I thought that was an absolutely terrible title. And the subtitle made it worse: *An Examination of Nuclear Power's Safety, Economic, and Political Record*. This was a book for ordinary people who wanted to understand this confusing and dangerous industry—but nobody but a policy wonk would pick it up! The new title also drained out the viewpoint; it gave no clue about what conclusions we'd reached!

By contrast, the most popular book in the category at that time had a much more straightforward title: *No Nukes: Everyone's Guide to Nuclear Power*. Immediately, the prospect knows that the book is for ordinary people and has a bias that nuclear power is not a good idea. It was no great surprise that our book, which was also overpriced for its market, died a quiet and quick death. If they'd called it an expanded, updated, post-Three Mile Island edition of *Perils* and

noted that the original had sounded the warnings back in 1969, it might have done considerably better.

For my second book, which was self-published in 1985, I chose *Keep Your Money: How to Save Thousands in Advertising*. The main title is much too generic, and the subtitle is a bit misleading; most of the book was actually devoted to alternatives to advertising (such as free publicity); of eleven chapters, only two covered traditional advertising at all, and one additional chapter focused on direct mail. Still, at least I was trying for an action-oriented, benefit-focused approach.

When I revised and drastically expanded that book into *Marketing Without Megabucks: How to Sell Anything on a Shoestring*, the title and subtitle were the same all the way from the original proposal through the finished and published Simon & Schuster book. 15 years later, I still think this is a very strong title. It conveys an immediately understandable benefit, identifies the audience (those with something to sell and a low budget), and rolls off the tongue easily. It's also pretty easy to remember the main title.

That didn't prevent me from making a mistake at my next at-bat. Thinking I was learning from my mistakes, I road-tested *The Penny-Pinching Hedonist: How to Live Like Royalty with a Peasant's Pocketbook* in front of a lot of my acquaintances, and got very favorable feedback.

But...I live in a college area, and the people I asked were educated, well-read people who knew what a hedonist is: someone who seeks pleasure. Turns out that people from different demographic segments were confused by the title, and some even thought it had something to do with devil worship. As I did radio and print publicity around the country and the world, the title created an unnecessary obstacle. I did eventually sell through the print run, but it took much more time and effort than it ought to have. While the title wasn't the whole problem, it sure didn't help.

The irony is that by the time I went to press, I already had a terrific domain name: www.frugalfun.com. Shortly afterward, I managed to acquire the phone number 877-FRUGALFUN. I'd have been much smarter to go with something like "Frugal Fun: How to Save a Fortune on the Things that Make Life Worth Living." Frugal Fun is short and easy to remember, hard to misspell, totally captures the essence of the book, and reinforces the brand I've established through the website and phone number.

When Chelsea Green purchased my next book, the working title was "Low-Cost, High-Return Marketing." It gave us a convenient shorthand to talk about the project (LCHR), but both the publisher and I knew we needed a better title. We went back and forth for months before settling on *Grassroots Marketing: Getting Noticed in a Noisy World*. This is a good, if not perfect, title. It could have a clearer connection to saving money, but it does establish that it's about marketing for ordinary people, and that the task is to be noticed.

And it creates a brand identity that's easy to extend. This book is the first extension; I might easily create (or commission) more books in the series, e.g., *Grassroots Marketing for Community Organizers*, *Grassroots Marketing for Green Businesses*, *Grassroots Marketing for Retail Stores*, etc. Each will build on what I've already done. There are many, many good marketing reasons to build

a series identity; just look at the “Dummies” books in nonfiction, or Harry Potter in fiction.

I thought I was all set with my sixth book. I had planned to call it “Win-Win Marketing.” But when I asked for feedback on a couple of subtitles (this time from an international Internet discussion list for small publishers), I discovered that a lot of people whose opinions I deeply respect had serious problems with the main title. So...back to the drawing board. I and others brainstormed titles for over a month.

Then one day I had the idea that I’d like to get a blurb from former President Jimmy Carter. At that moment, I had an audience of exactly two: President Carter, and whoever screens his mail. Once I distilled my audience down, the title and subtitle leapt at me within minutes: *Principled Profit: Marketing that Puts People First*.

As it turns out, Jimmy Carter doesn’t do endorsements for strangers (though my request did put me on his Christmas card list, and he sends beautiful ones). But the title is strong, and I’ve repeatedly had the experience of people buying the book right out of my hands.

Other Factors

In the original *Grassroots Marketing*, I outline eight factors in naming a business or product. Some of them are relevant to book titles as well, such as alphabetical placement. It should not be the key factor, and personally, I have yet to write a book whose title starts with “a.” But in some situations, it will be an advantage. Another of those eight factors, and this is one to pay attention to, is the availability of the book title as a domain name, preferably with a .com extension, either with or without hyphens.

A related issue, as John Kremer points out in the February 28, 2005 *Book Marketing Update*, is the use of keywords in a title—and especially as the first word—so that search engines return your book pages as results. As an example, he cites *Start Your Own Computer Business: Building a Successful PC Repair and Service Business by Supporting Customers and Managing Money* by Morris Rosenthal. That title violates many title guidelines, including length. But because it’s just packed with keywords, it does very well selling online.

Wisdom from Others

The PMA Independent ran a roundtable article about titles in its December 2005 issue. Among the points from participating publishers:

- Use a title that makes the book’s subject immediately clear (Dominique Racciah, Sourcebooks)
- The title should also convey the book’s attitude toward its subject, and have “some zip to it” (Curt Matthews, Independent Publishers Group [distributor])
- The main title should contain keywords and make sense by itself, since in a database, that may be all the prospect sees (Douglas Pfeiffer, Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company)
- Structure your series titles to build on the momentum you create, e.g., *The Street-Smart Naturalist: Field Notes From Seattle* (and then replace Seattle with other cities later) (Douglas Pfeiffer, Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company)

- Many great titles use just one or two words (Jack Thomas, Baby Simple Publications)
- Check keywords in both your title and subtitle for possible confusion with competitors (Stephanie Chandler, Booklovers)
- Take the time to get the title right, and let the title, the cover, and blurb reinforce each other (Kent Sturgis, Epicenter Press)
- While titles are important, the right book and the right marketing can overcome a poor title: “Our best selling book...has an accurate but uncreative title (*Dictionary of Eye Terminology*) that no one remembers...but it’s sold about 200,000 copies” (Lorna Rubin, Triad Publishing)

One of the participants was David Horowitz (no relation) of Rose Alley Press. His letter about titles for literary fiction and poetry are worth quoting in full (with permission, and with his request to note that the letter is copyright 2005 by David D. Horowitz):

Imagine Images

A book title is often not the only title in a book. A poetry or short-story collection typically features many titles. Each should articulate the thematic essence of the material to which it refers. Its tone can be jarring, mellifluous, playful, or somber depending on the writer’s purposes. Often a good title resonates with double and triple entendre, with connotations that illuminate subtle complexity behind the seeming simplicity of a catchy phrase. This in turn suggests the larger complexity of the subjects in real life to which a poem or story might refer. A good title can use alliteration and assonance to make it memorable, and typically it should be brief. Let one or two words resonate with multiple meanings rather than pile on phrasing.

Literary book titles, like cover images, can often be drawn from a manuscript’s repeated images, phrases, or themes. If an image of fire and flame, for example, appears and reappears in a manuscript and suggests its fundamental themes, then one might mention fire in the title. Physical images tend to work well in titles. Look for inclusive symbolic physical images, but images nonetheless. Abstract phrases often lack distinctive taste, flavor, bite.

The best way to test is to make a list of about a dozen favorite titles. Live with the list for a few weeks or even months. Winnow out the least satisfying, the least compelling. Winnow further. Imagine placing the book title on each page of the book. Does it effectively describe that page? What might be missing or feel wrong? Revise; combine suggestions; toy and tinker and play and try anew. Consider also superimposing various titles on possible front-cover images. Which title looks and feels most compatible with an image? Of course, consult with the author of the book, if it is not yours. Eventually, two or three phrases will emerge as the best choices, and finally over time one title feel will most compatible with the project as a whole. Be patient with the process. Let a title emerge from the material rather than impose a title on it.

Last, one might check Books in Print to make sure no undue conflicts exist with titles of other books. That test passed, you have likely found your title. Live with it for a month or so, and commit to it if it still works. Good titles resonate in readers’ minds for years. They allow a reader to recall the experience of reading the book and of absorbing its themes, story, and tone. A

good title articulates an essence and has the poetic power to evoke that essence's distinctiveness. It is a seed, a doorway, a companion, a sanctuary—rarely simply data.

David D. Horowitz
President, Rose Alley Press
<<http://www.rosealleypress.com>>

Chapter 4: Covers: Marketing from the Outside In

- *Why a great cover is crucial to your book's success*
- *Elements of covers—and their marketing function*
- *How to work with a cover designer*

Guess what—that old slogan, “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” is totally at odds with reality.

Everybody judges a book by its cover! To distributors, wholesalers, bookstore managers, and pretty much anyone else who makes quantity buying decisions, if your cover doesn’t stand out, you won’t get any shelf space. And if your cover isn’t strong enough to grab the reader’s attention, your book won’t ever leave the shelves in the hand of a happy buyer.

Even foreign rights purchases—where the cover will be completely changed—are influenced by the quality of the cover (and, of course, by the book’s domestic sales track record, which in turn is strongly affected by the cover).

While I’ve always been a strong supporter of do-it-yourself, certain book production and marketing tasks clearly should be handled by professionals. And designing a workable cover is foremost on that list. It’s a whole lot easier even to learn how to write a decent press release (another place I think professional advice is helpful, at least in the book industry) than to design a cover that will compete adequately with offerings from mega-publishers. Unless you’ve had several years experience playing with programs like In Design and Photoshop, the learning curve is daunting. And even then, just making sure you’ll have trouble-free processing and proper spine thickness for your page count and paper type at both on-demand and offset printers can be quite difficult.

Even mastering the software doesn’t give you the skills to create a workable design. You need a cover that holds up in a marketplace where the bar is constantly moving higher.

Later in this chapter, after we explore the various parts of a cover, we’ll look at how to work with a cover designer.

Key Elements in a Cover

Every book cover has these key elements:

- Title (and optional subtitle)
- Author’s name(s)
- Front cover
- Spine (the skinny part that you see when you look at a bookshelf)
- Back cover

Each element has important sub-elements and design considerations; we’ll look at them one at a time—other than title and author, which we’ve covered in detail in the previous chapter.

Front Cover

The front cover is the poster for your book; you want something that can draw in passers-by and make them say “wow” as they walk past your book displayed in a store window. A good cover will reach out to its prospects and follow the classic AIDA formula of advertising and direct mail: Attention,

Interest, Desire, and Action—in this case, walking inside to examine and, hopefully, purchase the book.

Of course, the cover will only create the attention and interest in readers who are interested; it serves, like any good marketing piece, to prequalify your prospects. No matter how great the cover, a book on football isn't going to interest me; a gourmet vegetarian cookbook may do nothing for you but my daughter would pore over it for hours.

Keep in mind that your cover has to market your book through many different marketing channels. The cover, in black and white or in color, will stare at you from the pages of distributor or publisher catalogs, in print reviews, and of course, on the websites of the various online booksellers. And in some of these settings, it may only be half an inch across. So your cover needs to work at a greatly reduced size and without color, and also work at full size and full color. Not realizing (and designing for) this range of uses is one of the biggest mistakes people make.

Text Elements on a Front Cover

A front cover should include, at minimum, the book title, subtitle if there is one, and the author(s)—or, in the case of an anthology, the editor(s). For an annual or seasonal publication, add the time context, e.g., Winter 2007 Edition. If it's a revised and expanded edition, mention that, and perhaps one of the specific changes: "Updated with full coverage of the 2007 Home Business tax rules."

Of course, there's room for a bit of marketing copy without making the cover too crowded: a brief celebrity blurb, mention of awards won (often done in a gold or silver starburst), or a forthcoming movie deal, for instance—but keep it simple enough so that the key elements, title and author, can stand out. You've got plenty of room for marketing on the back cover.

Don't forget that if you have a contribution such as a foreword from a well-known name, that name should be prominently on the cover as well—instead of the blurb, typically.

Front Cover Design Considerations

We've already talked about the need to be legible, even at small sizes, and to have a cover that works in black-and-white. But that isn't enough. Your cover is a 24/7 salesperson for your book; the design has to make a statement.

A great cover...

- Attracts the attention of prospects in your niche, and pulls them in once they've stopped to look
- Conveys the genre and/or theme instantly, even without the words; a children's picture book should not look like an adult science fiction novel, should not look like a business textbook, should not look like a celebrity biography, and so forth; the perfect cover for one kind of book would be horribly wrong for a different one
- Captures the uniqueness of the book and its approach
- Reinforces the brand identity of the series, author, and/or publisher (the Dummies books are a classic example—any of the covers would be weak by itself, but the brand identity they reinforce is very strong; for a better example, very germane to the audience for this book, look at Fern Reiss's *The Publishing Game* series)

<<http://www.publishinggame.com>>, with covers by Mayapriya Long)

- Uses the right fonts and graphics for its message
- Offers top-quality production values that avoid the “self-published look” (and stigma!)

Your designer may or may not use an illustration, a photograph, or a collage—but some very effective covers use only text.

Spine

That skinny strip between the front and back covers needs to display a lot of information in a small space. And if you’re selling through bookstores, it’s all you have to generate enough interest so the prospect pulls your book down for at least a 10-second review.

Typically, a spine will have the title, as large as possible, the author’s name, and the publisher’s name and logo. (Note to self-publishers: don’t leave out the logo. You may think it’s unnecessary, but failure to include it is one of the factors bookstore buyers and reviewers subconsciously or consciously examine to see if they should dismiss you as an amateur.)

If the main title can’t stand without a subtitle, consider squeezing that in, but in such a way that the main title is still eye-catching. This spine-is-all-you-see phenomenon is a compelling argument for using a main title that people can understand immediately. While it *is* possible to get a title and subtitle onto the spine, it’s a design challenge, especially for a thin book.

On a quick look at my own bookshelf, most of the spines that include both a title and subtitle were fairly thick—and the main title was only one to three words, usually just one. The vast majority have at least 200 pages, though I found a handful in the 140-199 page range, and one that was just 92 pages. However, that spine is almost unreadable.

While many cover designers routinely ignore this idea, I personally believe that a book spine should carry over the colors and graphic feel of the front and back covers. Why? Consider this: a prominent magazine runs a nice review, with a color thumbnail of your front cover. The prospect eagerly rushes out to the bookstore in search of your book (well, we can dream, can’t we?). But your front cover is green with a sans-serif title font—no little tails on the ends of the letters—while your spine is black and uses serifs. The prospect may go right by your book, pick up a competing title with a green spine and sans-serif title, and you’ve just lost that sale. If you’re branding your book as green in a sea of red and black, a spine in a different color will get you passed over. I know that even when I browse my own collection, I’ll sometimes look a long time for a book because I picture a certain dominant color on the cover, and I don’t realize the spine doesn’t follow that pattern.

Back Cover/Flap

I have *never* understood why so many big-publisher books completely squander the back cover! They fill the whole thing with an author photo, or worse, a blank panel.

You don’t have that luxury; your back cover is a crucial selling tool. The required components don’t take up much space: up to three shelving categories,

ISBN and bar code (with or without the price—I usually recommend including it, but there are arguments the other way).

Beyond that, you've got a nice big canvas to market the book to the maximum—even larger if you're printing hardcover with a dust jacket, because then you've got the two jacket flaps as well. Use that space to include some or all of these:

- Blurbs or endorsements
- Brief but enticing paragraphs about what the book contains, what it can do for the reader, how it can be used—all from the perspective of benefits to the reader: concrete tips, entertainment or educational value, building confidence, etc.
- If the book has high literary quality, a short, dramatic excerpt
- A brief synopsis that builds excitement and leaves the reader wanting more
- Some bullet points about what makes the book different
- The author's most relevant credentials
- A very small photo of the author (consider an action shot rather than a head shot, if the material is appropriate)
- The website for the book
- Special offers like a free update on the web of textbook-style learning aids
- Notes on any honors the book has gathered: foreign sales, movie rights, awards, and so forth
- Enough "white space" so that the cover is easy and pleasurable to read!

How to Work With a Cover Designer

Choosing a designer

Cover designers are under every rock and tree, it seems. Some of them are excellent, and some awful, and some in between.

Where do you find them? Look at ads in industry newsletters like PMA Independent and SPAN Connection (as well as the newsletters of the various local affiliate groups), talk to designers exhibiting at trade shows and industry conferences, participate in publisher forums and discussion lists...and ask friends and colleagues whose covers you like. Word-of-mouth is the best place to start.

When you contact a designer, you want to find out first of all if this person has worked in your genre. A great designer for business books may be terrible at science fiction, because the conventions are different in each niche. Then you want to see samples. Start by looking at the designer's website. Ask for direct links to the most relevant covers. Once you've narrowed it down, get some ballpark figures on price—and then get (and actually check) references.

Get it in writing

When working with a cover designer, you absolutely need a written agreement.

This agreement has to convey your right to use the work without restriction, not only for your book, but in your marketing, licensing (if you want to do t-

shirts, mugs, or hats, for instance), in future editions, sub rights, sales, on the web, and anywhere else you feel like using it. The contract should also make it the designer's responsibility to secure unlimited rights for you to use any illustration, particularly if you're buying the right to use a stock photo.

If you don't specify this in the contract, or if there is no contract, all you've purchased is the right to use the cover once. You don't want to be paying use fees every time you go back to press, or every time you do a run of postcards with your book cover.

One way to do this is to set up the contract as a "work for hire," which actually turns over the copyright to you. If your designer balks at that, or charges too much for it, insist on your unrestricted right to use the work in any medium and for any purpose, and place specific restrictions on what the designer is allowed to do with the design outside of your project. For instance, you may want to specify in the contract that the design or the specific illustration cannot be used for any work in the same genre. (Do allow the designer complete freedom to use your cover as a work sample, though. Not only is this fair and proper, but it also promotes your book.)

However, in a post to the Pub-Forum discussion list on January 20, 2006, intellectual property lawyer Ivan Hoffman <<http://www.ivanhoffman.com>> states that work-for-hire contracts with independent designers are illegal and heavily penalized in California and perhaps elsewhere as well. So make sure your rights clause stays legal! An "all rights" agreement may be just as good for your purposes, without the legal problem.

The agreement must specify that it is the designer's responsibility to ensure that the printer has usable, trouble-free files, as part of the agreed-upon overall fee. I learned the hard way that not every designer assumes this responsibility, and I got stuck for several hundred dollars and two months of production delays changing a cover that was green in the design that I approved but brown on the printer's proof. Needless to say, that designer does not get referrals from me!

Specify that you get copies of the files: not only the final PDF that goes to the printer (ideally, one PDF for the whole cover and separate ones for the three panels), but also any files used to assemble that final PDF, even if they're in a format you can't read. This way, you can tweak the file if you go back to press years down the road even if your current designer is unavailable, and you can also easily make postcards, bookmarks, t-shirts, and other promotional items from the original art.

You will also want to write into the agreement your expectations about how many rough concept sketches, how many drafts of the concept you choose, how revisions are handled, how much extra you will pay if the designer has to do more concepts or revisions than was contracted, and how the designer will be acknowledged in the book?

And of course, you specify the fee. Some professional designers charge as little as \$200 for a cover; others may charge \$2500 or more. You can probably find a number of decent cover designers in the \$500-\$1200 range (current as of January, 2006).

I recommend that before you send the cover designer your contract (or sign the contract your designer offers), you have it reviewed by a good intellectual property lawyer, well-versed in the particular weirdness of the book industry.

Expert Wisdom

Dan Poynter, *The Self-Publishing Manual*:

Good packaging sells soap, breakfast food, pantyhose—and books. A good spine, front cover and title say, “Pick me up.” Good back-cover sales copy says, “Buy this book.”

The average bookstore browser...spends eight seconds looking at the front cover and 15 seconds reading the back. And this assumes the spine stood out enough to catch her attention in the first place. Every word on the outside of your book must be used to sell what is inside.

Fern Reiss, *The Publishing Game: Publish a Book in 30 Days*:

If you have *not* gotten an endorsement from someone famous, write your own best quote and stick it on the back cover without attribution.

If you have any related books, consider adding their (front) cover art to the back cover of your book.

Connie Shelton, *Publish Your Own Novel*:

Why not be different? Well, if your sci-fi novel features a cover with a bare-chested man clutching a long-haired woman...it will get shelved in the stores with the romances. It will never get looked at by those readers you want to reach.

You can make your cover different, but not *too* different.

Pete Masterson, *Book Design and Production*:

Select an image, photo, or other design element for the front cover that further communicates understanding about the content—there is more truth about “a picture is worth a thousand words” than not. But, exercise care that the picture or other image is quickly understandable, particularly if the title requires a frame of reference to make sense. (A short, succinct title may fail if it is misinterpreted; for example, there are reports that the novel, *Fear of Flying*, was placed with books on aviation in some bookstores (before it became a best seller).

Consider, too, if your book would be best served by an all-text cover. If your book fits this category, then it may be counterproductive to try to include elaborate artwork. [He then discusses the cover for a book on viatical investments, and concluded]...Frankly, there’s no photo that can explain that idea.

Get Feedback Ahead of Publication

No less a book marketing authority than John Kremer, author of the long-selling (and highly recommended) *1001 Ways to Market Your Book*, often tells the story about putting two cover mockups on his website for reader feedback—and discovering that the vast majority of his audience went with the cover he liked less. Smart marketer that he is, he followed their advice.

Douglas Pfeiffer, of Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, sends cover and spine mockups around for feedback, even mounting them on foamboards and bringing them to stores and libraries.

For my own book, *Principled Profit*, I requested feedback on several cover mockups (one at a time) from publisher participants on discussion groups (the experts on effective book covers) and from the subscribers to my marketing newsletter (the market I wanted to reach). The feedback I got definitely strengthened the cover. For the first edition, I wanted an “edgy” cover that still felt like a business book; if it goes to a second edition, I will probably follow some of the suggestions I got to do a much more traditional-looking cover—in part because the ideas in the book are much more mainstream now than they were in 2003 when I went to press.

Chapter 5: How to Get Into the Stores: Distributors and Wholesalers

- *The difference between distributors and wholesalers*
- *Two other options to get books into bookstores*

Publishers and self-publishers: this chapter is just for you.

By now you know whether bookstores will be an important part of your plan. If the answer is yes, this chapter is crucial.

Bookstore Pricing Issues

If you're self-publishing, you need to know if you can even turn a profit in a bookstore even before you factor in the returns problem. If you're selling through a distributor, you'll be paid around 1/3 of the cover price if the book actually sells; that number goes up to 45 percent if you're selling to a wholesaler. Out of that, you have to cover the costs of book design, editorial, indexing, printing, marketing, shipping, and returns—and still have something left over to pay yourself.

But you're paying print bills based on relatively small runs, and you won't get the economies of scale of a publisher who prints tens of thousands of copies at a time enjoys. (This is **not** a reason in itself to do a huge print run, however; a whole lot of small publishers have been very badly burned on that.) Yet bookstore prices are sorely limited by market forces. Bookstore customers are used to paying no more than \$15 or \$20 for a book by an unknown author, and in some genres, considerably less—and distributors won't take your book if they feel its priced either too high or too low. So that limits what you can charge for your book. See Chapter 1 for a more extensive discussion.

Make sure you can at least break even on bookstore sales! Set a price that works both for consumers choosing among comparable books (i.e., is mid-priced compared to other books in the same market and of about the same size) and for your own bottom line.

In most cases, if you want to be in bookstores, someone other than you has to get the books into the system. Usually, that means you have a relationship with at least one distributor, publisher that acts as a distributor, wholesaler, or fulfillment house.

For any of these options, before you commit, ask a whole lot of questions. Understand the full costs, including less-than-obvious ones such as mandatory marketing programs—and run the numbers. Be sure to figure in returns (you may want to use 25 percent as a base number, and hope it won't go any worse than that).

Complaints about distributors and wholesalers are constant, to the point where every few years, a group of publishers starts a co-op to try to make an end-run around the system. But the economics aren't simple, and these ventures tend to be undercapitalized and thought through only from the publisher perspective—which means they fail to take into account the needs of their bookstore target market. Thus, even if they do get off the ground, they typically run into problems early and fold quickly. So...back to the available options.

Distributor

A distributor relieves you of all burden in dealing with the bookstore trade, in

return for a huge percentage of the retail price—typically, a discount of 60-70 percent off the cover price. On top of that, you could be charged shipping (more than once, if books get returned), catalog fees, marketing costs, and storage fees, among other possibilities. Distributors sell to wholesalers, and also directly to stores, if the stores are ordering full cases. Most distributors demand exclusivity within the book trade, although there are exceptions.

It *may* be possible, for instance, to have one distributor for the general trade and another for the religious market. Or one distributor for bookstores and others for different types of retail, such as gift shops, health food stores, or gas stations. If you have a book that is suited to non-bookstore retail marketing, by all means explore your options; it's usually as simple as asking the stores you patronize where they get the books they already carry (or what other suppliers they use, if they don't carry any books).

There is one distributor, Midpoint, that allows you to sell to independent bookstores, and they service the chain accounts. And there are others, like New Leaf, that are really hybrids: a cross between a full-fledged distributor and a wholesaler. These companies specialize in a market niche and offer marketing and catalog space, like a distributor, but they're non-exclusive like a wholesaler, and often, their discount schedule is more like a wholesaler's (which is a better deal for you).

Midpoint is one distributor that has a reputation for being small-press friendly. Others worth considering (or, more accurately, being considered by) include SCB, Consortium, SPD, Biblio (an arm of National Book Network), Independent Publishers Group (which administers PMA's distributor acceptance program), and Publishers Group West.

And you may also approach other publishers. My book, *Principled Profit*, is distributed by Beagle Bay Books, a publisher with a distribution arm. I also had a distribution offer from Chelsea Green, which published *Grassroots Marketing*. Some large publishers handle distribution for a bunch of mid-sized publishers, too.

Many small publishers see getting a distributor as some sort of mythical Holy Grail that will take away all their troubles forever. But the reality is that working with a distributor has its plusses and minuses.

Cautions: Before entering into a distribution agreement, execute paperwork that declares you are the owner of the stock, and you are consigning the books to them while maintaining ownership of the inventory. I believe there's some discussion of this in Dan Poynter's *The Self-Publishing Manual*. This is to protect you in case the distributor goes bankrupt, as a lot of them have in recent years; you don't want the courts selling off your assets at ten cents on the dollar to pay the distributor's debts. Also, if you do not have an agreement in writing that the stock consigned to them is insured against damage and loss by their insurer, and payable to you, then execute a rider on your own insurance to cover this.

Advantages of Working with a Distributor

- Insulates you from the hassles of dealing with wholesalers (the largest two of which are notoriously difficult to deal with)
- Centralizes all your ordering and inventory (except for direct-sale copies you warehouse on your own) in one place
- One account, one check

- At least in theory, the distributor's sales force will represent your book to the industry's largest players
- Well-equipped to supply bookstores nationwide

Disadvantages

- Higher discount than wholesalers
- Slow to pay (but so are wholesalers)
- Hard to get accepted
- Usually demand all wholesale markets
- Industry is financially unstable
- Hidden costs
- Returns can play havoc with your cash flow, especially if you order more, thinking you're almost out of print—and then the books (often damaged) come flying back

Wholesalers

- Non-exclusive
- Slow to pay
- Typically, 55 percent discount, and you pay shipping both ways.
- Ingram (by far the largest wholesaler) will not negotiate terms unless you're doing a whole lot of business.
- Ingram will not usually look at you unless you have ten titles or do at least \$20,000 business with them annually; otherwise, you'll have to use a distributor (two important exceptions: Ingram and PMA have just co-launched a program that gets qualified small presses into Ingram even with just a title or two—however, each publisher must sell \$20,000 through Ingram within two years or be dropped, so this isn't going to do much for most one- or two-book publishers—and as noted in Chapter 2, printing P-O-D through Ingram-owned LightningSource (LSI) gets you into the Ingram database)
- You can set your own shipping terms and discount with Baker & Taylor (second-largest, specializing in libraries but also serving bookstores), but they may retaliate by making your book difficult and expensive to order
- Baker & Taylor has been publicly accused by dozens of publishers of failing to pay on time, or, in some cases, at all; my own experience bears this out, and you may want to put them on pre-pay right from the beginning
- Both Ingram and B&T are notorious for returning stock just before they'd have to pay for it, and then ordering again—essentially forcing you to be their banker, and running up a lot of unnecessary shipping costs

Though far smaller than the two giants, there are many other wholesalers. Two of the more important ones are Quality Books and Unique Books, which almost exclusively serve the library market. There are also a whole bunch of little jobbers and wholesalers who tend to order in minute quantities every once in a while.

Fulfillment Houses

Smaller than a wholesaler or distributor, fulfillment houses supply wholesalers as well as individual stores. Most of them will even send a single copy to a buyer who purchased the book to read, rather than to sell.

Interestingly enough, in ten years of following discussions on various independent publisher discussion lists, I can only remember a handful of publisher complaints about fulfillment houses.

This may be an ideal solution for you, if your prices are high enough to support the fees. Book Clearing House, Rayve, At Last Fulfillment, and Intrepid are among those with excellent reputations.

Sales Reps

One final option: hire an independent sales representative. Large distributors and the biggest publishers use sales representatives, who actually call on bookstore owners to present some tiny portion of their wares. However, most of us will never reach the sales volume necessary to interest a representative, so I won't cover it here. If you get that big, attend BEA (Book Expo America) and track down some of these reps; the rep association exhibits every year.

ⁱ http://www.idpf.org/doc_library/statistics/2005.htm, downloaded May 6, 2006