

So, You Want To Be an Author

Hmmm...so many people write to ask for tips on writing and publishing...and I hardly know where to start giving advice because it's like someone asking you for general tips on whatever *your* business might be....Rome wasn't built in a day etc etc...and guess similarities also exist in that one has to start somewhereso the following is simply a collection of the questions most commonly asked by readers...

I've never done any courses and someone once just encouraged me to 'write as you speak'....which is how all my books came about. Frankly, I believe the number one thing is find/make the time to do it....and there will *never* be enough time. Like any successful business, writing requires time and hard work...

What works best for me is to first get all thoughts down on paper, without worrying about grammar etc and then edit, re-edit and preferably then again, have someone professionally edit. There are lots of books/courses around at adult ed classes etc. and on the web-not to mention scores of entire books written on the subject of writing/publishing. As for advice, on whether to approach publishers or self publish, again, there are many options...

It may be enlightening if you first, understand that a friend of mine (who has been in publishing in New York for over 20 years!) describes publishing as the most prestigious form of gambling because statistically only 1.8 out of 10 books published by **major publishers** ever makes any money! That figure of course relates to bookstore sales and is different if, as a professional speaker, you are able to sell vast copies back of room.

In terms of approaching publishers, look at books already on the shelves that are similar to yours so you know who's publishing that particular genre. Then, find out the names and correct spelling of the editor handling that genre within that publishing house and in your letter of inquiry, mention you know they handle that sort of book, within the first paragraph. It shows you've done your research.

Then, you need a short (1-3 page) synopsis/ query letter with an outline and possibly a couple of sample chapters. There are entire books written on how to write query letters/synopsis and they all have slightly varying advice but it would be useful to go to the library or look on the web for some of those titles. An excellent one is 'Insiders Guide to Publishing' by Jeff Herman.

With my early books, I first detailed the gap in the market for a book like mine, a list of my credentials as to why I was able to write a book on that subject and enclosed client testimonials to let publishers know I had an existing client base. I then guaranteed to buy 500 books at the end of the print run (but this wasn't necessary and I don't do that any more) Publishers like to know the basics of:

- What? the book is about? What similar books are already out there doing well, and how yours is different?
- Why? readers will buy? What need does it fill? Is there a niche market? Do you have stats on the number of people who need this info?
- Where? it will be sold (not just bookstores but back of room sales, target markets)
- How? the format, why it's different? what competition it has?
- Who? will buy it? Who you are and why you're qualified to write it?

There is no room for modesty in any of the above and be sure to write a strong query letter and synopsis because they will judge your writing style/voice by that and they may not read past the first couple of paragraphs unless they like what they initially read.

Join a local writers group-you can usually attend a couple of meetings without having to commit to join but one can learn a lot about writing (and publishing!) by hanging out with other authors.

If you have a ready market for your book (ie you can sell at your own training courses or seminars) you'll probably make a lot more money if you self publish. The trade off is that you need to have money to invest up front, make sure it's professionally edited, cover design, distribution, publicity etc handled by you.

I self published my 7th book in terms of wanting to get it out before a big publishing company could and wanting to be in total creative control. After a major funds investment and being on every major media in Australia, after 15 months of non stop effort, I sold it to a big US publisher-and just broke even-even though it made it to the best seller list in Australia. However, I must add that I now have a couple of thousand stock on hand to sell, plus a few years later, now receive royalties for global sales.

I'm told I was one of the 'lucky ones'...but believe that luck is a 4 letter word spelled w.o.r.k.. And, yes one also needs a bit of traditional luck along the way. But, in spite of the success of self publishing/selling to a mainstream publisher, I doubt I would go that way again (because I want to be a creator-not a distributor, warehouse) and think I will in future continue to use traditional publishers because I believe (rightly or wrongly) that association with a reputable publishing house enhances an author's credibility. But, to prove me wrong, many authors, even in a small Australian market, have successfully sold hundreds of thousands of self-published books.

Don't be disappointed if you get knock-backs as developing a thick skin is a pre-requisite of being a writer. Also don't be disappointed on how little money there is in publishing. Even when '*Good Service is Good Business*' became the #1 best selling business book in Australia a few years ago, my royalty cheque for that 6 month period didn't even cover my phone bill for that quarter-and I vividly remember this because both accounts arrived in the same mail!

Having said that, I can't think of anything I'd rather do than write-so please don't be discouraged, hang in there and follow your dream because by writing, you share your knowledge.

As I said, there are entire books devoted to 'How to Be Published', so really think you should do your homework first and what I've said is only a thought starter. There's a great website www.thorpe.com.au that has a section on tips for self publishers-and think this is the link: <http://www.thorpe.com.au/forms/files/publish.pdf>. Another to learn about self publishing and promoting your books is: www.parapub.com

How do you know if your manuscript is ready to send to a publisher? Well, maybe you never really know and the only way to find out is to try. But you may first want to consider asking someone other than a good friend or your mother for a candid assessment.

The Australian Society of Authors 02 9318 0877 or NSW Writers Centre 02 9555 9757...will have a recommended list of people who will give you a manuscript assessment for a fee. Like everything, ask for references and set a limit on how much you're going to pay them based on their hourly fee. And, remember, it's still only one person's opinion! And, like a doctor, you may want a second opinion. (but I'm not the right person to ask for that!)

Go for it-and remember that the only time success comes before work-is in the dictionary. All the best-for a best seller! Who says *you* can't?

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