



# On Becoming an Author

Becoming an author is one of the peak accomplishments of a lifetime. In various studies, about 80% of individuals hope to become an author of a book one day, but in reality only about 2% actually do.

An author is someone who has had his or her work published – published and made available to the public, to the reader, where it can be read, absorbed, used and understood.

The art of writing is part of the craft of writing – an essential element, but not the only element in becoming an author.

Writing may be an art and a craft, but becoming an author is also a craft – a set of skills that must be learned and honed. Master this set of skills and you will dramatically increase the likelihood of success in getting published and getting your book sold.

While most aspiring author have heard this before, most ignore the idea these practical mundane realities of becoming an author in favor of the more romantic notion that words are channeled and success is a matter of someone recognizing your talent and giving you a chance. Luck seems an easier path than mastery of the required skills.

The truth is that if you master the critical author skills, your creativity can soar and your work will rise to the top where it can be seen and recognized. Skill and persistence are often the difference between an idea unrealized and a successful book.

The Publishing Store is all about this craft. We are the intersection of writer/author and publisher where the lines are more and more blurred. Our only mission is to help authors and publishers develop successful books.

**We believe there are five essential skill sets that make up the craft of the author: Writing, Preparing the Manuscript for Publication, Publishing Strategy, Entrepreneurship and Marketing Strategy.**

## Author Skill Set #1 - Writing

No doubt about it, good writing is the basic, most essential skill of the author. Having something fresh to say and having the skill to communicate that to the target reader, creating an emotional connection that results in a change, a transformation in that reader, is the goal.

The skills involve developing the judgment to correctly analyze the core message and viewpoint to know if you have something that is likely to be needed and appreciated by the target reader, something which they are likely to want enough to buy. Another skill is the discipline to write these thoughts in organized ways with an economy of words, something that requires writing, rewriting, and rewriting again.

## Author Skill Set #2– Manuscript Preparation

A book is rarely something that comes to the writer all at once or without effort. The aspiring author must cultivate the skills to draw the book out of his or her experience and judgment as well as hunches and ideas.

When the author of book starts to work, something that will really speed up the process is **to take an inventory of and organize any source documents**, which might include looking at past client proposals, emails, seminar recordings, articles and more along the lines of the topics in the book.

Doing research is another specific skill that many authors require. There are two types of research that are most common. The first is doing **research the reader**, to find out who the reader is and what that reader might need and want so that the author can write directly for that reader or, alternatively, convince a publisher in a book proposal that readers need this book. The second type of research is **fact-checking the information in the book** to make sure it is current and accurate.

When an author wants to use a interview or other quote or research statistic in his or her book, the author may be required to get permission from the owner of that material. You can help the author by following a process to **obtain the required permissions**.

Once the author is mostly finished writing the book, it is time to get feedback from a few people to make sure the author isn't missing anything before the book is printed and gets out to thousands or maybe even millions of readers. You can help **coordinate a peer or audience review process** to help the author get that feedback and make any changes necessary.

If the author has decided to search for an established commercial book publisher, then the author will need to write a book proposal to pitch the publisher on the idea for the book. There are two tasks that you can help the

author with in writing the proposal. The first is to help the author **research potential publishers**, to determine which publishers are likely to publish the author's book based on what they have published in the past. Another part of the book proposal is to **do a competitive assessment**. Part of the book proposal is devoted to explaining what books are already out on the market that are similar to what the author is writing. Having competition is a good thing in this case because it shows there is a real audience out there who buys books on this topic.

If the author is successful in getting a book contract, then eventually the day will come when the author is ready to turn in the manuscript for the publisher to get it ready for printing. Publishers are very picky about how they want manuscripts sent to them and they will indicate, usually in the author's contract how they want this done, down to the type size, margins and more. You can aid the author by **preparing the manuscript to submit to the publisher** in just the way the publisher requests it.

### **Author Skill Set #3– Publishing Strategy**

Now that the book is written, the author must shift his or her focus to how to package the book so it will appeal to the target audience. It is not easy for someone who has not done this before to make the right decisions. The author may decide to also become a publisher, but it is critical for the author to understand the publishing process and how he or she can impact it, whether or not the author chooses to do it or work with an established publisher.

When the author finishes writing and is ready to start the publishing process, the first task facing him or her is to learn all the steps involved, decide who to turn to for expert help, and determine how much time and money the process should reasonably take.

The author can use his or her own bookshelves or the local bookstore to do research and find out what kind of book covers and interiors appeal to the target audience. Although the author will not be creating **the packaging for the book, he or she must have the skill to judge its effectiveness**. The way the book is presented must also fit the tone of how the book is written.

As a result of focus panels done by the major publishers, we know that the average potential buyer in a bookstore will spend about 5 seconds looking at the front cover of the book. The front cover is intended to create a positive emotional reaction to the book with the use of type, color and graphics. If the potential buyer feels emotionally pulled in, he or she will probably turn the book over and read the back cover for about 15 seconds. The back cover is intended to give the reader a logical reason to buy the book with compelling testimonials from important people, a clear and short message about the importance of the book and a short bio highlighting the credentials of the author.

Another important skill is to understand the business model of publishing which includes a **complex arrangement for book distribution**.

## Author Skill Set #4– Entrepreneurship

In addition to these book-selling considerations, when an author becomes a publisher, the author is creating a new business around a new product, the book, with new legal and other requirements. And although the author probably will not be hiring employees for the new business, he or she will probably be hiring a number of freelance professionals. One of the hardest parts of the process for the author is knowing whom to select and whether the work these professionals are doing is what is best for the book.

When the author is in the writing part of the process, the costs are minimal. Starting with the publishing part of the process, the author starts spending significant money and it is hard to determine for an author who has never been through this if what he or she is getting is worth the money spent, and if the book will eventually sell enough to make it all worthwhile.

The author may need the professional services of a book cover designer, a book interior designer, a copywriter to write marketing copy for the back of the book, a photographer for the author photo on the back cover, an indexer, a proofreader and the right printer.

The author must also determine an appropriate price for the book that will cover these costs but will also not be more than what a potential buyer will expect to pay.

There are a number of specific professional requirements to get a book recognized as legitimate among the millions of books already published. Those requirements include getting some special numbers and other items that any publisher would do as part of the professional process, including **getting an ISBN** (International Standard Book Number), **getting an LCCN** (Library of Congress Control Number), and **getting a bar code** that will appear on the back cover of the book.

Another important part of the process is creating a compelling package for the book, starting with creating an exciting book cover. An important component of the back cover is testimonials from important endorsers. The author's assistant can **coordinate the testimonial process**, sending the book to VIPs and following up until the necessary testimonials are received.

After the book cover is designed and the interior of the book is designed and typeset, the author's assistant can help coordinate the final pieces including working with professionals to create an index for the book and making sure all possible errors have been caught by a proofreader. Once the book is completely ready, the author's assistant can establish a relationship and **create an account with a printer**.

One of the final tasks in the publishing process is to look at a proof copy, one copy printed by the printer so the author can check and make sure it looks exactly like the author expected. This **reviewing of the printer's proof** is the last chance to make corrections before a number of copies are printed and ready to sell.

The final, but critical, task is to **get the copyright registration**, a process that legally protects the author's work against someone else claiming ownership of it.

## **Author Skill Set #5– Marketing Strategy**

Now that the book is written and published, the author must shift his or her focus to how and where to make the book available so it can be found and purchased by the target audience. With the millions of books marketed to readers each year, how can the author make sure that the people who want to buy this book know it exists and know where to buy it?

Many authors mistakenly assume that the publisher will take care of marketing, promoting and selling the book. This is absolutely not true and the author has responsibility for the majority of the marketing tasks.

Putting together a good marketing plan will help ensure the author is using his or her money and time wisely. As a part of that plan, there are things to do way before the book is published and at the time of publication. Marketing and selling a book will continue for the life of the book or at least for as long as the author would like the book to keep selling.

Internet marketing is the most cost-effective type of marketing for most book authors. So the author has to take full advantage of his or her own web site and other online opportunities like Amazon. Before the book is published, the author can work on the marketing copy, the carefully chosen words and visuals to be used to sell the book. There are some important printed materials the author might want to produce, such as a poster for book events, bookmarks, and a one-sheet flyer and order form. But these collateral materials can get expensive, so the author has to be careful not to get carried away ordering all these fun extras.

Another marketing opportunity is to take advantage of public relations, no cost ways to get the book known to its audience. Journalists write for newspapers, magazines and look for stories for the radio or television, as well as write for online news sources and communities. They are always looking for compelling content to find new angles on the news stories of the day. The author should always be thinking about how his or her expertise and the subject of the book are relevant to the important news stories currently occupying the public interest.

One of the things that authors discover is that writing and publishing a book is not publicly interesting news. But having a fresh approach to a story that is news may give the author an opportunity to become part of the news.

On or around the publication date, the date that the book is officially available to the public for the first time, the author has an opportunity for some special attention. People love things that are new, so it is prime time for authors to host live and virtual book launch events and do email sales campaigns.

Because books are relatively low in price compared to many other things, the author must sell a lot of books in order to pay for the publishing and marketing of the book. But books are generally sold only one at a time, so the marketing and selling challenge is daunting. The good news is that many books are still relevant years after they were written, so the author has a lot of time to keep selling the book. There are many books that are decades old and still sell many copies each year.

The key for the author is to get the most exposure for the least money. While many of the same marketing opportunities that work for other products work for books, there are some unique opportunities just for books. The more the author can use the Internet to send out articles, press releases, work with journalists, do blogs, podcasts, launch events and email campaigns, the more cost effective the marketing effort can be.

When the author finishes writing and publishing and is ready to start the marketing process, the first task facing him or her is to learn all the steps involved, decide who to turn to for expert help, and determine how much time and money the process should reasonably take. The author's assistant can answer many of these questions for the author and help **coordinate the book marketing activities** from beginning to end. The author may need the professional services of a marketing consultant, web designer, publicist and copywriter to get the sales boost he or she needs.

In preparing to sell the book while the publishing process is ongoing, the author's assistant can help the author **coordinate the preparation of the information to be on the author's web site and media kit**, whether that is a new site just for the book or a part of a larger web site the author has already created for a business or other purpose. It will be important to help the author understand what the critical elements are of the author web site and the media kit which will help journalists write their stories and prepare their interviews.

An important and unique part of the book marketing process is getting book reviews in major consumer and industry publications. With so many books coming out each year, if a positive book review appears in a major newspaper or magazine or in a review publication read by bookstores and librarians, this can guarantee early volume sales. To make sure reviewers know about the book, the author's assistant can **send out early copies of the book for the purpose of getting these early reviews** and follow up to make sure any

great reviews get onto the author's web site and sales materials.

Although a number of printers now get an author's book listed on Amazon, this listing will only have minimal information. Amazon has many opportunities for the author to create compelling material for that book's page, virtually all of it free to the author, including an author blog, places for reader testimonials, the ability for a reader to see "inside the book" as if he or she were browsing in a bookstore and much more. The author's assistant can **make sure the book is listed on Amazon and help the author make the most of that listing by adding all sorts of content** and getting readers to participate in reviewing the book and posting those reviews on Amazon.

One of the most exciting and fun opportunities for an author's assistant is to **create a virtual book launch and book tour** for the author's new book. This is a very cost-effective way for the author to announce the book and do a book tour through radio and podcast audio interviews and blog and other web online interviews, and perhaps including the author's own teleclasses, contests or other elements. The author may also want the author's assistant's help **in organizing live book events** at local bookstores or retailers or traveling to book fairs or exhibiting at trade shows and conferences.

Another very popular way to sell books is with an email sales campaign, particularly in **launching an Amazon bestseller campaign**. The Amazon bestseller campaign is focused on helping the author's book become a "best seller" by selling enough copies in a single day through an email campaign, to hit a spot in the top 10 of the Amazon Bestseller list.

In the years after the book is initially published, the author will want to find new opportunities to bring renewed interest to the book. One of the ways to do this is to be a finalist or winner in one of the prestigious book award competitions. The author's assistant can help the author by doing the research and legwork to **enter the author's book in a book awards competition** that is right for that book.