

1-1-2009

# Nurturing a Book Concept to Publishing Success: Lessons Learned from a First-Time Book Editor

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## Recommended Citation

Charbonneau, Deborah H., "Nurturing a Book Concept to Publishing Success: Lessons Learned from a First-Time Book Editor" (2009). *Library Scholarly Publications*. Paper 2.  
<http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/libsp/2>

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Nurturing a Book Concept to Publishing Success:  
Lessons Learned from a First-Time Book Editor

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Introduction

Developing a book concept into a publishing success involves discipline, management, and creativity. Furthermore, understanding the scope of work involved in the book publishing process can be one challenge facing library practitioners who are contemplating taking on such a project. Therefore, the aim of this article is to demystify the process of publishing a book by offering practical advice from a first-time guest book editor that has collaborated with international contributors. In particular, lessons learned about identifying a potential topic for a book,

writing a book proposal for the publisher, and negotiating the book contract will be highlighted. In addition, important skills needed for publishing success will also be described.

### Identifying a Book Concept

The book publishing journey is a time-consuming, yet rewarding, process. When formulating an idea for a book, it is important to consider some of the reasons for wanting to write a book. According to Goetting et al., there are "many reasons why a librarian might want to publish" (2007, 3). For instance, potential authors may wish to share their knowledge, experience, or expertise with their peers and writing a book offers a way to reach a wide audience. In addition, publishing can generate interest on a focused issue. From personal experience, publishing a book became an exciting opportunity to work with several contributors to help shed light on important issues and to explore

particular topics in-depth. Some authors may also envision that their books could be used as textbooks to help inform students. Furthermore, writing offers the advantages of name recognition, resume enhancement, professional networking, and career development (Gordon 2004).

Understanding the reasons for wanting to write and who the potential readers are will help conceptualize and refine the book idea. Conducting a review of the literature to determine what has already been published about the topic is also a crucial step in this process. Overall, selecting a topic that one is passionate about, assessing if there is a need for the book, and identifying potential readers are important considerations when formulating an idea for a book.

### Locating a Publisher

After identifying a possible idea for a book, the next step is to perform some background research to

find a suitable publisher. One useful approach is to locate publishers with books on similar topics by searching online via WorldCat, exploring publisher websites, visiting publisher booths at conferences, and browsing catalogs from publishers. Another recommendation is to assess the quality of books from potential publishers by reading book reviews of their publications and obtaining copies of their books via Interlibrary Loan for inspection. If feasible, consider contacting the authors of books from a prospective publisher to inquire about their experience with the publisher.

Furthermore, contacting a publisher to inquire if there is interest in a particular topic is highly recommended. This will let the author know if the idea is worth pursuing early in the process. In addition, the publisher may provide helpful suggestions and guidance for refining the idea. If there is interest from the publisher, the next step is to prepare a

compelling book proposal to convince the publisher that the idea is worth their investment.

## Preparing a Book Proposal

The main purpose of a book proposal is to elicit interest from the publisher. Guidelines for preparing book proposals are generally available on the publisher's web site or sent directly to authors whom are invited to submit a book proposal. However, most book proposals share several common elements. A book proposal typically includes an annotated table of contents describing the chapters and content of the planned work, a description of the intended readership market, and information about the proposed author for the book. It is also essential to research the competition to effectively demonstrate how the proposed book is unique and how it contributes to the profession. In addition, publishers often ask for a

sample chapter or a writing sample as part of the book proposal package.

## Negotiating a Book Contract

If the book proposal is accepted, the publisher will prepare a contract to be signed by both the author and publisher. Several items are often specified in the book contract. These include the length of manuscript, delivery date of the book manuscript, and royalties paid to the author. Some clauses in the contract are standard. However, authors may want to investigate provisions allowing the author to retain the rights to a future electronic version of the book and the ability to post the work, or a portion of it, in an Institutional Repository. The contract also states if an index is needed which typically falls under the responsibility of the author. If there are plans for several authors to contribute to the book, then each contributor will need to sign a contract. Therefore,

negotiating a book contract requires a careful review of the language in the contract, understanding the terms of the contract, and negotiating with the publisher for any desired amendments.

## Conclusion

Book publication "represents a substantial investment of time, effort, and money by both [the] publisher and author" (Schuman and Harmon 1997, 20). For authors contemplating writing a book, cultivating a book from an initial concept to printing entails a series of stages. These stages range from identifying a possible book topic, locating a suitable publisher, sending an inquiry to a publisher to determine if there is interest, and preparing a compelling book proposal. Whenever a book proposal is accepted, then the task of the book author evolves. As such, the author next focuses on writing the book manuscript, coordinating any contributions to the book by additional authors,



and delivering the manuscript to the publisher for review and feedback. Therefore, for book publishing success, a variety of skills are needed including being an effective writer, negotiator, coordinator, marketer, and problem-solver. In summary, publishing is a great challenge and understanding the overall process of publishing a book increases the likelihood of moving from book concept to publishing success.

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