

GETTING YOUR FIRST NON-FICTION BOOK PUBLISHED

©copyright by Robert (Bob) W. Lucas

As you might have read in my previous blog article, writing comes from within you and can start simply by sharing nuggets from your knowledge and experience. We often forget that others do not know everything that we know. In many cases, people are struggling to solve problems or deal with personal and professional issues that you have already solved or dealt with during your life or career. They are often willing to pay for your knowledge, but first you have to put it into a meaningful format and then deliver it to them conveniently. Luckily, in addition to all the traditional print media, there are a number of electronic reading devices or eReaders like the Apple *iPad*, Barnes and Noble's *Nook*, Amazon's *Kindle*, Sony *Reader* and other less expensive models where consumers can download and read electronic copies of books and other publications, typically at less cost than printed versions. These devices provide a potential stream of revenue for you once you have published your work.

Getting Started

An obvious key to your writing future is to decide what you will write about and then get started. There are thousands of resources available which outline specific steps to take to get your first book printed. Like any other venture worth your effort, it is always a good idea to do a scan of the materials on the internet and in bookstores and libraries. These can help guide your thinking and establish an action plan. Resources such as *Writer's Digest* (www.writersdigest.com), <http://www.enhancemywriting.com/>, and <http://www.internet-resources.com/writers/wrlinks-nonfiction.htm> are just a few of the websites that you can visit to get started building your knowledge about the writing and publication process. Networking with professional groups that focus on writing and publishing is also a great approach. You can locate these in your area by doing an Internet search for *writer* or *author* groups. There are numerous nationally-known groups which have local chapters into which can tap. A good start in your group search is <http://www.bookmarket.com/writers.htm> which lists various writing associations and organizations around the United States. From there, you can contact area meeting coordinators and start attending their programs to share ideas and get suggestions from others who are aspiring or publishers writers. Typically, each group will offer speakers and workshops that help train those new to the endeavor. If you prefer a more relaxed approach to learning about writing and publishing, you can contact Steve Tanzer of TBS Travel at info@ourcruiseagent.com to register for their *Writers Boot Camp* which will be delivered aboard a luxurious cruise ship sailing to Cozumel, Mexico in February 2013.

The Role of Agents

Whether you use a literary agent is up to you. They are not required when dealing with a publisher. However, if you think your book has good potential to become a really good seller and want to share part of your royalties with one, they can come in handy. It may be difficult to find a good agent because they are selective about whom they represent

and often only take on projects that focus on one or two genres and that are ready for publication. For writers who obtain an agent, these people can assist in making decisions about what to do during negotiations with publishers and help coordinate marketing responsibilities, such as, arranging media interviews once the book is published. Obviously, you will pay a fee that should be negotiated in writing for their services. It is a good idea to do research and ask for references from any agent before signing a contract with them. Find out their success at in getting authors interviews with the media, placement of information in publications, finding credible reviewers and other aspects of book promotion.

Like any other aspect of the writing process, you can search the Internet for information about agents as well as contact information for them. As you should do when working with anyone to whom you are going to give money for products or services, always get recommendations and be comfortable with the person before handing over any money or signing a contract. Related to a contract, be sure you know what you are signing. If you need and desire to use one, there are contract lawyers available who can assist in contracting and negotiation with agents or publishers.

Some publishers will only deal with an unknown author if they have a literary agent. This is because they realize that most reputable agents are selective in who they represent and have vetted the people they present to publishers for consideration. Publishers typically depend on agents to identify talented authors who have the potential to deliver a solid manuscript that can lead to a successful and profitable book.

My personal experience has been that I have not needed an agent due to the approach I take to finding a potential publisher. Using one may be beneficial for novel and fiction writers or those who feel they need others to assist them in the effort. As someone who writes business related books, I do not find them necessary. I have found potential publishing sources relatively easily by attending major trade expositions at conferences held by professional organizations with which I associate (e.g. ASTD [formerly The American Society for Training and Development] and NSA [The National Speakers Association]). This is because most major business publishers have trade show booths where they sell their products at these types of business conferences. They often send along their *Acquisitions Editor* who is charged with identifying potential experts who desire to publish books based on their knowledge and experience. If such a person is not present at a show, I can still usually get an introduction to that person by speaking to the salespeople at the booth. They either provide the contact name and number or take a card and pass it along when they return to their office. In either case, I follow up by phone and email immediately after the conference ends. Speaking to these people via telephone first, rather than sending a query letter helps me gauge their interest in my topic and saves valuable time. I get to share a brief concept, ask permission to send along a personal biography, outline, and proposal. As for the query letters, they are often reviewed by editorial interns or junior editors and never make it to decision makers, which is why I try to avoid having to use one.

When I first started writing books, I had to provide sample published articles to demonstrate that I could write effectively. These pieces helped demonstrate that other publishers found me print-worthy, which helped open the door to book proposal acceptance. This is why I encourage aspiring authors to start writing articles on their areas of expertise and getting them in print online or in publications. Two useful online sites where you can get articles published are www.ezinearticles.com and www.selfgrowth.com. Both accept articles which are posted to be read and download. Often these articles are used by people writing their own blogs and newsletters, which gains you potential worldwide exposure. You typically do not get paid for these pieces; however, you can put your web address, contact and professional information at the bottom of each article.

After you have published several successful books, you will likely not be asked for writing samples by book publishers, although some editors often want to see an introductory or first chapter and tentative table of contents.

Publishing Options

Some aspiring authors in my workshops have asked whether they should self-publish or find a publisher for their book. The short but not so simple answer is “yes.” This means that each option has pros and cons and depending on your own situation, motivation, finances, and ability to handle various elements of the writing and publishing process, either might be a viable possibility for you. Your decision will be driven by a number of factors. The following overview of what publishing houses do may help you make a decision. Still, I recommend that you do additional research and talk to people who have taken both routes. In doing your research, you are probably going to hear positive and negative experiences about each approach. From this information, analyze what makes the most sense for you before proceeding.

Because of the time commitment involved in the self-publishing process, I have always opted to partner with a large publishing house, simply because they do a lot of the things I would have to do otherwise. The downside is that I give up rights, a large percentage of royalties, and decision making about everything from the book title, cover design, format, and in some cases content. Because of these negatives, and the fact that the publishing industry is changing dramatically and quickly due to the advent of print technology and social media, I plan to self-publish the book that I am currently writing.

Publishing Houses

We are all familiar with the large publishing houses. They are the ones that published the textbooks we grew up with in school (McGraw-Hill, Thompson-Southwestern, Prentice Hall, and Allyn and Bacon) and the ones that produce the *New York Best Seller* books that many of us read for business and pleasure (Harper/Collins, Random House, and Bantam Press). These monoliths have printed millions of publications since

coming into existence. They have the financial clout and staff talent to take an author's idea and help shape it into a viable revenue-generating product in the span of months.

Since they have basically shaped the publishing business, these large publishers have traditionally been in control of what becomes commercially printed word in today's world. This is both a plus and minus for individual authors who approach them with a book proposal. On the minus side, publishers have all the process expertise and maintain most of the control over a book project. Thus, the author who pours his or her sweat and tears into creating the manuscript ultimately becomes a minor player related to what the final product will look like, other than content, once the writing begins. On the other hand, if an idea is accepted for publication, they do provide a vehicle for potential writing success by using their talent and clout to get your book into print.

As I will discuss in another article for this blog, when it comes to contracting with major publishers, the typical fledgling author is at a disadvantage and to some degree at the mercy of these organizations. This is because most new authors lack knowledge about the publishing process and do not have or want to spend money to hire a contract lawyer to assist in the negotiation process. Too bad, because the publishing houses have a staff of lawyers working on their *standard contracts*.

Self Publishing

Writing, financing, formatting, editing, cover creation, printing, warehousing, marketing, and distribution are some of the responsibilities that you assume once you decide to self-publish your own books. If the time and knowledge related to accomplishing all this does not scare you off, then self publishing is a viable option for getting your words into print.

Rather than try to go into great detail here about the self publishing process, I will refer you to two excellent sources. The first is Dan Poynter at <http://www.parapublishing.com>. He considered a guru on the subject and has published numerous books on how to self publish. He offers a free newsletter and other resources on the topic through his website. The second resource is www.selfpublishingresources.com which provides books, lists of resources, articles and much more on the topic of self publishing. Add to these two sources all the information available on the Internet and you have everything you need to get started producing and printing your own book.

A word of caution related to contracting with *vanity presses* and others who will take on many of the production and distribution tasks related to getting your book into print...they are in business to make money. Apply the caveat of *buyer beware* when approaching one of these companies, Also, when selecting a printer, make sure you choose one that has published books, rather than just printed materials or copies. Use a book printer who can provide samples of previous publications they have produced, references. Also make sure that you fully understand all the financial implications of your relationship and what deliverables you will receive for the investment you make.

Final Thoughts

Having worked with nine different major publishers or their branches; I have come away from those experiences with enhanced knowledge and confidence about my abilities as a writer. I have definitely learned many things and made some wonderful contacts as a result of the experiences.

Writing does take time, but if you are the type of person who enjoys the feeling of satisfaction derived from personal goal accomplishment and have the ability to express yourself in writing, then it can be a vehicle to provide both. It can also be a way to gain personal and professional recognition while generating a decent income stream. You become an instant expert once your book is published. This can lead to opportunities to speak, gain consulting contracts and to have your opinion solicited and valued by others.

Bob Lucas B.S., M.A., M.A., CPLP is an internationally-known author and learning and performance professional. He has written and contributed to thirty-one books and compilations. He regularly conducts creative training, train-the-trainer, customer service, interpersonal communication and management and supervisory skills workshops. Bob can be reached at blucas@robertwlucas.com or through his website www.robertwlucas.com. Follow his blog at www.robertwlucas.com/wordpress and like him at www.facebook.com/robertwlucasenterprises