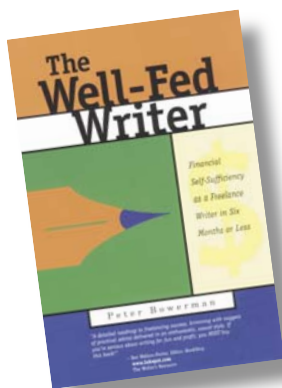


Promoting Your Self-Published Book

By Alyssa Wyman



“Self-publishing is not a fall-back position. It’s my first choice,” says Peter Bowerman, author of *The Well-Fed Writer* and its companion volume, *TWWF: Back For Seconds*. “No one will ever care about your book more than you do.” Big publishing houses rarely deliver the overnight success many authors dream about. Promoting a new book today requires a major commitment, regardless of the publishing method you choose. With self-publishing, you retain total control over marketing and keep more of the profits. In an interview with *\$1,000,000aire Blueprints*, Bowerman shared some tricks of the self-publishing trade, and he showed us how the Internet can be an author’s best friend.

>>> A Word About Self-Publishing

Self-publishing is a topic unto itself. In this article, we deal strictly with promoting your self-published book. For a host of articles full of advice and information on self-publishing, visit *Writing World* online at www.writing-world.com. That said, we do have one piece of advice for you in the self-publishing realm: Hire a professional publishing consultant. Bowerman says that he hired one the first time around and the advice he received paid for itself many times over. One place where you can find a professional publishing consultant is on the Publisher’s Marketing Association (PMA) Web site (www.pma-online.org). And Bowerman himself now has such a wealth of knowledge and expertise in this area that he is currently working on his third book, *The Well-Fed Self-Publisher*, due out in 2006. “Self-publishing can be a black hole of time,” says Bowerman. “To keep it from consuming you, hire a consultant who can steer you in the right direction.” For more tips on self-publishing, or to talk with Bowerman about having him become your own personal self-publishing mentor, visit www.wellfedwriter.com.

>>> Make a Successful Start

Presentation is everything. If your book looks like it was self-published, the packaging can eclipse the writing. The cover, title and printing all play a major role. Visit bookstores to look for covers and titles that catch your eye and apply those concepts to your book. Hire a professional to design your cover. “DON’T,” Bowerman warns, “let your printer design your book cover.” Put some thought into a title that is creative, yet descriptive, and which, in the case of a how-to book, is a promise (think *The Well-Fed Writer*...).

Print your galleys (the pre-publication version of your book) only in four-color and make them look like the final version. Spiral bindings and F&G (folded and gathered) pages look amateurish, so use a professional finish for the spine (Bowerman recommends what is called “perfect binding.”). Choose paper and printing appropriate for the style of the book. Your book needs to look like it belongs in a bookstore if you want reviewers and readers to take it seriously.

>>> Blurbs for the Cover

There’s nothing like a quote from a well-known personality to help sell a few copies. Look up related books on Amazon (www.amazon.com) by subject; many include e-mail links to the authors. Alternatively, try anyone whose name will be recognized by your future readers. Contact them directly or through an editor or other writing source. Ask if they will review your book and write a little blurb for your final cover. Be professional and respect their time, but aim high; the worst they can do is say no.

>>> Reviews — The Key to Book Sales

Bowerman recommends working your way up in layers, starting at the bottom and building success as you go. Approach the top layers only after building a reputation. Begin by identifying your target audience. Then search the Web for associations, newsletters and anyone who has a Web site catering to those groups. For a listing of associations try: www.marketingsource.com/associations/, www.ipl.org/div/aon/, and the *Oxbridge* directory of newsletters online at www.mediafinder.com, or use keyword searches. You can also check the print version of *Gale’s* directory at a local library.

Create a standard pitch letter with variations for different groups. Locate the “Contact Us” link on each Web site and cut-and-paste your pitch letter into an e-mail. Your goal is to get them to read your book and post a review on their Web site. You can even offer to write the reviews for them. Bowerman discovered that many of his readers bought the book only after seeing several reviews of it. Therefore, get as many sites to post reviews as possible. Never send review copies to someone you have not contacted, either by e-mail or phone, or they’ll likely end up in the trash. However, don’t be shy about sending out review copies to anyone who asks. Once you’ve gotten several good reviews, make a list of the organizations and links to their Web sites. Use that list to approach bigger fish. You’re more likely to get noticed if you show that you’re already establishing an audience.

Another avenue to try early on is book clubs. Try *Writer’s Digest Book Club* (www.writersdigestbookclub.com) for

writing books and check your local library's copy of *Literary Marketplace* for a complete listing of book clubs. Once you've built up some reviews, approach the bigger clubs like *Book-of-the-Month* (www.bomc.com), *Quality Paperback Book* (www.qpb.com), and *Doubleday* (www.doubledaybookclub.com). Few things boost sales more than a well-placed "Selection of Book-of-the-Month Club" (as Bowerman was fortunate to be able to do). Then get on the databases that big bookstores and libraries order from (more about that below).

>>> Magazine Articles as Book Promo

Put together four or five interesting articles about (or excerpts from) your book. Make them of varying lengths from 250 to 1500 words. Some might simply be excerpts from your book. Contact Web sites and publications whose audience matches yours and ask to submit an article. You won't usually be paid for the articles; but with the final attribution paragraph explaining who you are, what you've written and your Web address, it's wonderful free advertising. When someone requests one of these articles, all you have to do is e-mail it.

>>> Your Web Site — An Absolute "Must-Have"

Your book's Web site doesn't need to be 25 pages; you're selling one or two books, not 5,000. One reader told Bowerman how he set up a site in just a few hours for only \$75 by using www.godaddy.com. Use your site to showcase your book, include reviews and an excerpt or even a whole chapter. Make sure to provide detailed instructions on where and how to buy it. Keep it simple with fast-loading pages and consider using the same color scheme as your book cover. Insert a link to your Web site in every e-mail you send, to *anyone*. Get the e-mail addresses of everyone you talk to in the process of promoting your book. Make a point of sending them a quick e-mail with a link to your Web site. They are less likely to visit it if you give them the address over the phone. Check out Bowerman's Web site for ideas (www.wellfedwriter.com), though he's quick to note that the site has evolved dramatically over the past five years. Starting small is fine.

>>> When to Make Yourself "Official"

Set your "official publication date" (OPD) three to six months after your "bound book date" (BBD), the day you receive final printed books. This gives you enough time to get the word out and start creating interest in your book. Some important reviewers — *Library Journal* (www.libraryjournal.com), *Booklist* (www.ala.org/booklist), *Publisher's Weekly* (www.publishersweekly.com), *ForeWord* (www.forewordmagazine.com), and *Kirkus Reviews* (www.kirkusreviews.com), to name a few — only like to review up-and-coming books (meaning 90 to 120 days prior to the OPD), so be sure to leave plenty of time.

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>>> Library Access — Getting on the Shelves

Busy librarians often order most of the books reviewed in their industry publications, relying on them to weed out the pack. Those include *Library Journal* and the others mentioned in the previous paragraph. The truth is those publications only review about 10 to 15 percent of the books submitted to them. While your chances of getting reviewed are not high, it's worth a shot. If you make it in, you increase your credibility and your sales. Bowerman's advice to becoming one of the 10 to 15 percent? Write a good book and remember that presentation is everything.

>>> Bookstores — Create Demand First

Contrary to popular opinion, most people won't find your book while browsing the shelves. You need to create demand and get people to go looking for it. When they don't find it, they'll order it at the information desk. Get those reviews out there, and then get listed on one of the databases that bookstores can access, such as Biblio (www.bibliodistribution.com), which is your door to Ingram, the huge wholesaler for the bookstores (known as "the trade"), or Baker & Taylor (www.btol.com), the wholesaler for the libraries. Check each site under "publisher requirements" or "prospective publishers" for what you need to do to qualify.

One "fulfillment" source (the physical shipment of your books to clients from the big buyers to the one-book buyer) that Bowerman recommends highly is BookMasters (www.bookmasters.com).

Check out their section titled "iPub Services," which is especially for self-publishers. They can do just about everything, except write the book for you. You can also visit the Web site of each major bookseller for instructions. Once bookstores start seeing demand for your book, they will begin

to order copies on their own. The most important tip Bowerman shared with us regarding bookstores is this: If you push your book into the big chains without first creating demand, you may end up with a lot of returns, which average 25 to 30 percent or more (and have topped out in some "nightmare" scenarios as high as 60 percent!), often in poor condition, and requiring a full refund. Using these strategies, Bowerman's return rate through 35,000 copies is less than 5 percent.

>>> Who Should Self-Publish?

Any first-time author. After that, it depends largely on the name you've made for yourself and the category of your book. Nonfiction, specifically how-to and other niche books,

The screenshot shows the GoDaddy website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'Domain Names', 'Web Hosting', 'Email Accounts', 'SSL Certificates', and 'E-commerce Products'. A prominent banner advertises 'New Domains \$3.99/yr' and 'Transfers \$7.99/yr'. Below the banner, there are several service boxes: 'Web Hosting & Servers' (up to 4GB space & 100GB transfer for \$3.99/mo), 'Email' (spam, virus & fraud protection from \$9.95/yr), and 'Traffic Blazer' (improve site traffic and sales from \$29.95). The page also features a '24/7 Customer Support' section and a 'New Our Catalog' link.

are best suited for self-publishing. On the other hand, fiction readers will browse the shelves in search of new titles. Once you've created a following with your first book, it can't hurt to consider a conventional publishing contract, but only if your potential audience is huge.

>>> Conventional Publishing — The Second Choice

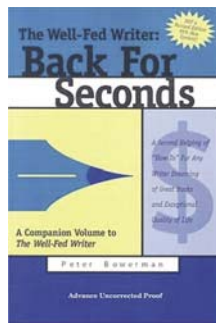
A major publisher approached Bowerman in 2003, but he declined their offer. Now that he's gone through the process twice, he doesn't see an upside to going the conventional route. The money is less — often a lot less — you give up control of the process, and you sign away the rights to your creation. Depending on the market for your book, you probably won't make up in volume what you lose in per-book profits. On a \$20 paperback, you might get to keep \$1 to \$2 per book with a conventional publisher, versus \$7 to \$16 (net) with self-publishing, depending on the distribution method you use.

When the publisher loses interest in marketing your book because something new comes along, you're stuck. Some contracts specify that the rights revert to the author on a certain date, but you still have to wait for it. If your book deals with a current topic, the window of opportunity may close before you regain control.

>>> Two Times, a Charm

When you're ready to publish your second book, you have two things going for you. One, you've been through it all before and two, a little something Bowerman calls the "marketing boomerang." If you do enough marketing, you'll find reviews of your book in places that you've never contacted — or even heard of. The process begins to multiply on its own. When he began promoting his second book, Bowerman did an online search for all appearances of his name and book title. Due to the "boomerang" effect, the list had grown significantly. He contacted every group on the new list, asking if they would review his second book, too. His success rate was huge, since they had already reviewed the first one. Using these sources and a list of subscribers to his monthly e-zine (which he'd been publishing for 30 months at that point), Bowerman put out the word that his next book was on sale. During the first month, it was only available through his Web site (where his profit margins ran 80 to 85 percent) and sold 450 copies. Not a bad return for a few mass e-mails. Then he continued following the formula he created and got it listed in the library journals and bookstore databases for wider distribution.

To date, Bowerman has sold over 35,000 copies of his first book, and sales of his second book are chugging along nicely. Most conventional publishers think sales of 10,000 to 15,000 copies are good for a niche book like his. With numbers like these, there's no reason to go the conventional route.



Bowerman's last piece of advice is to "always be looking for more contacts in your target communities. A week doesn't go by that I'm not sending out two or three review copies."

RESOURCES

FOR THE SELF-PUBLISHER

- **Self-Publishing Consultant**
Peter Bowerman
("Mentoring")
www.wellfedwriter.com
- **Printer & Distributor**
Services: Galleys, Full Printing Services, Fulfillment, Storage, etc.
Contact: Shelley Sapyta
Phone: **800.537.6727**
E-mail: ssapyta@bookmasters.com
www.bookmasters.com
- **Writing World**
Numerous articles about self-publishing and promoting your book
www.writing-world.com
- **Press Release Writing**
www.press-release-writing.com

MAJOR PUBLISHERS

If you think you've reached that plateau of success where you need to call in the big guns to sell your million copies, or if you're just tired of handling all the details, here are the major publishers. Each of them owns several divisions, which serve different markets. Check online or get a current copy of Writer's Market for specific information on how to approach them and what kinds of titles they publish.

- **HarperCollins**
www.harpercollins.com
- **Holtzbrinck Publishers**
www.holtzbrinck.com
- **Penguin Group, Inc.**
www.penguin.com
- **Random House, Inc.**
www.randomhouse.com