



Costly Publishing Mistakes to Avoid

Mistake #1: Not Knowing The Target Market/Reader

One of the biggest mistakes one makes is not knowing for whom you are writing and publishing a book. Before you even start writing you must decide who is your target reader so you can ensure that you give the reader exactly what they want. In order to identify what your reader wants, you need to start with a reader profile. Here you focus on the core readership for your book/genre, identifying as many consistent traits as you possibly can. You do this by answering the following questions:

1. What is the typical age and gender of your reader?
2. What do they do for a living?
3. Where do they live (e.g. urban or rural)?
4. What are their hobbies and interests?
5. Why do they read this genre? What are they getting out of it?
6. If you write nonfiction, what concerns, issues, or problems does your book address?
7. Where do they buy their books, in what format, and how often?
8. Also, for nonfiction ask what is their background on the subject? Do you need to introduce technical or industry specific terms? Do you need to present a basic introduction to certain concepts or can you jump right into the core content?

You may identify other qualities or questions to address for your genre, but these are some basic ones to consider. From this you glean a pretty clear understanding of your primary reader. For example, if you are writing a book on country home traditions, your target reader would likely be a female, stay-at-home mom, living in the country, interested in homemaking, looking for tips on achieving and sustaining her country lifestyle, and she most likely purchases her books in print format. If your target were an urban techie, you would want to consider electronic formats in addition to print, which can affect the writing process as you look for ways to enhance the content in electronic form.

As you write, you must constantly check your content against the needs and wants of your target reader. If at any time you stray from the genre formula or step away from your reader profile, you need to either correct it or be able to justify it not only to yourself but also to the publisher.

Your reader profile is also an essential part of your platform building strategy. The days of passively placing books on shelves are gone (though they never really were here to begin with). Both fiction and nonfiction authors must actively start building and engaging with their readership long before their book is even acquired, much less published.



In terms of your platform, your reader profile will help you identify:

- What content to give readers in your online presence. Your readers are asking, “What’s in it for me?” You need to be able to show them what’s in it for them by sharing tips, helpful links, fun stories, and other appropriate content beyond your book.
- What organizations and media to connect with to secure interviews, reviews, speaking engagements, bulk orders, and to generally connect with your audience.
- Creative ways to promote your book. Book tours and book signings are not profitable, and television and traditional media outlets are dwindling. Instead, look for ways to connect with a charity, a product or service, to hold contests, or some other creative way to tie your book to a fun activity or existing project.

Mistake #2: Picking the Right Genre

It is important to select a single genre for your book. Most works straddle more than one genre, but for the most part every book has a primary market they cater to.

Solidifying your genre is important for many reasons:

1. **Targeted Content:** Each genre has different conventions, standards for what works and doesn’t work. To sell well, you need to make sure that your content meets the expectations of your genre.
2. **Appropriate Design:** The book cover establishes expectations for the reader. Each genre has certain expectations about what is a good book and what isn’t. You want to make sure your book fits in the genre, but also look for ways to set it apart.
3. **Targeted Marketing:** Knowing your genre helps you develop a targeted marketing campaign. Each genre has special publications, online outlets, organizations, and other methods for getting in front of readers.

For more tips on selecting genre visit <http://tiny.cc/whatsinagenre>

Mistake #3: Not Getting A Second Opinion

Be sure to get a feedback from professionals and readers in your genre. Friends and family are not the best source for constructive feedback (unless of course they are a book designer or a professional in your genre). Feedback needs to be collected not only on the manuscript/content, but on the design, title, price, etc.

Mistake #4: Not Having a Realistic Timeline

Production: It is important that you allot time for several revisions both in terms of editorial and design. You want your book to be as perfect as possible, and that takes time. It can also take several weeks for printing and delivery.



Book Buying: It's important that you educate yourself on timelines associated with corporate book buyers and print media. Corporate book buyers at such outlets as Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, and Hudson News start allotting their budgets for specific titles at least 5 months prior to publication date (the actual buy comes roughly one month out). This means if your book publishes in June, you need to be connecting with corporate buyers in January. It's also crucial to get advanced reader's copies to reviewers and media as far as 6 months out due to editorial lead times across mediums such as print, radio, television, and the internet.

Distribution: Whether you are going through a distributor or handling titles yourself, you need to allow up to 8 weeks to register and enter your title into the system. Then it will take another 3-4 weeks to get your books to the wholesaler.

Mistake #5: Layout and Design

Trim Size: This means the total outer dimensions of a book. The basic sensitivity here is that there is limited space on shelves, and in order to get enough products on the shelves books need to be relatively uniform in size. Typically books are printed as either 5x8" or 6x9" for either hardcover or paperback.

Margins: Generally, use a 1" margin at the top and bottom and 0.75" margin on the right side. On the left side there is a 0.75" visible margin, but with space allotted for the gutter—the area where the pages are bound together. If you do not leave enough room for the gutter, once bound, your words will run into the seams between the pages, making it difficult to read.

Font and Typography: For fiction and general nonfiction, serif fonts are easier to read on the printed page than sans serif fonts. Size depends on font, but in general text should be somewhere between 10 and 12 points. Stay away from bold type, underlined type, all-caps type, and exclamation points to emphasize a point—this can come across as unprofessional.

Editing: It is crucial that the book pass through several rounds of editing, including a final round of proofing after it has been formatted in order to catch any typos or grammatical errors.

Design: Cover design needs to be congruent enough with what is typical of the genre in order to "fit in," but unique enough to set the book apart. The cover design establishes expectations for the reader, so make sure that what is on the outside is in line with the content on the inside.



Page Count: Make sure that your book page count is competitive with other titles in your genre. A book that is either too long or too short can hurt your chances for good retail sales and can directly impact printing costs and the retail price.

Barcode/ISBN: A legible ISBN, UPC code, and price must be printed on the back of the book. Be sure to include a “human readable” price above the barcode price section.



Title: Be sure to choose a title that is catchy, unique, related to your content, and easy to search online through such engines as Google and Yahoo. Avoid trademarked terms or hard-to-spell catch phrases.

Mistake #6: Format

Genre can dictate many production elements about your book, including whether to publish it as a hard cover (case bound) or trade paperback (perfect bound).

Typically:

Hardcover: print in hardcover first for business, picture books, health, and other titles not mentioned below, reserving your paperback rights to sell to a publisher later or to re-release the book and penetrate a new market of buyers at a lower price point

Trade Paperback: For fiction, self-help, and memoir. It's tough for anyone other than established authors with a long and solid sales history to successfully sell hardcover in these genres.

Mistake #7: Price Point

It is important that your book be priced competitively with other books in your genre. A difference of as little as a dollar can have a significant impact on the sales potential of a book. Compare your book to titles in the same genre of similar lengths to determine pricing. You can also refer to this chart (keep in mind the importance of page count related to the gap between prices):

Genre	Hard Cover	Paperback
Business	\$17.95-29.95	\$9.95-19.95
Fiction/Memoir	\$14.95-27.95	\$3.99-17.95
Health	\$19.95-27.95	\$9.95-18.95
Self-Help	\$18.95-26.95	\$13.95-17.95
Biography/Autobiography	\$19.95-27.95	\$13.95-18.95
General Nonfiction	\$12.95-18.95	\$7.95-9.95
Children's	\$14.95-16.95	\$3.95-7.95

Mistake #8: Print quantity

Don't go overboard for your first print run. It's always good to start out small so you can fix errors missed in proofing before you invest in a large number of books you can't sell—but not too small that it's no longer cost effective or your run out of books just as your marketing takes off. It's recommended to print 2,000-5,000 for the first print run of a book with a national launch campaign.

Mistake #9: Not Knowing How Books Get into Book Stores:

The decision to buy: Publishing a book does not obligate bookstores to carry it. Corporate book buyers look for the following things when choosing which books to carry:

1. **Hook:** Does the book have a compelling hook, something unique that will appeal to readers and set it apart from the competition?
2. **Market:** Is there are large enough market for the book and is that market one the retailer caters to?
3. **Design:** Does the book meet bookstore standards and have a professional, clean design that compares to the genre while also setting it apart? **Be forewarned, design is one of the key factors that can make or break your chances of getting retail placement. Make sure your book is genre appropriate and avoid putting your face on the cover unless you are a known celebrity.
4. **Marketing support:** Book buyers want to see that you are creating demand and driving people into bookstores. They want to know that you are working with a publicist and want to see a copy of your marketing plan summary (this is usually printed on the back of your advanced reader's copy).

When stores buy: Bookstores start dedicating their budgets five months out from pub date. This means if you have a book publishing in June, you will want to start soliciting your book to buyers as early as January. If you are working with an exclusive distributor, they will often have a dedicated sales force actively selling your book to corporate buyers. You can still add your title as a drop-in closer to



or after publication date, but by this time bookstores have spent most of their budget and may or may not be able to purchase your book.

How stores buy: Chain bookstores and some independent bookstores will not purchase books directly from the author. For the most, big stores like Barnes & Noble and Books-A-Million source their books through a wholesaler like Ingram or Baker & Taylor.

- Generally, Ingram won't list publishers with fewer than 10 titles to their name. More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of all books sold at retail are sourced through Ingram. In order to get into Ingram with less than 10 titles, small presses and authors will need to be listed with a distributor.
- Generally, Baker and Taylor will let independent authors and small presses list books regardless of the number of titles.

Mistake #10: Not Supporting the Book

In order for a book to be successful it needs to have a great deal of marketing support behind it. The 3-6 months leading up to publication and immediately after are the most crucial for determining the sales potential and success of a book. From the moment you decide to write a book you need to start developing your platform, a group of people interested in your topic and who view you as an expert in your field. Just like a physical platform, an author platform raises you above the crowd. For more information on how to craft a winning marketing strategy go to <http://tiny.cc/authormktg>.

Mistake 11: Shipping

The cost of shipping is hard to calculate and varies based on distance and weight, but there are some common mistakes associated with shipping that can cost you big time:

Underestimating the cost and time it takes to ship: On average, it costs roughly \$1 per book for a hardcover book to ship domestically. Again, this varies by weight and distance. If you choose a heavier weight paper or publish an exceptionally long book, shipping costs can add up quickly. Also, you want to allot on average 3-4 weeks to ship anything domestically. Keep detailed records of all shipments sent and received in case of disputes.

Double shipping: This occurs when you've gone to press and received your books without previously setting up a relationship with a distributor. After you've already paid to have the books shipped to you, you have to reship them to a distributor's warehouse where they will wait for a corporate buy - where once again you will have to pay to ship the books to the retailer (this importance of this is explained below).

Mistake #12: Returns

Bookstores will only stock books they can return. This protects bookstores from getting stuck with large quantities of unsalable books. It's a necessary evil in the publishing business and it affects when you get paid. It can take as many as 120 days



GREENLEAF
BOOK GROUP LLC

to receive payments from corporate buyers as they wait to adjust what is ordered compared to what was sold/returned. You are responsible for covering the costs of returns (industry average is 30-35%), so be prepared to have room in your budget.

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