



The 7 Deadly Sins of First-Time Authors

By Mary Walewski

Buy The Book Marketing LLC

Introduction

James Redfield sold more than 100,000 copies of his self-published book *The Celestine Prophecy* before Warner Books published it in hardcover. After that, according to *Publishing Trends*, it became the number two international bestseller in 1995, and number one in 1996.

Richard Nelson Bolles, an ordained Episcopal priest, had lost his job because of a budget crunch. In 1970 he wrote, published and gave away 100 copies of *What Color is Your Parachute?* You know the rest of the story — it's a legendary career guide. Thirty editions later, there are 6 million copies in print, and the Library of Congress lists it as one of "... 25 books that have shaped readers' lives."

Digital publishing and ecommerce have leveled the playing field for small and individual publishers. Authors are no longer dependent on the major publishing houses to see their work in print. Bookstores are not the only place to sell books. And, most importantly, self-published books are no longer regarded as "vanity" publications unworthy of a buyer's time and money.

Ironically, noted authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce self-published their work. Will you be the next self-publishing success story? It's entirely possible if you have a well-written book and a marketing plan that fits your objectives.

Marketing is more than just getting the local bookstore to stock your book. It's having a written plan that incorporates four basic elements:

- product (your book)
- price, (retail price and special deals)
- distribution (where is the book for sale) and

- promotion (how you appeal to your audience and build demand for your book.)

Read on to learn how to avoid the seven deadly sins of first-time published authors:

Sin #1: Not Writing for Your Target Market

The time to consider who's going to buy your book is not when you have a garage full of books you've spent thousands of dollars to produce; it's *before* you compose your dedication to your mom, your spouse, and your dog — although not necessarily in that order. It is never too late to define your target market, though.

Who Is Most Likely To Buy Your Book?

Who is most likely to buy your book? Make an exhaustive list; include anyone who might have the slightest connection to your topic. Here's an example: Let's say you've written a how-to book entitled *Dog Coats Sewn Easy*, a niche book. Who is in your target market?

- Dog owners
- Friends of dog owners
- People who like to sew
- People who know people who like to sew
- Dog owners who have short-haired dogs
- Dog owners who have a short-haired dog and live in cold climates
- People interested in developing a business of sewing and selling dog coats

Where Can Your Target Market Buy Your Book?

Where can the fashion-conscious dog owner be found? And, where would their families and friends be found? Here are a few ideas:

- Bookstores under Dogs, Sewing, Crafts
- Kennel clubs for short-haired and hairless breeds
- Fabric and craft stores
- Hobby stores
- Pet supply stores
- Veterinarians' offices
- Kennels
- Dog groomers
- Online bookselling sites
- Online pet supply sites
- Your web site

Focus On A Mix Of Venues

Of the venues listed, the ones that will likely bring you the most money are those in which you can hand sell your book. For example:

- A booth at a dog show
- At a kennel club event
- Out of the trunk of your car
- Your web site

Selling through retailers (outside of your web site, that is) isn't necessarily bad; it just shouldn't be your *only* venue. If it is, you will most likely sell your book on consignment or at the wholesale rate (average discount is 55 percent). The visibility alone is a good reason to sell your book at a 55% discount. Go with a mix of venues that get you the sales *and* profits you need.

Sin #2: Allowing yourself to indulge in that daydream: "I won't have to market. My book will sell itself."

C'mon, admit it, deep down you don't think you'll have to do anything to market your book; after all, it's so good it will sell itself. But how can people buy this good book if they don't know about it? They can't; *you have to market it to them*. Note: approximately 400 books are published in the US every day, so you have a lot of competition. Here's where you can stand out:

Start As A "Local" Author

You don't have to start out with a nationwide marketing campaign—that's too intimidating. It's perfectly okay to start out close to home. Use your status as a "local author" as a hook to get attention from area newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations.

State Your Message Clearly, Differently and Often

The nasty truth is: The media doesn't care that you wrote a book, only that your information might help their readers/listeners/viewers and, thereby, bring in advertising dollars. This means that once you have media attention you have to be prepared to deliver. You must:

- State a clear message
- Present your message differently than your competitors
- Be willing to put your message out there again and again

Our message for *Dog Coats Sewn Easy* might be "Create warm, stylish coats for your dog, even if you've never sewn before. Create your first coat in less than two hours or *I'll sew it for you!*"

Expand Your Market

Delivering a consistent, unique message will not only get you noticed in your hometown. In today's competitive news environment, national media looks for a

lot of its feature stories in local markets. Take advantage of local media exposure and internet exposure to achieve national attention.

Nobody is above common commerce. Even Shakespeare probably had someone doing his marketing for him.

Sin #3: Forgetting You Are In The “Book Selling” Business

Your book is not your baby; it’s your business. Writing and publishing a book eats up untold hours and thousands of dollars, so if you expect to break even and eventually make a profit, you’ll have to be serious about this “book selling” business of yours. You’ll have to put in as much time—or more—marketing as you did writing.

Write A Business Plan

A business plan includes a statement of objectives for your business, a set of goals and the plan in which you intend to achieve them. Check out the Small Business Administration website (www.sba.gov), the other 365,000 websites turned up in a Google search for “business plans” or your local library to research this subject.

Develop Ancillary Products To Support Your Book

It’s tough for a company to make a profit selling only one product—in your case, a book. Some authors have developed board games, books, bookmarks, CDs, calendars, conversational cards, craft kits, gift packs, greeting cards, key chains, plush toys, posters, and puzzles.

The authors of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* have done well selling ancillary licensed products to support their book. For product ideas, go to www.chickensoup.com.

Sin #4: Expecting Other People To Sell Your Book For You

Nobody has a bigger stake in your book than you do; so it's a mistake to expect an overworked, underpaid book rep or retail bookseller to sell it the way you would. It's your job to create demand for your book, not the publisher's, not the rep's, and not the booksellers'.

Relying On Bookstores For Sales

The average chain bookstore/superstore carries at least 100,000 different titles. Managers have the discretion to select only about 10 percent of the inventory; the other 90 percent is selected by regional and national buyers. **Give the bookseller a reason to stock your book.** Help them out by showing them a comprehensive marketing strategy for your book.

Understanding Returns

Bookstores take books from distributors on consignment, after that these books have a short, three-month shelf life. If after three months they don't sell, they go back to the distributors as "returns" (a word that will soon strike fear in your heart). Their covers are usually shelf worn, making them unsellable as new.

Working Outside Of The Traditional Sales Model

Creating demand outside of the traditional bookstore model fuels that model. In other words, hand selling your book raises its visibility and, in turn, builds the demand for it. People begin to ask for your book in bookstores, and they in turn order your book from their distributors. The end result? You sell more books.

Consider *Dog Coats Sewn Easy*. Your target market sometimes shops in bookstores, but it probably shops more often at pet supply stores. If so, it would

make sense to go beyond of the bookstore and place your book in pet supply stores, grooming shops, boarding kennels, and veterinarians' offices.

Investigate Online Bookselling Sites

Online bookselling sites work well for niche books like *Dog Coats Sewn Easy*. Bookstores *might* carry one title about making dog coats, but an online store like Amazon.com might carry several. As of this writing, Amazon.com lists at least 10 titles about knitting items for dogs and more than 39,000 general knitting titles.

Sites like Amazon.com can do this because they don't have to stock all of the titles, which means they don't have to worry about shelf space because they have a huge network of independent sellers in the Amazon Marketplace who are the ones who stock and ship the titles. When someone buys a book from an independent seller, Amazon collects 15 percent of the sale price.

Sin #5: Not Giving Away Your Book

You labored countless hours to write your book and spent thousands of dollars to publish it, so it's understandable that every book is valuable to you. You don't want to give away your hard work; but your book is not your baby, remember, it's a business.

Donate Books To Help A Cause

It costs less *and* generates more publicity to donate fifty dollars-worth of books to a radio give-away for charity than to take out a newspaper ad that costs hundreds—if not thousands—of dollars. It also makes you, the author, look like the true humanitarian you are.

Give Away Review Copies Of Your Book

Generate publicity through book reviews. Send reviewers query letters and a synopsis of the book. If they're interested, they'll request a book, which you can send as a galley (review copy) or finished copy, stamped "review copy." Some major publishers have begun to send PDF files of a book instead of galleys.

A good review can boost your sales, sometimes in the unlikeliest places. Look beyond the major newspapers and magazines. Look instead at small trade publications, association newsletter, and local publications that don't usually get solicitations for book reviews. If your book relates to their subject, they might be thrilled at the chance to write about it in their publication. And their readers might flock to buy your book. *Crafts for Pets Monthly Newsletter* might not be the *NY Times Review of Books*, but our dog book would stand a way better chance of getting a review in the former. And would probably get a spike in sales as a result.

Give Away Individual Chapters

Entice prospective buyers and create a buzz by giving away free chapters from your book. Have them available for download from your web site. Advertise the freebie in your blog and your ezine.

Give Readers The Opportunity To "Search Inside The Book"

If your book is listed for sale on Amazon.com, be sure to sign up for the "Search Inside the Book" function. It allows prospective buyers to check out your fantastic table of contents and a few pages of content at a time. Don't worry, your book can't be seen in its entirety and can't be downloaded for free.

Sin #6: Sticking With Conventional Marketing Strategies

Most new authors assume the best way to generate attention for your book is to hold conventional book-signing events and beg for book reviews in daily newspapers. Keep in mind: your target market might not necessarily read the book review column in your newspaper. Use your imagination to stage other events that will grab the public's attention, garner newspaper coverage in other sections of the paper, and provide you the means to sell your books.

Stage a Benefit

You could stage a benefit and invite the media to attend. To promote *Dog Coats Sewn Easy*, you could put on a dog fashion show as a benefit for an animal shelter. Shelter dogs could model your coat designs, and you could sell coats and books at the back of the room. Be sure to point out that a certain percentage of your sales goes to the shelter.

Take Advantage Of Tie-ins

Look for tie-ins for your book. What products would go well with our doggy book? A kit for sewing a coat that includes a matching collar and leash? Doggy boots to protect their paws from de-icer chemicals on sidewalks? A pattern they can buy to sew a matching hat and scarf for the owner?

You could also look for business affiliations with doggy day care places, vet clinics, pet stores, pet groomers, breed-specific rescue organizations, and so on.

Give Demonstrations

Our intrepid dog book author could also demonstrate how to make a stylish coat for her pooch – perhaps in a fabric or hobby store.

If you're marketing a cookbook, you could prepare some of your recipes at cooking stores, grocery stores, restaurants, wine shops, and farmers' markets.

Morning TV shows love to feature cooking demos, but before you approach them be sure you've created a unique hook. Maybe your cookbook features recipes for bachelors, for harried working moms, for kids. Maybe your cuisine is healthier, easier, or quicker than what people usually cook.

Sin #7: Relying On Major Newspapers And Magazines

If your book gets a review in a major newspaper or magazine, good for you, but don't count on getting one. It has always been hard to get a review, but it has recently gotten even harder—major newspapers have downsized their book sections and are even taking them out of their Sunday editions, and staff cutbacks have ensured that only books from the big publishers will get reviewed anyway.

Investigate Local Publications And Other Media

Focus your efforts on your local newspaper and on smaller publications specific to your topic.

Check out your area radios stations. Listen to the station for a few days and nights, get the names of the producers for the shows you're interested in, then make a brief, succinct pitch. Producers won't waste their time reading long proposals. Night shows that cater to insomniacs and shift workers usually are open to unusual pitches.

Watch local morning news programs. Again, do your homework, and find out who produces them. Be ready to submit a brief, succinct pitch. And keep trying. As one producer has said, "Don't be a stranger, but don't be a pest."

Go for Online Publicity

Use online publicity as there are endless possibilities, limited only by your drive and imagination. You might consider:

- Blogging about your topic
- Guest blogging on other people's blogs (Did you know you can do a virtual book tour, via blogs, without changing out of your bathrobe?)
- Broadcasting on Internet radio
- Presenting podcasts or teleseminars
- Posting in chat rooms and bulletin boards
- Creating a profile on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn.
- Upload videos to YouTube.

My company, Buy The Book Marketing specializes in online promotion. See my website (<http://buythebookmarketing.com>) for a list of products and services to increase your presence online.

Conclusion

The English writer C.C. Colton wrote, "There are three difficulties in authorship: to write anything worth publishing, to find honest men to publish it, and to get sensible men to read it." You've triumphed over authorship and have published your book. Now, get people to read your book by following these seven marketing guidelines:

Seven Marketing Guidelines

1. Accept that all great books—including yours—*must be marketed* in order for readers to find them.
2. Recognize that *your book is a business* and treat it as such.
3. *Define your target market* before and as you are writing your book and how to reach that market. Seek out the non-traditional markets beyond the bookstores.

4. *Do not rely on distributors' reps* and/or your publisher to sell your book to bookstores. Also, do not rely solely on bookstores to sell your book.
5. *Build buzz* by giving away copies or samples of the book.
6. *Look for new and unconventional ways to get publicity* for your book.
7. *Use a mix of media*, including the Internet, to get attention.

About The Author

Mary Walewski, MLS, is owner and chief researcher of Buy The Book Marketing LLC, of Broomfield, CO. A librarian by education and former sales executive, Mary founded Buy The Book to help self-published authors define their niche market and sell their books using non-traditional book markets.

Her website is <http://buythebookmarketing.com>.

Email: mary@buythebookmarketing.com

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