



Four Pillars of Successful Book Marketing

By Brian Jud

Many authors write a book based on a subject they like, or perhaps on a unique experience they have had. As a book-marketing consultant a question I frequently hear is, “My book is finished, now what do I do?” Successful book marketing is founded on what you do prior to writing your content. Here are four major steps to take before you begin.

1. Identify and Define Your Target Readers. No book’s content is for everybody, regardless of how perfect you think it is. You will sell more books if you first describe your target readers, the people who may be interested in what you have to say.

Define your readers with the 5Ws: Who, What, Where, When and Why. First, who are your readers? How old are they, degree of education (will determine the vocabulary in your publicity and literature), income level (should your books be in Walmart or on cruise ships?) In what form do they want to buy (an older reader may prefer a large-print edition, a Gen Z reader may read off a mobile device)? Where do they look for the information in your book? Empty nesters may shop in Hallmark stores, young parents in supermarkets, and business travelers in airport stores.

Next, consider when they purchase. Is your content associated with a major holiday, season or appropriate as a gift? If your content is suitable for sale during the fourth-quarter holiday season, do not publish it in September and expect to have it on the shelves in time. Think about when the store buyers (for bookstores or other retailers) place orders for their holiday titles, and that is probably in June.

Finally, why do they buy? You may believe you are selling a 6"x 9" perfect bound, softcover book, but that is not what people want to buy. Think of Arm & Hammer baking soda. In how many different ways is that used? The product itself is no different in any use. Now, think of your content the same way. It does not change, but is purchased and used by different people for different reasons. Consumers do not purchase bound sheets of white paper with black ink on them. They want to solve some problem such as being a better parent, chef, wealth builder or to find a job.

How about people in your other target segments? Retailers (including bookstores) want product on their shelves that will turn a profit. Librarians want to help their patrons. TV and radio producers want to put on a good show for their audiences. Show buyers in each segment how your content will meet their objectives.

2. Determine Your Prospective Customers’ Needs. Defining your prospective buyers is just an initial step. Continue to drill down to find a better fit for the benefits you offer. For example, suppose your content was about how to find a job. You would correctly assume the academic market would be a good target. However, this could mean students at high schools, trade schools,

night schools or colleges (community, private or state universities). Let's assume you choose college students, so here is how you can sub-segment that niche:

- College teachers are looking for books that could be used as textbooks or for supplemental material. They need information that is presented sequentially with discussion questions at the end of each chapter and perhaps an accompanying instructors guide.
- Students need concise, clear, and inexpensive information that will give them the facts they need to find a job quickly.
- Career placement officers need to increase the number of students at their college who graduate with jobs.
- Alumni associations need to provide graduates with useful information that will increase the value of their alma mater and increase the size of donations to the school.
- College bookstores want to make a profit selling books.

As you can see, buyers in any one segment have varying needs. Selling to all of them with the same literature and the same appeal will do little to increase your sales. Marketing to them, according to their individual needs, will have much better results.

3. Conduct Integrated Marketing. Before you publish, plan how you will mix and match the four elements of a professional marketing mix for each segment: the product and its distribution, price, and promotion.

Product. Your content must be different from and better than what already exists on your topic. And your final book should be professionally produced with high-quality editing and design. The cover includes front, spine and rear, with ISBN and price in the bar code. You are competing with the major publishers and your book cannot look self-published.

Book Distribution. Know where your target readers purchase your content and make sure your book is available in those channels. These could be airport stores, supermarkets, discount stores, gift shops and many more. The good news is that you already know how to sell to these stores: you get distribution partners and they contact buyers for you. The bad news is they charge a significant fee for doing so, and unsold book are returned.

Also, consider direct distribution in which you sell to non-retail buyers in corporations, associations, schools, the military and government agencies. These sales are typically in large, non-returnable quantities. In addition, there is no immediate comparison of your book's price with competition as there is on a retail store's shelf.

Pricing. Deciding upon the price of your book may have more impact on your sales, revenue and profits than any other marketing decision. Yet some people determine the price by matching competitive prices, or pricing their book at what "feels right," or in the worst case give it away for free. Any of those choices may negatively impact your operating income. Instead, base your book's price on the value you provide readers vis-à-vis competitive options. When selling to non-retail buyers the final price is negotiated and typically based on the quantity purchased.

Promotion. The thrust and content of your promotion (including social media, book publicity, advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, direct mail and media appearances) change according to your target segment, product differences, distribution strategy and pricing. The marketer plans how these will interact and support one another for maximum effectiveness.

4. Profitability. In Step One you defined your target readers. Now ask, how many of them are there? And what percentage of them will actually make a purchase? Multiply that by the discounted price of your book to forecast revenue. Do not be overly optimistic in your revenue estimates and predict up to a year before receiving significant income.

If that figure is substantial, then “run the numbers” to see if your efforts can make money. How much will it cost to perform all the elements of your marketing mix? If you do all that you must, how many books can you sell? Consider distribution discounts, returned books and “miscellaneous” costs that always occur.

When you publish a book, you cease to be an author. You are now a businessperson who must perform many activities. If you are unwilling to perform undesirable (to you) activities, get others to do them for you, but include those costs of doing business in your financial projections. Enter this process early, prepared, with your “eyes open” and you are much more likely to succeed. Know to whom you are selling, what is important to them, how you can integrate all the marketing elements and then place the emphasis on running a profitable business. You will sell more books and have some fun in the process.

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