

A Path to Publishing

What I Learned By Publishing a Non-Fiction Book

Ed Cyzewski

All Rights Reserved

@ Ed Cyzewski, 2010

Advanced Reading Sample, March 24, 2010

Endorsements

I haven't seen a single more helpful resource for writers hoping to enter the publishing fray. *A Path to Publishing* is a friendly guide through the challenging and confusing maze that leads to having a book on the shelves. It should be required reading for writers!

–Rachelle Gardner, Literary Agent, WordServe Literary Group and blogger at <http://cba-ramblings.blogspot.com>

Finally!! Someone who cares enough to tell the truth about publishing! This well written book is refreshingly honest, open and full of excellent advice about what it really takes to get your book published and how to effectively market and promote it. God bless you, Ed Cyzewski!

–Kathleen M. Campbell, President, Campbell Public Relations, LLC

Experience is the best teacher—especially other people's experiences. Ed Cyzewski has spent hundreds of hours learning from the pros and, thankfully, is now sharing the goods with everyone else. If you've ever dreamed about becoming a published book author, read this book. Underline the key points. Do what Ed says. And be sure to thank him on the Acknowledgments page of your first published book!

–David Sanford, award-winning author, editor, writing coach, and literary agent with Credo Communications, LLC (www.credocommunications.net)

A Path to Publishing is a book that most authors would benefit from reading. Not only does it give you the true life experiences of the author in getting books published, it gives solid, useful information for authors to use to help them in their quest to get published. No matter what your goals are regarding getting your book published, *A Path to Publishing* will give you concrete, helpful information and ideas to aid you in the process.

–Doug Johnson, Author of *You Sold Me At Hello: How To Get People To Buy Without Being A Salesman* and CEO of G.R. Johnson & Son Consulting, LLC

If you're looking for some wise advice on getting published, invest a little money in Ed's book *A Path to Publishing*. He'll get you started, and point you down the right path.

–Chip MacGregor, President, MacGregor Literary

I have been engaged in editing and book publishing for well over thirty years and sometimes even I am confused about what happens and why. It is a complex business, that's for sure. Every year commercial publishing houses go through the mysterious alchemy of selecting books to publish. If you have tried writing and publishing nonfiction, you have wondered by what process manuscripts are chosen to see the light of day as published books. And you have wondered how to negotiate the selection process to become one of the chosen few who do get published. Outside of the traditional publishing methodology, where the landscape changes monthly and where many publishers offer zero add-on value, there is self-publishing, eBooks, niche publishing, cooperative publishing, desktop publishing, and blogs to consider. Now for all of this you have great help in Ed Cyzewski's rapidly readable, witty, fresh and incisive little book, which is big on valuable insights on how to publish and market expository writing. *A Path to Publishing* is a step-by-step manual with on-the-mark advice covering the sister professions of writing, editing and publishing. I do not always agree with all the author's assumptions, but in the best tradition of authorship, Cyzewski is willing to make available to others what he has found out for himself. He does this as an insider bringing an outsider's eye for all the profundities.

–Leonard G. Goss, GoodEditors.com, www.goodeditors.com

A Path to Publishing

What I Learned By Publishing a Non-Fiction Book

Ed Cyzewski

Publication and ISBN information

A Path to Publishing

May 2010

By Ed Cyzewski

© All Rights Reserved

To my parents and step-parents:

Your support for my writing endeavors means more than I can express.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....#
Chapter One: Preparing for Publishing.....##
Chapter Two: Develop Your Expertise.....##
Chapter Three: Develop Networks.....##
Chapter Four: Develop Your Craft.....##
Chapter Five: Seek Guides##
Chapter Six: Clearing Room to Write.....##
Chapter Seven: Preparing Your Proposal.....##
Chapter Eight: Publishing Options.....##
Chapter Nine: Writing a Book.....##
Chapter Ten: Working with an Editor.....##
Chapter Eleven: Marketing Your Work.....##

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the insight and direction provided by my many colleagues and friends in the publishing industry. It has been an honor in particular to work with David Sanford and Kathleen Campbell and to receive their support throughout the years. The wisdom of Brad Lewis, Rebekah Clark, Caleb Seeling, and Debbie Stier are referenced at many points throughout this book, and I'm grateful to have worked with such wonderful people.

Beth Meachem at the Greater Manchester Arts Council and Clemma Dawson, who co-chaired the Manchester Poet's and Writer's Weekend with her, have provided timely opportunities to talk about my experiences in publishing. By inviting me to speak to publishing-hopefuls I realized the importance of sharing what's in this book. In fact, this book began as a series of publishing talks at their events. It is a privilege to share in their work.

In addition, many kind friends and colleagues read through early drafts and offered editorial suggestions and advice that made this a much better book. In no particular order, I'd like to thank:

Serena Kovalosky (<http://serenakovalosky.blogspot.com>)

Matthew Costner (<http://www.resilientemergence.com>)

Bill Spinks (<http://www.google.com/profiles/wm.spinks>)

Adrienne Williams (<http://contemplativelife.wordpress.com>)

Many other friends and colleagues checked out my early drafts and gave this book the thumbs up, and I'm very grateful for their time and support.

To my wife Julie, I appreciate your patience and support while I put this project together. Thanks for sticking with my crazy dream to write books even when the path forward isn't easy to figure out.

Introduction

So, you've decided that you want to publish a book. Everyone says you have it in you, and now you're going for it. Congratulations. You are now setting out on what may be one of the most fulfilling experiences of your life.

It may also prove to be one of the most difficult.

Book publishing is a dynamic industry where talent does not guarantee success, trends change, and good timing can be nearly as important as a good manuscript. In light of the economic meltdown in 2008 many publishers have cut back on staff and acquisitions, meaning that it will be that much harder for unknown authors to break into a market where a web presence, media contacts, and name recognition are critical components of a book proposal.

The state of the industry, however, does not change the fact that many would-be authors have stellar book ideas languishing on hard drives, in filing cabinets, and in their imaginations. In addition, with the rise of self-publishing and ebooks, there are many new avenues to pursue in publishing that give would-be authors the tools they need to sell their books to readers.

While a friend's encouragement, "You should write a book about that," may not be the best measure of a potential author's chances of publication, simply understanding the path to publishing may well be enough to help hopefuls determine their next steps. I know many who have labored over draft after draft

of their books without considering the basic matters of the current market, the book's key benefits to readers, or a concise explanation of the book's main idea.

I've been there too.

Before first-time authors spend their days and nights tweaking every word in chapters that may never work, in a book that may never be accepted, for readers who don't exist, they need to first examine the raw elements of their book ideas and the path to publication. Publishing can be taxing, difficult, and even humbling, but it is possible to publish, especially with the multitude of routes available in self-publishing and online publishing.

My Own Path to Publishing

I entered book publishing thinking it would be a side project, which it is for many authors today. I thought I'd have a regular day job as a pastor and then crank out books in the evenings.

With no shortage of ideas for publication, I sat down with a professor at my seminary who gave me a talk very similar to what I'll be sharing in chapter one. To put it lightly, he told me, the odds of publishing with a major press are slightly better than that of chimps pounding out Shakespeare on typewriters given infinite time.

The odds of earning something above the poverty line from publishing are in the range of those same chimps writing, directing, and performing their Shakespearean plays. I always tell my friends that book publishing is the most impressive thing you can do while earning a wage below the poverty line.

You really don't want to see the income listed on my tax forms.

After my professor set me straight, I learned that publishing a book would require a greater commitment. At the same time I realized, after working in a

church, that I wasn't cut out for traditional pastoral ministry. That launched plan B, which involved finding a day job to pay the bills that gave me some flexibility to write. Thankfully my wife has supported me throughout.

I also needed a guide to help me through the process. During my last semester at seminary I met with my professor Dr. John Franke and wrote a rough draft of a book introducing contextual theology to the typical people who attend church. John gave me a reading list, discussed the main ideas of the book at length, and then offered his support throughout the book proposal process.

He put me in touch with several acquisition editors who looked over my drafts, but both editors decided to pass on my project. Over lunch with a local pastor, I learned about a literary agent who represented another author I respected. I dropped the agent a line, he responded with enthusiasm, and we were off.

Two years later I had my first book deal, several other projects in the editorial pipeline, and a whole mess of lessons to learn about the publishing business and writing a book—lessons that I will share in the following chapters.

In the fall of 2008 my book *Coffeehouse Theology* released to a nice review from *Publisher's Weekly*, several positive reviews in major Christian periodicals, and an economic meltdown. My release date of September 15th coincided with the collapse of the investment bank Bear Stearns.

My family has always boasted about having the worst luck.

It sold well out of the gate, but soon lagged off in 2009. I didn't break any records for sales. Lady poverty became my publishing companion once again.

Nevertheless, I had an inbox full of e-mails from family, friends, and strangers asking me about the book publishing process—some were almost sheepish and ashamed to even consider such an undertaking. They had ideas, outlines, or drafts, and were curious about the next step.

I couldn't tell them how to write a bestseller. However, I could offer them a basic path to publishing. They needed a simple introduction to publishing and what would be expected of them. I realized that I could offer that. By the time I wrote my eleventh e-mail along those lines, I realized that I needed to give potential authors some more substantial help.

What This Book Offers

I look at myself as a bridge builder who helps connect potential authors with a viable way to share their ideas, hopefully in print, with the public. That image came to mind while we were living on a lovely dirt road near one of the most photographed covered bridges in New England. While praying one morning I had a sense of calling to build bridges. Ever since then I've embraced that calling and have been building bridges for Christians with theology, prisoners with the Bible, and now authors with publishing.

While I myself can't cover every single bridge or path to publishing, I can offer what I've learned from others and what has worked for me. I wrote this book imagining that I was sitting across from a friend at a café, explaining what I did in order to publish and covering some options that my friend may want to consider.

In addition, I have invested significant time into reading the latest articles and keeping up on trends and innovations of this industry. After releasing my first book I also passed through several unusual situations that give me insight into the worst fears of many authors—things that may make them never want to write another word. So while I can't tell you everything you need to know about writing a book that will sky-rocket to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list, those who are looking into publishing will find this path a good first step. In

order to round out my own experiences, I will also include lessons from other published authors in brief case study sections.

Keep in mind that while I'll focus primarily on my lessons in the nonfiction world, some of these will cross over for fiction. Fiction writers can certainly learn a lot about preparing for publishing, writing, networking, and marketing, but s marketing plans and book proposals for fiction books will be quite different from nonfiction projects.

I believe that writers of most nonfiction book topics will find this book a helpful first step in developing a publishing battle plan before seeking advice more specific to their fields of expertise. I'm focusing on the big picture in publishing, helping writers sort out which path to choose, and then explaining concrete steps they need to take.

Learn About Other Paths

Since publishing is a changing industry, I would encourage you to sign up for my monthly E-Newsletter at www.edcyz.com to stay in the loop on major trends and tools that may arise. In my newsletter I'll pass along updates from top publishing blogs, additional writing resources, and new tips from my own blog.

I hope to continue sharing my own lessons in publishing and the experiences of others on my web site and in my newsletter. Should I need to add any updates to this book, you'll be the first to know if you're a subscriber.

When you visit www.pathtopublishing.com, be sure to click on the "Other Paths" page. On that page you'll find advice from authors, editors, publicists, agents, and other publishing professionals, as well as links to their web sites. There are many different paths to publishing, and this page will give you additional perspectives and resources.

When You Are Done This Book

By the time you're done reading this book I hope that you'll take action. This book should help "you the reader" take the next step toward becoming "you the writer." In fact, I hope you'll find it irresistible.

That doesn't mean you'll necessarily have a big-money book deal or even a contract with a tiny publishing house. However, I hope you'll begin finding your own path into publishing. You may follow in my footsteps or you may set out on your own way.

Whatever it looks like, the day after you finish this book should involve a first step toward publishing. Perhaps it will consist of e-mailing your idea to a trusted friend or industry professional. Maybe you'll sign up for a writing course or begin researching publishers and agents. Then again, you may be hungry for more information about writing or publishing, and so you'll pick up a book or magazine to take you deeper into the process.

The goal of every writer is to communicate an idea to readers—a specific audience. You can do that in a multitude of ways that include blogs, ebooks, self-publishing, and traditional routes. Determining the idea, the means of communicating it, and the target audience will be up to you. This book will help you take these steps on your own path to publishing.

Action Steps

In each chapter I will include a series of action steps that will help you figure out what to do next. I know that a book like this can feel like information overload, and I admit that publishing requires a lot of work. However, it is very possible to do if you're committed to the long haul and keep chipping away at each part of

it. By completing these action steps you'll be able to take your first steps down your own path to publishing. If you work through each action step you may be surprised with just how much progress you've made by the time you put this book down.

Chapter One

Preparing for Publishing

You may think you're ready to show your work to the world, or you may be terrified. Most of us identify with the latter category at one point or another. I know I did.

I had a book idea that took four years to publish. During those four years I was rejected by five different publishers. Some of them didn't find my idea worthwhile, others didn't think I had enough credentials to write on it, and still others had too many other proposals that looked better.

The details involved in publishing can be overwhelming, so we'll start with a brief overview of a few ways you can prepare yourself for the world of publishing.

Determine Your Goals

While your publishing goals can change over time, it is important to take stock of your goals and expectations at the start of the publishing process. Are you aiming to simply spread information that will help people? Are you looking to start a career in writing, to gather an additional credential for your field of work, to entertain readers, or to initiate societal change?

How you answer these questions will in large part determine the path to publishing you'll choose. Convictions and goals will rule out certain publishers

and make others more attractive. In addition, these goals will determine how you define success for your book. Perhaps publishing an ebook will be enough to spread the ideas of some authors, while others are aiming for a certain level of distribution and authority behind their books that comes with a large house. Other writers simply want a hard copy of their ideas to hand out or sell among friends or colleagues.

Action Step

List three outcomes that you expect from publishing.

Prepare for Rejection

There are too many authors with too many proposals out there for everyone to succeed. Publishing is a tough business where turning a profit has become increasingly difficult. Publishers receive more proposals than they could possibly accept, and therefore you'll need to be sure your project stands out from the crowd and is clearly recognizable as a marketable product.

However, even if you hit every nail on the head, you can expect to receive your fair share of rejections. After my first book deal (a book with two study guides), I didn't have a guarantee that my future projects would sell due to market conditions and the nature of one proposal's topic—it had a lot of competition. I still had to learn that the rejections in the publishing world always outnumber the acceptances.

Writers such as Stephen King and J. K. Rowling had to walk to their mailboxes and open up a series of rejection letters before landing their first book

deals. This is an almost unbearable prospect for some first-time authors. However, look at it this way: Success in publishing technically requires only one acceptance, even if it is preceded by five, ten, or twenty rejections. A book's content, your marketing platform and hard work, the publisher's marketing, and society's trends will determine how well it sells.

Speaking of a marketing platform, agents and editors often say that a strong platform is essential for the proposals they accept, but many new writers may not know what a platform is. Let me take a moment to explain this before moving on to the next point. According to Kristina Katz, author of *Get Known Before the Book Deal*, "A strong platform includes things like a Web presence, classes you teach, media contacts you've established, articles you've published, public speaking services you offer and any other means you currently have for making your name (and your future works) known to your readership."¹ Many publishing veterans can tell you that publishing isn't just about writing a book anymore. Thankfully, these are all things you can learn how to do, that is, if you keep reading.

Prepare for Scrutiny, Critique, and Revision

If your book isn't rejected outright, there's at least a good chance that your first draft is terrible. First time authors simply don't have the experience of writing for publication and may need a lot of help to get their manuscripts up to snuff.

I once handed a copy of *Coffeehouse Theology* to an aspiring writer and wrote inside the cover, "Remember that your book's first draft can never be worse than my first draft of this book."

In the first round of edits for that book I had to rewrite chapters, delete one, and rethink the way I approached my audience. Thankfully my editor helped me

keep an ideal reader in mind—a trick that helped me to connect with my intended audience.

Don't let calls for major revisions and strong critiques of your writing scare you away from publishing or ruin the triumph of securing a book deal. It can be humbling when an editor slashes sentences, paragraphs, and even whole chapters, but remember these professionals understand how to communicate ideas clearly with readers.

I like to say that I never wrote a sentence I couldn't delete. Writers from William Faulkner to Stephen King say, "Kill your darlings." You get the idea.

Writing a solid book requires a lot of scribbles, deletions, and revisions. In a sense, I hope you can at least find a little bit of freedom in this. Hand in your best work by all means, but never fool yourself into thinking you've perfected it on your own. Ernest Hemmingway once wrote to F. Scott Fitzgerald, "I write one page of masterpiece to ninety one pages of shit."²

Promote Yourself

Publishing requires promoting yourself and your ideas. An author needs to believe in his/her message and in his/her ability to communicate it with others. Writing a book takes the confidence to speak with some level of authority on a topic, and promoting it involves convincing others that your book is worth their time.

My agent once told me that writing the book is only half of the work in publishing. Marketing it makes up the other half. I confess that I've had a hard time accepting that end of the bargain: going out to speak about the book and sticking myself in front of others.

Thankfully it isn't that hard to read a book and talk about it for a few minutes in front of a group. If you love your ideas and stories, then it shouldn't be unreasonable to talk about them in front of an audience.

If you don't want to travel much further than your computer or a local café after wrapping up your book, then perhaps you need to reevaluate your goals and plans for publishing.

Authors should spend several years building up networks of friends, bloggers, media contacts, and influencers who can help sell their work. Marketing expert Seth Godin says authors should spend about three years building up a tribe who will be interested in their work.³

Look to the Long Haul

The publishing world deals in years, not in months or days; much of this process will take years of preparation. Editors can take anywhere from one to three months to reply to book proposals in the best of circumstances. The process of writing, editing, and preparing for printing can take roughly a year to unfold.

Simply putting together a winning proposal with both a compelling book idea and a worthwhile marketing platform will require a significant investment in research, writing, and relationships.

Plan your life accordingly and celebrate each small gain. Very few authors rise to success quickly.

Pray for Luck

I landed my first book deal because a publisher was looking to expand into new topics—I matched their needs perfectly at the time. By the time we were working on our next project together, their focus had shifted once again.

This time I found myself outside of their plans.

You can't underestimate the importance of timing and luck in the writing business. Writers can't always blame themselves for tough breaks nor can they always take full credit for their success. That being said, it's rarely an accident that a book is published. There are concrete steps writers can take to draw attention to their proposals and to make editors take notice.

Action Steps

What intimidates you most about publishing?

What can you do to address those concerns?

What kinds of books sell best in your area of publishing interest?

Additional Reading

For suggested books, articles, and resources, visit the "Resource" page at www.pathtopublishing.com.

¹ Kristina Katz, "How to Build a Marketing Platform," *Writer's Digest*, July 29, 2009.

<http://www.writersdigest.com/article/how-to-build-a-marketing-platform/> (Accessed February 22, 2010).

² Ernest Hemmingway, *Selected Letters 1917-1961*, Carlos Baker, Editor (New York: Scribner, 2003). 408. <http://bit.ly/do6di6>. (Accessed March 22, 2010).

³ Seth Godin, "Advice for Authors," *Seth Godin's Blog*,

http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2006/08/advice_for_auth.html (Accessed February 22, 2010).