

# **A Path to Publishing**

## **Practical Advice on Publishing a Book**

By Ed Cyzewski

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# Introduction

So, you've decided that you want to publish a book. Everyone said you have it in you, and now you're going for it. Congratulations. You are now setting out on what may well 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 platforms and name recognition are critical.

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.

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 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 platforms 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 saying in chapter one. To put it lightly, 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 Shakespeare plays. I always tell my friends that book publishing is the most impressive thing you can do while earning below the poverty line.

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

After he 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's job went a long way toward paying the bills and keeping us afloat.

I also needed a guide to help me through the process. During my last semester at seminary I met with my professor John Franke and wrote a rough draft of a book introducing theology that is formed in a context. 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 and decided to pass over the course of the following years. 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.

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 15<sup>th</sup> coincided with the collapse of investment bank Bear Stearns.

My family has always boasted having the worst luck.

Nevertheless, it sold well out of the gate, but soon lagged off in 2009. I could at least say I sold through my first print run, but after that 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 or to rise to the heights of a bestseller list. 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 Ebook Offers**

In 2007 we purchased a modest ranch house in Vermont<sup>1</sup> just down the road from Normal Rockwell's former home and studio. Rockwell had a sweet farm house on a lovely dirt road directly across from one of the most photographed covered bridges in New England.

While praying one morning I had a sense of calling and that bridge came to mind. At that point in my life, and perhaps for the rest of it, God called me to build bridges. While writing my first book *Coffeehouse Theology* I aimed to build bridges between Christians and the practice of theology, while also reconciling divisive camps among Christians who divide regarding the place of cultural context in theology. One wise professor of mine shared that the "covered" nature of that bridge may be a prophetic symbol of needing shelter from the resulting... droppings... that may come in response to my efforts.

The bridge image stuck, and I've realized that I need to build bridges in more places than theology. I also needed to build bridges between potential authors and 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. In addition, I have invested significant time into reading the latest articles and keeping up on trends and innovations. Those who are completely new to publishing will find this path a good first step.

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<sup>1</sup> We have since sold that house so my wife can pursue a PhD in English Literature.

I will also include insights from other published authors, whether editorially or in brief case study sections. Thanks to online networking and the generosity of other writers, I have had the privilege of connecting with fellow writers who have been a tremendous help in my own endeavors.

By including brief snapshots of their own journeys through publishing, I hope to round out my limited perspective and experiences.

## **For the Free Version: Why This Ebook is Free**

### *Easy Distribution*

This book is free because I hope to help as many writers as possible find their place in the world of publishing. I know how tough it is, and believe me, it's still a hard gig even after you've been listed in the Library of Congress.

Prospective authors also invest significant time and finances into publishing right from the start. I believe the front end of that process should be as simple and cheap as possible for prospective writers to explore before they begin purchasing books or attending workshops. A book like this will help writers critically consider their goals, ideas, and resources before they take the next step.

## **How You Can Stay in the Loop**

This book is also a communal effort, and to that end I would encourage you to sign up for my monthly E-Newsletter to stay in the loop. In that newsletter I'll give updates on the book, additional writing resources, and information on my latest projects.

I hope to continue sharing my own lessons in publishing and the experiences of others on my web site and in my newsletter. When an updated version of this book appears, you'll be the first to know about it if you're a subscriber.

## **When You're Done Reading This Book**

By the time you're done reading this book I hope that more than anything else 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 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 be 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 a reader—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.