

# The Publisher's Plan

By Steve O'Keefe

The main reason authors don't understand what publishers do is that we fail to tell them. If authors understood the publishing process, there would be less whining, fewer resources spent on low-return activities such as direct mail, and greater resources spent on high-return activities such as publicity.

A big step in improving relations with authors would be to provide a "Publishing Plan" document similar to the one shown here. For each activity in the publishing process, the author should be told the name of the person responsible, the direct phone number or e-mail address for that person, and a target date for completion.

Beyond that, publishers should send authors proof of performance on a regular basis. Editorial departments are pretty good at this, sending page proofs, cover art, and galleys. But marketing departments are notoriously poor communicators. How many authors get sent the marketing plan or sales information sheets for their books? Do you send summaries of sales conference results to authors? Do you send copies of your catalog pages, or co-op ads, or ads that run in trade catalogs? Trade marketing activities are almost invisible to authors, which is why they think you're "doing nothing" to market their books.

If you presented an author's book at sales conferences, why not send them a note about it? If your sales reps presented the book to buyers, why not send authors excerpts from the report? If you are exhibiting the book at BEA, ALA, or other trade shows, why don't you tell the author? Publishers spend months preparing the sales channels for a new book, but authors see little or none of this, and fail to appreciate the importance of priming the pump to the successful launch of a book.

Even publicity departments, who understand the importance of the clipping process, fail to send endorsements, reviews, listings, ads, or other

mentions of the author's book. Over a decade ago, when I worked in publicity for a small publisher, part of my job was to photocopy every single ad, endorsement, review, or other mention of every book we published, and send a copy to each author involved. It was rainy-day work, tedious and time-consuming, but it meant a great deal to the authors, who frequently reported that other publishers never sent them any clippings.

A particular sore point for me is that publishers typically purchase all rights to a work, and then sit on everything except the print publication rights. If they are buying foreign language rights, then they ought to have a plan to market them. Same goes for electronic rights, screenplay rights, etc. But if they're marketing these rights at all, authors seldom hear about it until a sale hits the royalty statement. Why don't publishers tell authors how they plan to market these rights, and then send proof that they followed the plan? Why can't you say, "We've taking your book to Frankfurt," and then show a catalog listing for it, or send the author excerpts from notes taken at meetings with rights buyers?

I can only imagine publishers rolling their eyes, thinking if they told authors they were going to do all this stuff, then authors might hold them to it. Or authors might try to "interfere" in the process, by contacting foreign publishers or agents, for example, and encouraging them to look at the book at Frankfurt. And that is exactly why relations are strained between publishers and authors. Because publishers don't want to be accountable to authors, and they don't want authors interfering with their work. It is easier to keep authors in the dark than risk their meddling.

And that's why so many authors are taking a financial hit to experiment with self-publishing, electronic publishing, working with book packagers,

and working with micro-publishers. They are sick of being left in the dark about their own books, having their suggestions ignored, and being isolated from the marketing process.




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## The Publishing Plan

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Wouldn't it be nice if publishers provided contact information for the people responsible for each of these activities, along with target dates for completion? Wouldn't it be nice if they provided authors with proof of performance?

### Design

- Interior Design
- Cover Design
- Illustrations
- Front Matter / End Matter

### Editing

- Content Editing
- Copy Editing
- Page Proofs
- Final Page Proofs

### Trade Marketing

- Info/Sales Sheet
- Marketing Plan
- Back Cover Copy
- Catalog Copy
- Sales Conference Reports

### Publicity

- Press Kit Proofs
- Galleys Available
- Endorsements Sought
- Galley Mailing to Media

### Trade Show Marketing

- BEA
- ALA
- Regional Shows

### Rights Marketing

- Foreign Language Rights
- Serial Rights
- Electronic Rights

### Special Markets

- Custom Editions
- Textbook Adoption
- Gift Store Marketing
- Specialty Retailer Marketing

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