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Target Your Book Carefully To Hit The Bullseye of Your Niche Readers

By Charles Jacobs

You're about to write a book. You've waited a long time for this opportunity. Perhaps you've just graduated from college. Or perhaps you're writing in your retirement, and now have the chance to make your dream come true. Make certain you take every step necessary to ensure that your initial attempt at writing will be successful.

Have you taken the time to ask yourself some probing questions that will sharpen your aim and hit the bullseye? That elusive bullseye contains an audience waiting eagerly to hear what you have to say?

Thinking It Through

Whether you're writing fiction or nonfiction, two first steps are critical to heading you in the right direction. Take the time to carefully think through what it is you plan to write and why you've decided to craft this specific book. Set aside the romance and the excitement that always accompanies the inspiration for a new book. Make certain you fully understand the goal you set for yourself in tackling this project?

With that information, you can then think through the second major concern: Who is the reader that you're trying to reach? Is the market broad enough to make worthwhile all the effort you must put in? Indeed, is there a market at all? Head to the library and check out *Books in Print* to determine the books that have been written on your topic. How does your approach differ? Is it unique enough to add to the list of books already published on the subject?

Rest assured your topic has appeared in print over and over again. Originality isn't determined by the subject you pick. No subject is original. Hundreds of thousands of books have been published over the centuries since man first transcribed thoughts to paper. What is original—and compelling to information seekers—is the way in which you treat that subject.

Many, many books have been published on gardening, for example. On beautifying your home's landscaping; tending a small, backyard vegetable patch; or raising bountiful crops commercially. But when the first treatise on organic gardening went to press, it launched a brand new approach that affected both hobbyists and commercial growers, and spawned hundreds, perhaps thousands, more books targeted to health devotees and food purists.

Targeting Your Book

Obviously, it is much easier to target a nonfiction book. The very information offered on its pages determines the audience. But this can be done with fiction as well. Watch the trends. What subjects are being used as settings for the most popular reads? Are they about crimes and courtrooms, as Grisham's books were for a period of time? Are the main characters members of the corporate or high finance communities? Is a specific locale appearing with regularity in successful novels? Analyzing these trends will help you strike that oh-so-important readership bullseye.

When one after another, corporate leaders were charged with gross mismanagement designed to fill their own private coffers, bookstore shelves swelled with nonfiction recounting these abuses. What a perfect time to craft your novel about a dedicated whistle-blower who risked his/her own future to publicize the malfeasance of the top management.

I am not advocating that you sell your soul to the marketplace. There must be integrity in the choice of topics you pick. But it certainly spurs sales if that choice has relevance to the issues that are making headlines and capturing the interest of millions.

Tell the story you want to relate, but add elements to your characters that are relevant to current interests. Perhaps your protagonist can be a soldier who has just returned from combat overseas or possibly a spouse who is anxiously awaiting his/her mate's return from a war zone. You might consider making one of your people an AIDS sufferer or cancer victim. Or in a totally different vein, why can't a primary character be a veteran of a pop TV program similar to *American Idol* or a participant in one of the reality shows.

Reaping the Harvest

Of course, hitting the bullseye means success. Your marketing of the book must be meticulously geared to reaching your target audience. In many cases, that means abandoning glorious dreams of bestseller listings and huge sales to vast audiences. Niche marketing...sending that arrow directly to the bullseye audience...is the key to success for every writer, teenager to retiree.

For every subject, there are thousands of hungry readers longing for information. Whether you write on a hobby, politics, house painting, scuba diving, ancient Greece—you pick the subject—they're waiting for you. But your challenge is making them aware that a new book with unique information is available.

That task has become much easier these days with the help of that superb tool—the Internet. Done properly, mounting your own web site packed with information on the subject and using the new tools of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to help Web surfers find it, will translate to thousands of book sales. Supplementing that by reaching out to publications that deal with the subject and tapping into every avenue that leads to your target audience will guarantee success.

So ready, aim, shoot! You've now got the arrows. Hit that bullseye. It's yours for the doing.