A Beginner's Guide to Successful Technical Publishing

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Thor Projects

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Cover Photo

Barnegat Lighthouse; Barnegat, NJ; taken by the author in June of 2000.

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Being an author has a certain mystique to it. It's sort of like the great American dream. You sit in your office, or on the beach, busily typing away. You listen to the voices in your head reading off the words, sentences, and paragraphs of the book much like the lyrics of your favorite song.

Although technical publishing isn't quite like producing the great American novel, it's still a prestigious thing. The first time that you see your name on the cover of a book, it will give you a boost. The boost that you get may be like one you have never felt before, and may not ever feel again.

But that's the vision, it's the dream. In reality, to get started on your first technical work, you need to understand how technical publishing works and know what you're going to write about. The goal of this eBook is to share with you the components of the technical publishing processes and the techniques that you need to know to be successful at it.

Although this eBook focuses on a "printed book" final product, you will learn all your options for writing, including the advantages and disadvantages of each option. This focus is appropriate because most people anticipate writing a book when they start thinking about technical publishing. Don't worry if that's not your goal, however; the eBook contains plenty of information about other publishing options.

The first part of this eBook explains your publishing options and gets you to the point where you're ready to negotiate a contract for your work.

The second part of this eBook explains typical clauses within a contract and identifies what is, and is not, flexible within a contract. The discussion then turns to setting schedules and establishing how you will deliver your material. Then you learn about the publishing process (specifically, what happens to the material and how that impacts you). The second part concludes with tips, techniques, problems that you are likely to encounter, and advice about how to survive the publishing process.

The third part of this eBook explains your responsibility for promoting your work. More than any other, this part of the eBook will help you be successful, by enabling you to sell more copies of your work, and ultimately make more money.

Part 1: The Lay of the Land

This section of the eBook helps you to understand the lay of the publishing landscape. It reviews the different venues for which you might write and identifies other roles that you can play in the publishing process, besides that of author. You also learn where Acquisitions Editors look for new authors. This section concludes by explaining the skills that you can use to get an assignment after you've made contact with an Acquisitions Editor.

The goal here is to try to dispel any misconceptions that you have about the publishing process and to expose you to options that you can use to "get your feet wet" in technical publishing. Many a potential author has drown by jumping head first into the process. (I suppose it should be noted that there are some successes as well.)

Different Venues for Your Writing

When I say "technical publishing," most people think of their name on the front cover of a book, going on talk show tours, and swarms of people wanting their autograph in the copy of the book they just purchased.

I suppose that those things do happen for some people, but it's much more likely that you'll continue your life as it was before the book was published. You'll drive the same car to the same job, and still be married to the same person. (Although I must admit that the thought of a supermodel wife isn't a bad dream.)

For most people, setting out to write a complete book as a first foray into technical publishing is ill-advised. Although on the surface writing might seem to be something simple to do, when you're working on longer material and when working collaboratively (which is always the case when writing a technical book), some tough issues will inevitably arise.

As elaborated on in the second part of this eBook, most people have trouble sustaining writing for long periods of time, particularly when they're working long hours with little sleep because they're trying to write while continuing to work and continuing to be a part of their family. For now, let's focus on the first steps into the publishing waters, the relatively easy steps, and advance step-by-step from the small endeavors to progressively harder tasks. The next few sections progressively identify more challenging publishing opportunities.

EMail Newsletters

Some newsletters can mean money for you, but most of them are just a way to get exposure. Newsletters are sometimes part of a web site, or more accurately a marketing method used for web sites. Sometimes users groups and/or other dedicated people compile them. The next section covers email newsletters for web sites. Authors are often contracted to write for a specific web site, and then that material, in whole or part, is included in an email newsletter.

Writing for email newsletters is most often just a stepping stone to doing something that pays (or pays better). The nice thing is that most newsletter editors are desperate for content, so getting them to accept your idea for an article is likely to be quite easy. This fact enables you to write based almost entirely on your own thoughts and interests. When you move on to writing that pays, you'll generally lose a little bit of control over your topics.

Email newsletters also generally offer the widest variety of lengths. Although article lengths for a newsletter are often shorter than those for a web site or magazine, they are frequently more flexible. Articles for a newsletter may be as few as 300 words, and may extend to beyond 4,000 words. This flexibility helps you to get used to how much your writing "weighs." You'll get used to how many words your thoughts take up. And you'll get a chance to play around with making articles longer and shorter to fit your own targets. Email newsletters are a good "training ground" where you can hone your writing skills, before moving on.

Web Sites

Perhaps the easiest entry point into technical publishing these days is your favorite technical web site. If the site is run by a company and periodically posts articles, chances are that they have a budget for buying articles. If your favorite web site doesn't fit this description, you'll want to find one that does. They really are a useful vehicle.

Web sites are a good proving ground for a few reasons. The most notable is that most established authors won't be competing with you for these kinds of opportunities. Because web sites typically pay less than other for-pay writing endeavors, they are frequently not sought out by established authors.

Web site articles are roughly the same length (2,000–4,000 words) as a magazine article, however, and in some cases more people see them than see a magazine article because these are often freely available to

anyone with a web browser. Therefore, even though you might have to write about the same amount of material as you would if you were writing for a magazine, you may find that more people actually read your article.

One of the other benefits of writing for a web site is that your contributor profile normally stays available on the site long after your article is gone. This can be an important point if your goal is to work on publicity, or to move on to other kinds of writing.

Be aware that when writing for a web site, you might not know when the article will be posted, and most of the time you won't be paid until the article is published. Although you might think that an article should be posted as soon as you make it available to the site, this doesn't always happen. Article placement is often based on the availability of the webmaster's time, the revenue the site is generating, and the available space. (After all, webmasters don't want to retire articles from their home page position before their relevant lifetime expires.)

In addition, because web sites generally have less-focused editorial objectives, it's often easier to find articles that you'll enjoy writing and that the site wants/needs. After you gain confidence writing and meeting the flexible publishing criteria in the email newsletter arena, you can move on to the more restrictive magazine format.

Magazines

Writing for magazines is probably the sweet spot in the writing domain. For the amount of time invested in writing, magazines generally offer the highest pay. Unfortunately, these assignments are often the hardest to come by because of this. The professional authors, those who spend 80% or more of their time writing, tend to gobble up these opportunities as quickly as they can.

The positive side is that magazines constantly search for new, creative, and interesting ideas for their readers. As a result, a new person who has unique knowledge of a subject area often has a good chance to convince the Acquisitions Editor at a magazine to buy one of his or her articles.

Most of the money in magazine writing comes from writing articles, although after you've written several articles, perhaps you will even get a column. Another way to enter the magazine market is to write reviews. They're treated differently from editorial articles, and pay slightly less than an article. The neat part is that you'll get a chance to play with new hardware. The bad part is it may take a bit of convincing to get to write a review.

Articles generally pay between $500 and $2,500 per article, although many are based on a per-word rate. Reviews generally pay between $200 and $500 for a 400-word review. Although this might not seem like much money, consider that a magazine article doesn't normally take more than a few days to write (at the most).

If you decide that this is where you want to try to make your mark, be prepared for a lot of rejections until you're established with a magazine.

Books

As discussed earlier, books are what most people think of when they think about technical publishing. However, writing a book is not the most profitable part of the writing spectrum for most people. Unless you can find a project that sells well, and is done on a royalty contract, you'll probably find that writing a book is less profitable than writing for any of the other venues previously discussed.

Finding a book to write isn't generally that hard. Acquisitions Editors are always clamoring for people because they know that book writing is rarely the most profitable thing that a technical writer can do. The pay rate for a book is approximately $20 per page. Compare this with the $1,000 to write a magazine article that's four or so pages in length, and the pay scale difference becomes clear.

One of the other issues is the sheer amount of words that must be written when writing a book. A 30-page chapter might mean 13,500 words. (I opened a chapter from a book that I wrote and rounded the numbers.)

Most technical books are at least 250–300 pages. That means that you're talking about 135,000 words for a small book. The typical technical book size is 600 pages (270,000 words) and the largest titles can be 1,500 pages (675,000 words).

Compare this with the 1,500 to 4,000 words in a typical magazine article or web site article and you can see just how big a difference that writing a book can be. Suddenly you're not talking about something that can be done in a few hours or a few days. You're now talking about months and months of work.

The sheer amount of effort required to complete a project is something that you should consider before taking on a book. I'll show you some techniques that you can use to help maintain your motivation while working on book projects if you decide you're willing to take it on.

Self-Publishing

Although technically self-publishing could probably be put in the same category as book publishing, I think it's important that you realize that there's a different way. Although writing a book may be difficult, it's sometimes just as difficult, or more difficult, to settle on a publishing idea that you and the publisher think will sell (and that is within your experience).

Self-publishing used to be an expensive process. You had to take on the editing costs as well as the actual printing costs. Although the editing costs generally were just several thousand dollars, the printing costs could easily run into the tens of thousands of dollars. For most people, that was a big risk to take, even if they were fairly sure that their book would sell. Add to that the difficulty of getting a bookstore to stock your book and you can see why self-publishing was such a difficult thing.

The advent of the Internet and secure electronic documents has changed the self-publishing landscape. Today you can create documents (such as this one), compile them with software, secure them with a key, and distribute them. Instead of the expensive publishing costs, and the difficulty of getting the books stocked in bookstores, you can focus your attention on writing the material. The editing can be outsourced as it was before, but the "printing" process is as simple as outputting the file to PDF. A distribution site, such as MightyWords.com, then secures the document and makes it available on their servers for an amount that you specify. You'll get a percentage of the purchase price each time someone pays for and downloads the document.

The beauty is that your startup costs are much lower than traditional self-publishing, both in terms of time and in terms of costs. Currently, online publishers are not charging fees to get your self-published eBooks on their sites, although it's possible that this may start soon. They make their money by helping you to sell your eBook.

One interesting point is that most eBooks are shorter than traditional books because they are more focused. When a traditional publisher participates in the outline of a book, they often want to ensure that the book will fit a wide variety of audiences so that they can sell thousands and thousands of copies of the same book. The cost of producing a book is so substantial and the per-imprint cost is so low that they want to do everything that they can to get as many sales as possible.

Although it's obvious that you want to sell copies of an eBook, just as the publisher does for a book that they print, you are often less inclined to write about topics that may have marginal value to the core audience. As a result, eBooks tend to be shorter, typically between 20 and 100 pages in length. Ultimately this means that many fewer words must be written for an eBook than for a traditional printed book.

The one other caveat to this form of publishing is that you don't have the marketing department of a publisher or the presence on bookstore shelves to help sell books, therefore you should expect lower sales of an eBook than of a traditional book. A counter argument has it that the ease of getting an eBook results in sales that a traditional book wouldn't be able to elicit. Although true, this doesn't yet seem to be substantial enough to overcome the exposure limitations.

Other Publishing Opportunities

I mentioned in the introduction to this part that writing is just one of the parts of the technical publishing process with which you might want to become familiar. Although writing is the most frequently considered role within the publishing process, it's not always the best place to start your publishing experience.

If you've convinced yourself that you want to work on a book, but you're scared by the shear number of words that you'll have to write, consider one of the editing roles that book publishers use to help ensure that the book is valuable to the reader. These roles are discussed in the following sections.

Tech Editor

Most people recognize that authors should be the experts on the subject matter they are writing about. Although most of the time this is true, authors are sometimes selected for their previous writing experience, and not for their expertise of a subject matter. Other times the author claims to be an expert on a particular technology, but may not be.

It is the job of the Technical Editor to ensure the accuracy of the material being written. Although most publishers ask the Technical Editors to confine their "edits" to comments between paragraphs, a few even allow the Technical Editor to edit the author's material.

In either case, the primary mission of the Technical Editor is to ensure accuracy. One of the other jobs of the Technical Editor is to identify things that the author left out but that are important to the topic at hand. If the author is talking about New York landmarks and left out the *Statue of Liberty*, for example, it would be the Tech Editor's job to make note of this.

Some publishers have started using two, or in extreme cases three, Technical Editors on a project. The hope being that what one technical editor misses, another will find. This means that there's often a lot of technical editing available, and most of the time the only requirement is that you know the subject matter.

Being a Technical Editor is perhaps one of the highest paid positions in all of publishing. With pay rates ranging from $1.50 to more than $5.00 per page, you can make some good money just verifying the accuracy of someone else's work. If you work for $2.00/page and you can do 30 pages an hour, which should be reasonable once you get used to it, you can make approximately $60/hour. Although it might not be a high paying consulting rate, you can do the work at your own leisure, within the timeframes the publisher prescribes, and you can do it in your favorite sweats.

Your name appears in the book as the Technical Editor, so you can still show your friends your work. And sometimes, you will get a special "interrupter" on the cover of the book indicating that you've ensured that the material is timely and accurate. This used to be common with Sams publishing; however, I've seen other publishers doing this as well.

Copy Editor

If you were to ask my English teachers and professors over the years if I would ever become an author, I think most of them would say that there's no chance of that ever happening. Not that I blame them really; my use of the English language has never been described, by anyone, as mastery.

Oh sure, I can get my point across to most people, but sometimes my sentence structure stinks, and I've picked the wrong word more than once. (Do you know the difference between *affected* and *effected*?) The end result is that my language can be smoothed out a little to support better understanding by the reader.

If you're nothing like me, it's possible to get the opportunity to work as a Copy Editor. This role is focused on making the English of the text "right." Copy Editors put in the correct comma and rearrange sentences, or even move paragraphs of text around, to make things flow better. By and large, I have a great deal

of respect for these people. With very little or no knowledge of the subject matter, they often do an admirable job of making the material read better.

Copy editing is something that can be profitable as well, but it does require an excellent grasp of the English language, and the discipline to edit something that you may know very little about. For most of you reading this eBook, I presume that this isn't your forte.

Development Editor

The Development Editor role is perhaps the hardest role to describe because it means different things to different publishers, and two developers within a single publisher may have two completely different ideas of the part they play in the creation of a book.

I wholeheartedly believe that the Development Editor has an important spot in the development of material. They fill a critical gap in the development of material. The Development Editor does three things:

- Ensures adherence to series guidelines
- Corrects structural and writing issues in the material
- Trains the author

Although we've not talked about series yet, they are just a collection of books that are supposed to have the same look and feel. One can think of them as a brand in that they should convey a consistent message to the audience. Series have similar or identical elements (notes, tips, sidebars, summaries, and so on) in them, and often follow a specific writing style.

Perhaps the most popular series in technical publishing today is the yellow and black series by Hungry Minds, Inc. (formerly IDG). The series is of course the . . .*For Dummies* series. The rules for writing in this series are fairly strict, and the Development Editors for Hungry Minds, Inc. make sure that authors adhere to them.

A practical example might be that some series require that certain elements, such as a summary, be present in each chapter. If you neglect a summary, the Development Editor will put a note in the chapter reminding you to provide this element.

The second role of the Development Editor is to correct "major" problems with the material. That is to say, they are responsible for helping authors structure their thoughts in a way that can be understood by the reader. Material can have two basic structural problems. The first is that the author jumbles up several thoughts into one sentence or one paragraph, and doesn't lay out for the reader a clear path to follow. The second is an arrangement of topics in the material that doesn't support the reader's learning.

The first case, in which the author jumbles a few thoughts into one sentence or a paragraph, is something quite typical of new authors. They have so much to stay, and all the thoughts try to get out at the same time. It's the Development Editor's job to help the author to understand how to slow the thoughts down and get them out one at a time. As a result, the material becomes more readable, and the author's points are made more clearly.

The second case, in which material isn't organized in a logical manor, is something that happens to even the most experienced author. It's generally pretty easy to fix; the entire text is rearranged into a new order that makes more logical sense. The only real work is generally left for the author. The author just changes the references in the text to material that comes before or after the text, and also changes the transitional paragraphs. Just like the anti-jumbling process, the reordering of topics within a chapter make it easier for the reader to follow the materials, and thus to higher reader comprehension.

This sometimes takes the form of applying adult learning principles to the material. Adult learning principles basically state that you have to encourage the reader to learn the material by piquing their curiosity, or helping them to understand how the material will apply to them. By applying this concept to the material at

hand, the Development Editor helps to ensure that the reader will get the value out of the information you convey.

The final thing that Development Editors do is to train authors. Although this is necessarily a broad category, it's a reflection of the Development Editor's job to make sure that authors are successful in their writing. Certainly showing an author where he has made structural errors or where his structure is weak will help the author learn what he is doing wrong. However, the Developer Editor's role goes much further into teaching authors to recognize when they might be making structural errors, and techniques that they can use to quickly solve these problems.

A Development Editor is typically someone who's very experienced with writing, someone who has a background in English, linguistics, or learning, or a combination of those skills. Development Editors are a very high value part of the publishing equation because they are like personal mentors for new authors.

Freelance Development Editors generally get paid very well because they have a lot of experience with writing, and they help to make even mediocre authors good authors. Typical pay rates for freelance developers are from $7 to $10 per page. Although getting freelance Development Editor assignment may be lucrative, they're hard to come by because most publishers want to keep their developers on staff to help ensure a level of quality.

Note

I'm considering writing another eBook that talks specifically about the things that Development Editors do, or should look for. The motivation behind this eBook would be to help you learn to write better by helping you understand what to look for in your own writing, before someone else looks at it. If you have an interest in this kind of an eBook, please email me at rob.bogue@thorprojects.com so that I can determine whether there's a market for such an eBook.

Getting Started

Hopefully in laying out the opportunities that exist in technical publishing I didn't make it so overwhelming that you want to run away and forget about the idea of technical publishing. Instead, I hope that you saw the vast number of opportunities that exist within the technical publishing market, and looked upon all the opportunities thinking to yourself how much fun it could be to locate the right opportunities for you.

The next few sections review who to talk to and how your initial contact(s) should go to give you the best opportunity for success. The goal here is to help you with your approach so that you can be more successful.

Submitting a Proposal

When you're talking about being an author, the starting point is almost universally submitting a proposal, or an idea, of some sort to the Acquisitions Editors to see whether they have any interest. This section presents approaches that you might take with web sites and magazines, and how the approach might need to change for a book proposal.

Web/Magazine

Your starting point whenever submitting a proposal is to send off an initial inquiry to the Acquisitions Editor, or webmaster, to determine whether he has any interest in the idea. Because the process of creating a proposal takes time, you want to minimize the amount of proposals that you're doing that don't lead to contracts.

For most web sites, the author guidelines are posted on the web site. These are the guidelines or rules that the web site uses for all submissions. Typically the guidelines include basic information on how the web site pays, the forms in which deliverables must be submitted, and so on. You want to read these before you submit your inquiry to the webmaster. It might give you valuable insight into what they are looking for, and what kinds of articles they will never accept.

Magazines that have web sites often post their writing guidelines, and sometimes even their editorial calendar. The editorial calendar is the guide that the magazine uses to identify the topics they will be covering in each issue, and sometimes the editorial calendar includes deadline dates. This can help you to focus your inquiry to the Acquisitions Editor. Instead of asking whether the magazine is interested in an article about X, you can ask more specifically whether they want an article about X for the issue of the magazine that will focus on technologies such as X. This also helps you if the technology isn't familiar to the Acquisitions Editor.

When writing your inquiry to the Acquisitions Editor or webmaster, make sure to cover the following points:

- Why this article will be of interest to their readers

- When you can have the article completed

- The proposed title

- A general overview of the article (including the things that it will cover, the approach that it will use, and the things that it won't cover)

- That you have read (or haven't read) the author guidelines

- Your previous writing history (if you have one)

Although it's important that you cover all of the items in this list, try not to write too much. The shorter the message, the more likely you'll receive a response.

Be ready for the response. It might be, "Not now"; or it might be, "Could you do Y rather than X?" Sometimes the vision that you have for the article might not match that of the webmaster or Acquisitions Editor and he might want you to change things slightly to fit his vision of what the article should be. Try not to get locked on your viewpoint for the article, and be open to editorial desires. Generally it's not worth trying to convince them that Y won't be as appealing as X. Just write the article and submit the X idea to another magazine, or wait a while and resubmit it to the same magazine. Sometimes articles that don't seem to make sense the first time they are submitted make more sense after a few months.

Sometimes you'll be asked to provide a writing sample for this kind of work so that the Acquisitions Editor can see what your writing is like. The best thing to do is to point the editor to other things that you've published (if you have anything published.) If you haven't been published yet, you might want to write the article and send that to them. Although you have no guarantee that they will accept it, your only loss is that you would have spent the time writing the article that you might not be able to sell. If you don't end up selling the article, you might want to find a freelance Copy Editor to edit it for you, and give you a few pointers. Although this will cost you a few dollars, it will help you to get future articles accepted.

Book

Submitting a proposal for a book idea is a bit more complicated because there's an expectation that you, as the author, will know the market better than the publishing company. Although starting the process is roughly the same, the process is significantly longer. Once the initial contact is made, you often start discussing the idea with an Acquisitions Editor, convincing the editor that the idea is sound and that you can write about it.

When you're having these conversations with the Acquisitions Editor, you need some numbers, some idea of how much demand there is, or might be, for your proposed book. In the case of established technologies, this will be based on the installed base of the product, as well as any recent press about why the product's market share might be growing. In the case of a brand new technology, it might be industry projections for the technology, the opinions of magazine columnists, or press releases indicating adoption by major corporations.

Your starting point for gathering this information should be to contact the marketing department of the company about whose technology you want to write. If you're writing on an entire industry that's growing, you may want to contact the industry association. Consider doing both of these things before contacting an

Acquisitions Editor. Although most corporate communications and marketing departments are quick to respond, they are not always forthcoming with information until they know there's something in it for their organization.

Trade organizations, because of their not-for-profit (and sometimes volunteer) status, often are harder to reach and stay in contact with. It might take a week or more to get the kind of adoption information that you want from these organizations. Be patient but persistent when trying to obtain this information from an industry association.

The other important piece of data you need is detailed information about competitive titles — in other words, the books on the same or a similar topic already on the market. If there aren't any, you're in luck. You might get the market to yourself. More often than not, however, there is at least one book on the market that will compete with yours. Your Acquisitions Editor will be interested in competitive titles because the more titles competing for the same market, the fewer copies of the book will sell.

The next step is to submit an outline. Most publishers want to see outlines that are at least one level more specific than the chapter titles. This helps them to determine what content will be in each chapter. Sometimes Acquisitions Editors will provide feedback themselves, sometimes they'll send it to their Development Editors for review, and other times they will send it outside for review (which *they* pay for.) In any case, expect to spend a week or several weeks working with the Acquisitions Editor developing an outline with which you can both live.

After you've convinced the Acquisitions Editor that the outline makes sense, you have to write a proposal. Most publishers have proposal templates that you can use to submit the proposal. You can submit the proposal in your own format; by providing the information on their form, however, you can show your willingness to work within their structures, and you'll make it easier for them to find the information they want.

Your Acquisitions Editor will take the outline and proposal to an editorial review board (Ed Board). The people on this board will decide whether the book makes sense for the organization to do. They'll talk about the competition and whether they've got an advantageous position relative to the other titles. It may be based on the length of time the book has been on the market (perhaps it's outdated) or the conversation might wander to the ability of the book to maintain its place on the shelf because of the publishers' relationships with the booksellers. If you're lucky, and the Acquisitions Editor is good, the Ed Board will approve the book.

Once the book is approved, the Acquisitions Editor can sign a contract for it and you can start writing. Contract negotiations are covered in Part 2. In the meantime, it's important to cover some other topics related to getting your first assignment.

Getting an Editing Assignment

Getting an editing assignment for a book project is often easier, and quicker, than going through the outline and proposal process required for writing a book. In many cases, there are even easy links from the publisher web sites for individuals interested in becoming a technical editors. Those links lead to surveys that get forwarded to the people who hire technical editors.

Tech Edit

Although the process differs from publisher to publisher, most Acquisitions Editors can acquire Technical Editors for their books. If they don't have time to acquire Technical Editors, the administrative staff for the publisher may draw upon a pool of known Technical Editors and hire them to perform a technical edit.

The starting point for technical editing is to provide a list of your skills or areas of expertise. You will want to send this list of skills along with contact information to the Acquisitions Editor or to the person that the web site suggests. In the section on "Staying in Touch," you'll learn some ways to continue to engage the Acquisitions Editor after you've sent your list of skills.

Copy Edit

If you think your skills are more suited to copy editing because of your background in English, you'll have a little harder time than trying to find a Technical Editor role. Although publishers use a lot of Copy Editors, getting established takes some work. Your best bet is to contact the Managing Editor of the publisher via email. This can best be done by guessing at what their email address is based on the email addresses you see for other people in the organization. For instance, if you see that Joe Smith's email address is joe.smith@somepub.com, it's reasonable to assume that Jane Doe's email address is jane.doe@somepub.com. You can try this to find the Managing Editor to convince her of your skills.

Development Edit

Getting an assignment to development edit won't happen, unless you've already authored or edited for a publisher. Most of the time, Technical Editors who do a consistently good job at identifying not only the technical errors in the work, but also the structural issues and concerns, will get asked whether they want to help with a development edit.

Frankly, getting development editing work has a lot more to do with your relationship with the Development Editor on projects for which you have been the Technical Editor than on any predefined set of criteria. The Senior Development Editor traditionally has responsibility for hiring outside developers. So you'll want to make that editor your friend if you want to get development contracts.

What to Do If They Call You

Up to this point, the assumption has been that you will need to make the contact with the Acquisitions Editor because you want to write and they don't know that yet. However, that isn't always the case. Often when a publisher lays out their publishing plan, they notice certain titles that they should have to provide a complete list to the market. As a result, the Acquisitions Editor is tasked with finding an author or authors to write the books that the publisher thinks the market needs.

This is more the norm than it might seem. Because the publishers map out quite a few titles, and because, relatively speaking, getting those titles through Ed Board is easier than a new title, they often get quite a bit of the Acquisitions Editor's attention.

The primary differences when an Acquisitions Editor calls you versus when you solicit the editor is that the Acquisitions Editor found you, so your reputation precedes you. You won't need to spend a lot of time convincing her that you're the right person to write the book. Another difference is that you often don't have as much work to do in terms of the proposal. The Acquisitions Editor often does the proposal document for you based on the research that lead the publisher to put it in the publishing plan in the first place.

There's also sometimes a tendency to have easier negotiations with books for which the Acquisitions Editor contacted you. This is due to in part to the simple fact that she needs you, not the other way around. It also is due in part to the fact that it's on the publishing plan, so they have a little more flexibility.

Getting Noticed

If the idea of having an Acquisitions Editor call you sounds appealing, you're not alone. It's the easiest way to write a book. But of course you have to get that call. The following sections talk about the places where Acquisitions Editors go when they're looking for people to write a book, and therefore the best places to become involved to get one to call you.

Professional Organizations

Users groups and professional organizations are always looking for speakers for their meetings, and for authors to write for their newsletters. This is an excellent place to meet people in other organizations and to see how they are approaching some of the same problems that you're having. Your exposure in such an

environment just might attract the attention of an Acquisitions Editor. They are certainly known to frequent such events.

I used to be the president of the Windows NT Users Group of Indianapolis. This group was set up in the mid 90s, when finding support for Windows NT was difficult. During my involvement, we had three different individuals from the local publishing houses come and introduce themselves to the group, looking for people who were interested in writing. A dozen or so more wrote the board of directors looking for members who were interested in writing.

The moral of this story is twofold: 1) Get involved with the local users group, volunteer to serve on the board of directors, or do a presentation before the group. 2) Make sure that the people on the board of directors for the organization know that you're interested in writing. Even if they can't refer you immediately to a publisher, they might give your name out when an Acquisitions Editor contacts them.

Teaching and Speaking

Working with professional organizations is one way to get noticed by an Acquisitions Editor. Another way is through any kind of teaching or speaking. Publishers look for the organizational skills and ability to communicate that is reflected in your ability and willingness to speak in front of an audience or to do instructor-led training.

Teaching and speaking can take the form of the traditional instructor-led training at a local technical training center or at a community college. Or it can be involvement in regional or national events that have speaking opportunities. Many regional technology gatherings try to put on seminars and are anxious to get speakers on interesting topics.

Newsgroup Postings

Acquisitions Editors are particularly fond of watching newsgroup postings for several reasons. Vocal involvement in the newsgroups often means that your name will be recognized by the potential reader, and may lead to more sales of the book.

As with professional organizations, people who are involved with newsgroups often are exposed to a wider variety of problems and opinions and therefore have a broader range of "experience" to write the book.

Finally, searching for authors in the newsgroups is easy. All they have to do is go to one of the newsgroup search engines and type in the subject that they want to have a book on. They then can sift through the postings until they find someone who appears knowledgeable and then email that person to see whether he or she is interested in writing a book.

For the Acquisitions Editor, this is infinitely easier than trying to find users groups to see whether they might know of someone qualified on a topic about which the publisher needs a book. Just finding the right users group can be a challenge in and of itself, and that means waiting on someone from the board of directors to respond.

Don't underestimate the value of this method of "being discovered"; it happens very frequently.

Staying in Touch

Just contacting an Acquisitions Editor doesn't mean that the editor will instantly have an opportunity for you. She may be busy on other projects, or she might not have a project that fits your skills right at the moment.

The Value of Patience

"All things come round to him who will but wait."

—Longfellow, *Tales of a Wayside Inn*

One of the biggest challenges that I continue to face in my life is patience. As someone who likes to "take charge" of situations, I hate to wait for others to do their part. In the case of working with others to find opportunities to work together, however, this is absolutely necessary.

I have to realize that my work with others fills a need that they have (or by proxy, their organization needs). No matter whether I think a book is important to do, the determining factor is whether the publisher thinks the book is needed. Although there's something to be said for persuasion, the most effective way to persuade a publisher that they need to do a book (or article) is to tell them the reasons why you think it's important, and then step away so that they can form their own conclusions.

Persistent Pestering

Okay, so you can't walk so far away from an idea that they can't find you. You do need to periodically remind Acquisitions Editors that you're still alive and kicking. The art to this is doing it at a frequency that truly helps them remember that you're out there without annoying them. Although this is something will differ for each Acquisitions Editor, and will be something you'll have to feel out on your own, here are some ideas for how to manage the level of interaction with the Acquisitions Editor:

- **Ask how frequently you should check back.** It sounds simple, but most people don't ask the question because they are afraid of hearing "never." In most cases, you'll probably hear every month or so. If you get an answer, try to make sure you contact them at least this frequently.
- **Contact them every time you get any applicable news.** Most people don't mind hearing about the latest certification that you've earned, or your latest article for a magazine, and so forth. This will also help them to think that you're serious about what you do. Don't go overboard with this though. If you're generating news more than every other week, you may want to bundle the news up and send it out every other week. You don't want to flood their Inbox.
- **Forward them news stories that might be useful.** Doing something as simple as forwarding them a review of one of the books that they've worked on, or a news story about their publisher, or even something that hit the national news from their "home" town, lets them know that you're thinking of them and trying to add value to your relationship with them.
- **Summarize applicable conference visits and forward them a copy.** If you're interested in writing on programming topics, and you go to a programming conference, take notes on the conference and forward those notes on. This shows your commitment to staying in touch with the community, and may give the Acquisitions Editor helpful insight into the market.

The most important point is to try not to annoy them. Although most of us have social skills that tell us when we are pestering people, sometimes we ignore these skills because we're so focused on getting that opportunity to write. I caution you that the process of signing authors for books is very arbitrary; there's no set criteria for whom an Acquisitions Editor will use, so it's important not to annoy them.

One final note on persistence and pestering is that sometimes there are people who are so out of control that they will send the wrong messages. They will quit responding to you, or will never respond to you. It's important to ask these people if you're contacting them too much. Most of the time when asked, they will say that they are just really busy. For instance, I have one former associate publisher and product developer who almost never responds to voicemail messages and email messages. And yet today, even as I was writing this, he sent me a message to keep pestering him, that he's just very busy at the moment but still wants to talk to me. Use your judgment, but when in doubt . . . ask!

Part 2: Negotiating and Understanding

The first part of this eBook focused on the people who you should contact, the roles that you should pursue, and the skills that you need to have to get an assignment. This section talks about the contracting process and the process of delivering the work. Although most of this part applies almost exclusively to book writing, you might find the discussions about contract clauses and payment options interesting even if your goal is to write for magazines.

Agents

If you've ever known someone who writes general-interest or business books, you're probably familiar with the concept of a literary agent. Even if you don't know one, you've probably seen some TV show that had a literary agent that the show's author worked with. Literary agents, or just agents, take a percentage of the author's payment in return for putting the author in contact with publishers and helping to negotiate contracts.

In the world of general-interest writing and business writing, literary agents are a must. Most publishers won't accept contact or proposals by anyone but a literary agent. However, they are mostly unnecessary for technical publishing.

Several Acquisitions Editors whom I know have told me point blank that having a agent doesn't get you more money. They will pay an author everything that they can afford to pay them whether there's an agent involved or not. When you consider that an agent is going to take a cut of your royalties, all that getting an agent will do is reduce your income.

The other issue is that many Acquisitions Editors don't like to work with literary agents. For whatever reason, Acquisitions Editors see agents as an intruder to the process of negotiating with the author. As a result, there's a slight negative associated with your name when you do use an agent.

To be fair, agents have contacts in the industry and can probably streamline the process of finding you a publisher who is willing to publish the title that you want to publish. However, with a little patience, and a little persistence, you shouldn't need an agent if you're going to do technical publishing.

Contracts

The first time you stare down your 15-page contract from the publisher, you're likely to have a coronary, or proceed directly to your nearest lawyer's office for a nice long chat. Although this section identifies a few of the basic things that you should be aware of, it's always a good idea to speak with your lawyer before you sign a contract. **Do not substitute the following for legal advice.**

Pay Structure Options

The part that most people flip to first is the payment. Although you've already negotiated what the pay will be with the Acquisitions Editor, you want to see it in print. And although you've negotiated the pay with the Acquisitions Editor, there are probably details about how you'll get paid. Here are a few of the most common remuneration schemes.

Work for Hire

Work-for-hire contracts mean that you don't own the copyright to the material. Whereas for most people this isn't a big deal, it can be a concern. (We'll cover copyright issues after we talk about the contract options that most people are concerned about.) Work for hire is just that. The work you are doing is being done strictly for hire, and as a result you have no ownership of the material. The positive side of this is that you generally get more money initially than you would get with a royalty-based compensation structure.

Sometimes publishers will do a work for hire with kicker. These kinds of contracts are very similar to work-for-hire arrangements in that you don't own the content; however, the publisher agrees to pay you additionally if a certain number of copies of the book sell. A typical work-for-hire (with kicker) contract would give you a small percentage of the sales price for each copy sold past a certain number, or sometimes a fixed dollar amount if the sales exceed a certain number.

These kinds of contracts are generally awarded when only a chapter or two of a book is needed because there is another author, or authors, working on the other chapters. However, it may also be awarded when the title is a title on the publisher's title plan, and they're anxious to hire someone for the book.

Royalty

Most authoring contracts are set up so that you get a percentage of the price for each book sold. This type of contract is most often set up with an advance against the royalties so that you can have something to live off while you're writing the book. Although the idea of a royalty book is appealing to most people, most royalty-based books don't earn out the royalty advance, and therefore the author never sees more than the advance.

What I mean by "doesn't earn out" is that the money that you get while you're writing the book is an advance. It is money that the publisher is giving you in anticipation that the book will sell and that they'll make a profit. It is not money that must be repaid to them if the book doesn't sell enough copies. However, the proceeds from the royalties that you would earn are applied against this advance before you receive any more money.

Let's work through a scenario to make it clearer what I mean. Suppose that you'll make $2/book for every book sold. And suppose that you were given a $10,000 advance. For the first 5,000 books sold, you won't receive a royalty check. This is because the first 5,000 copies at $2/book will earn back the $10,000 advance.

After the advance has been covered, you'll start receiving royalty checks for the entire amount of your royalties. Note that things are rarely as easy to calculate as the above makes it seem; but for simplicity, those numbers worked.

The complexity in determining the number of the copies that you'll have to sell to earn out royalties is based on three things. First, if you have a royalty schedule that slides or is different by how the books are sold, it can be difficult to calculate the number of copies that will be necessary to earn out the royalty. A sliding scale is just a royalty arrangement in which one royalty percentage is paid up to a certain number of copies, and a different percentage is paid for the copies sold after that. A sliding scale might have three or four levels of royalties that will be paid out.

The second issue for calculating how many books that it will take to earn out the royalty is that the royalty percentage is almost always based on what the publisher brings in. This means the wholesale price of the book. This is approximately 50% of the book's retail price. It varies from about 45% of the retail price to 53% of retail price based on the publisher, and the mix of booksellers to which the publisher sells. Using 50% is generally a good enough number.

The third issue is a reserve against returns. In the publishing industry, books are shipped to the bookstores with the anticipation that the books will sell. If they don't, the bookstores often ship the books back to the publishers for credit. Because publishers know that this will happen, they keep a reserve against your royalties to cover the books that may be returned. The percentage that they hold back varies, but it may be as much as 20% of the royalties you've earned.

If you're confused, you're not alone. Most Acquisitions Editors report that their authors are confused by their initial royalty statement, and are sometimes upset to learn that royalties are paid based on the money the publisher receives, not the amount that the end user pays. They also report authors who are upset to find out that the money they were already paid was an advance that must be earned before the author will receive additional compensation.

Magazine Payment Schedules

In the case of book contracts, a portion of your contract will most likely deal specifically with the delivery schedule, and tied to that delivery schedule, a set of payment dates. Very few things could be a clear cut as that. You know that when you turn in a particular part of the book you can invoice for a certain amount. (Yes, you'll generally have to generate an invoice for most publishers to be able to process a payment for you.)

The process for getting paid for a magazine article is a little different. Although some publishers will submit your invoice to accounting for you when you submit the article to them, others will wait to get you your payment. It's important (to most people) to know what the publisher is going to do.

Binding Fees

Sometimes your magazine contract will call for two separate payments. The first payment, a binding fee, is payable when the article is received. Normally this is a token amount of money that does little more than prevent you from sending the article to another publisher.

Binding fees are something that you want to avoid if possible because they essentially require that you do a lot of work writing an article only to receive a small percentage of what you would expect to receive.

Pay on Print

In most contracts that have a binding fee, there's also an associated printing fee. That is where you make your money. The "pay-on-print" fee is the typical payment that you would expect for a magazine article.

The problem with a binding fee (above) is that just because you get the binding fee doesn't mean that the magazine will ever print the article. And if they don't publish it, they never have to pay you the real money for the article – and you'll be prevented from selling the article to other publishers.

Most magazines don't use binding fees, and pay for the article when they print it. This helps their accounting department keep their records straight for the profit and loss of the magazine on an issue-by-issue basis. If they were paying for articles before they were printed, it would be difficult to assign the cost of your article to the issue for which it was purchased.

The primary thing that you should think of when writing with a "pay-on-print" payment schedule is to pay attention to when the article will be printed. This will be important if you're waiting for the payment for your article in the mail.

Other Contract Clauses You Need to Know

In NewspaperLand, the most popular column is the obituaries. It's not the column that people read first, but it's the column that the most people read eventually. Although most people jump directly to the contract clauses dealing with payment terms, it's important that you go back through the rest of the contract to make sure that you understand all the other clauses. You may think of them as the obituaries, something that you should read at some point.

Non-Compete and Exclusivity

Most contracts include a clause that prohibits you from publishing future materials that may harm the sales of the current book. Depending on the wording in the contract, this can be a major issue, or a relatively minor one. Suppose, for instance, that you're writing a Linux certification book for the Linux Professional Institute's Level 1 certification. Written and interpreted broadly, this might prohibit you from writing an entry-level Linux book. Although publishers rarely go to these extremes, you'll certainly be prohibited from publishing another book on the Linux Professional Institute's Level 1 exam.

In most cases, the best course of action if you want to publish on a similar topic is to talk with your publisher and offer to do the book for them. Obviously if the publisher agrees to do another book on the same topic with you, you need not worry about this clause of your contract for that book.

Droit Moral or Copyright

If you ever want to blow an entire afternoon, start looking up Droit Moral, or copyright issues in general. It's a murky issue that may never be made totally clear by the U.S. courts. In general, however, you need to know a few things about how the copyright system works in the United States and abroad.

Essentially Droit Moral, which is not completely integrated into U.S. law, says that an author has some rights by virtue of creating the work, and that these are non-transferable. These rights, as defined by French law, are as follows:

- **Right of Disclosure.** Only the author is permitted to indicate when a work is "complete" and ready for public review.
- **Right of Attribution.** The author has the right to control how he is identified in reference to a work, including ensuring that he is properly attributed as the creator.
- **Right of Integrity.** The author can ensure that the reproductions or adaptations of his work are consistent with his original work.
- **Right of Retraction.** The author has the right to remove the work from the public at any time.

From the perspective of U.S. law and the inclusion in the contract, there are a few important points. First, the author might be required to protect the copyright of the work and to assist in any legal actions taken by the publisher to protect the work. This is generally a non-issue for most people because there are rarely serious challenges to a copyright in today's environment.

Second, most of these rights, including the right to control when the work is published, are assigned to the publisher. As I said, the Droit Moral idea isn't fully incorporated into U.S. law. Most contracts specifically disallow Droit Moral rights for the author, in an attempt to ensure the publisher's control of the work.

Author Copies

One of the benefits of being an author is getting copies of the work for free. Typically a contract will specify 10 copies of the work to be delivered to the author at no cost. Although this initially sounds like a large number of copies, it might be too few for some people.

The primary key here is not the copies that you give to your friends and family, although for some individuals with large families the number of author copies might seem insufficient (particularly for a first book). The key here will be your marketing plan for the book. That's right, I said **your** marketing plan for the book. As discussed in Part 3, you should expect to provide some marketing for your book.

Before you sign your contract, have a rough idea of how many copies that you're going to need, both for your family and for your marketing efforts.

Future Works

In my opinion, this is the weirdest clause in the contract. It says that your next book proposal must be sent to the publisher first. It specifies a time frame the publisher has to respond to the proposal – before you are allowed to submit it to other publishers.

The reason that I think this is the weirdest clause in the contract is because it is not generally enforceable and serves no other purpose than to make it difficult for the author to pursue other publishers. It's unenforceable because most professional authors pursue two or three different ideas for their next book simultaneously. The clauses rarely have provisions for multiple-proposal submissions during the same time frame.

Perhaps the strangest thing about this clause is that if you enjoyed your work with a publisher, and were happy with the work that was done with your project, of course you'll come back to them for your next project. If you were not satisfied with the work they did on the previous project, then you won't go back.

Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure

"I ain't saying nothing about nobody."

—Ralph Connor, *The Major*

Humans are social creatures by nature. We enjoy sharing stories and information with each other, but sometimes that runs counter to commercial interests. The confidentiality clause of a contract serves to make the

communication between the publisher and you confidential. (That is, such information cannot be disclosed to a third party without the publisher's permission.) In most cases, this includes the terms of the contract.

There are standard exceptions in confidentiality clauses to cover information that becomes public knowledge (except through breach of the confidentiality clause), and information previously known to the person to whom you might be disclosing the information. For all intents and purposes, that means that if there is something that has happened that has caused the information to become public, such as the book being published, you can discuss those details, but not other details of the contract.

Negotiating Your Contract

When General Motors (GM) first introduced its Saturn car company in 1985, many people thought it wouldn't work. There were lots of new things that were being tried, and no one was sure how the market would react to them. However, 16 years later the company is still in business, and appears to be doing well.

One of the things that GM changed was that they created a no-haggle pricing structure. Every dealer would provide the same Saturn car to the consumer at the same price. This meant that there wouldn't be the typical haggling at the car dealership that people had grown to hate.

Although several reasons precipitated this change, one of the most important was to help to facilitate a long-term relationship between the consumer and the dealer. When you negotiate, you're forced into an adversarial relationship in which for one person to win, the other has to lose. This wasn't helping car buyers feel good about the dealer they bought from, and ultimately was causing turnover in GM's customers.

I bring up this story because the first thing that you should consider when you're negotiating your contract is that you will have to work with these people over the next few months, and you need that relationship to be good. If the Acquisitions Editor feels beat up, you're not going to get her support when you need something from her – and trust me, you will need her support.

You also need to look beyond the current project and think about your prospects for negotiating with the Acquisitions Editor again on your next project. Getting to the negotiation stage on your next project may depend on the Acquisitions Editor feeling that you negotiated in good faith.

I'm not saying that you should roll over and accept whatever she presents to you; however, while you're negotiating, you should consider whether the things that your negotiating for are "materially important." In other words, make sure the things that you're arguing for are worth the additional tension that you're creating.

Previously I mentioned that agents don't get you more money when you're dealing with technical publishing. That's due to a relatively simple reason. Most Acquisitions Editors offer their best deal first so that they don't have to haggle with you. Just as you have to work with the Acquisitions Editor for the next few months, the editor has to deal with you, and as a result wants the experience to be as pleasant as possible.

Most Acquisitions Editors have guidelines for what they can advance an author for royalties, and the maximum royalty percentages that they can offer an author. If you go beyond those guidelines, the Acquisitions Editor must get the contract approved by an Executive Editor or a Publisher. That's not generally something the Acquisitions Editor will want to do, particularly if you're early in your publishing career.

That is not to say that as you continue to publish books, and continue to work with publishers, that there won't be a little better deal for you. The better an author is known to the publisher, and to the world in general, the easier the process becomes; and therefore, it is easier to justify a few thousand more in the advance, or an extra percent royalty. However, most of the time, these are things that need to be initiated by the Acquisitions Editor to be effective.

Although the financial aspects of the transaction are the ones that are most often challenged, some authors are interested in changing the language in other parts of the contract, because they are concerned about how something reads, or the rights that they are assigning or so forth. This might not seem like a problem on the

surface. However, a small change here, or a minor change there, even if the change doesn't significantly change the rights being transferred, requires approval from the publisher's lawyers. This is both expensive and time-consuming, and frankly something that just won't be done unless you've sold a million books for the publisher.

Your Acquisitions Editor can change some things in the contract, but there are far more things that the editor cannot change. My recommendation is to talk to your Acquisitions Editor and discuss your concerns. The Acquisitions Editor has most likely heard the same concern before. If she has a way to address your concern, she will; and if she doesn't, she won't. It will be up to you to decide whether you can live with the terms and conditions of the contract. A word of caution, however: Most publishing contracts look almost identical. You're likely to find the same objectionable clause in the next publisher's contract.

Setting the Schedule

By now you may be thinking that you are home free. You've developed the outline and the proposal, and you're well on your way to negotiating the contract, and then you get asked to put together a schedule for the delivery of the book. All the sudden you start wondering how you will ever figure out when you'll be able to write this book.

Being Realistic

The key to setting a schedule is to be realistic. You can't plan that you'll never get interrupted and you'll never have a computer problem, and the power will never go out, and so on. Instead, you have to plan that problems will occur and incorporate them into your schedule.

The starting point for most people is developing a baseline average of how much you can write in a given period of time. For instance, you can write ½ page(s) per hour, or 20 pages per week, or some guideline from which you can base your schedule.

Obviously not all work is going to occur at the same rate. You'll have some weeks where you're zipping along creating 100 pages, and the next week you'll maybe manage 20. However, the idea is to determine how many pages that you will be able to write. Here's a rule of thumb for authors who know the material that they are writing very well:

Type of Author	Number of Pages/Week
Has a "day job," first book	30
Has a "day job," not the first book	45
No "day job"	75

These are average numbers, which means that you're writing might take longer than the average. For those with a day job it assumes that you can give two complete nights a week and one weekend day to the writing process. Approximately 24 hours per week. If you can't give the additional time, you'll have to plan on fewer pages per week.

You should give careful consideration to how demanding your work, family, and hobby commitments are. It's likely that you'll have to put in every available minute to writing the book, and that sometimes doesn't mesh well with other commitments. If your work requires that you work 50 hours or more a week, or if it's particularly stressful or draining, you might have to make allowances for that.

If you have a newborn baby, or children whom you need to spend time with and read stories to, you'll have to factor that in too. Although wives may be tolerant of a few months' worth of not seeing you as much,

children are rarely as understanding. As a result, you may end up writing well into the night – if you can do that and remain coherent.

You should consider a host of other personal factors that may further influence your ability to write a book. If you travel frequently for work, and often have to attend business dinners, for example, you'll want to consider how that may impact your ability to write two nights a week.

Dealing with Sagging Enthusiasm

One of the unique challenges for most people to deal with their own enthusiasm for the project. Many people start out the writing process full of energy and raring to go. They deliver quite a bit of material in the first few weeks of the project, because they are psyched up about the idea that they are publishing a book. As the process begins to drag on and as they start to realize the sacrifices they are making to make this book, however, their writing begins to slow, and it becomes more painful.

Both of these factors lead to them being behind in their writing, which further inhibits their motivation to write, and makes the book slip further and further behind. When this happens, it really feels like the project will never end, so making the time to finish the writing becomes more and more painful, sometimes more painful than the author can tolerate.

Like many things in life, writing is more of a mental game with yourself than an outward expression. The better aware and in control of your own thoughts and feelings you are, the more likely it is that you'll be able to maintain your enthusiasm for the book, and will be able to ultimately complete it.

A good suggestion is that when you're initially planning your schedule that you add more time to the end of the project. Instead of expecting that you'll write 30 pages a week, assume you'll write 25 pages a week. Although it might not seem like 5 pages is much, it may be enough to help you feel like you can get back on track (if you're off) or that you can take a break and enjoy a little bit of your life for a while.

Another suggestion is take a week off in the middle of the project. Set up a week in the middle of the project where you won't deliver any material. This break can help you get back on track, or give you an opportunity to take a break from the book long enough to recover your energy level.

Part 3 spends some more time on motivation and discusses how you can motivate yourself to complete a project.

Deliverables

Each publisher has their own guidelines for how things must be delivered. Most of the time they will give you a set of author guidelines that will tell you in detail how they like to see things. However, expect that you won't get these guidelines until you've turned in a few chapters and you've turned in the material "wrong." Unfortunately that seems to be the norm in publishing more than the exception. However, you can circumvent this by asking for the author guidelines during the negotiation process, or before you start writing.

Although author guidelines seem to be drier than your mother-in-law's turkey on Thanksgiving, read them completely. Making even small changes after you've been writing for a few weeks is a very painful experience that you'll want to avoid if possible.

Figures

One of the things about writing that gives most authors trouble is the figures. This is due in part to some rather arbitrary and unnecessary rules on the part of the publisher, and due in part to the fact that the figures are not provided as a part of the manuscript file as one might expect.

Most books are concerned with two types of figures: screen shots and line art.

Screen Shots

The most common figure for a technical book is a screen shot, a copy of what should be on the user's screen. Because the figures are supposed to represent what the users will see on their screen, publishers set specific guidelines for how the screen shots should be taken.

The first requirement is that all the screen shots be in a particular file format. The file format of choice varies by publisher, but might be TIF, BMP, or PCX, depending on whom you're dealing with. The key is submitting the file in the format the publisher expects. You also want to pay attention to the color depth of the file. Although some publishers want 256-color figures, most have now transitioned to wanting 16-bit color, sometimes called high-color, images. Normally you're asked to set your computer's display to this color depth instead of using an image-editing program to reduce or increase the number of colors.

Most publishers require that all the screen shot figures submitted be the same resolution, and some require that a particular screen resolution be used. Most typically an 800x600 pixel screen resolution setting is required, and the entire screen must be captured. Although occasionally you'll find a publisher asking for files at a 640x480 pixel resolution.

Most authors don't actually run their systems with their screen resolution set this low. However, these settings are designed to make the text readable when reproduced in the book. By requiring that screens be no more than 800x600, the publisher knows that when they place it on the page the text on the screen will be readable, unless some weird font is used.

The reason for requiring that all figures be submitted in full-screen size is so that when they place them in the document, they will get a consistent size. They crop the figures in the tools provided in the layout program. Most publishers want you to indicate your desire for cropping on the figure itself. Most publishers will accept a note in the text where the figure is placed if you just want the figure cropped to the active window or dialog box.

Most publishers also require that the default color scheme for Microsoft Windows be used. Even if you prefer the travel theme, including the darker, brown color set, you'll need to restore the Windows default color set to take your screen shots. This is because they know how to tweak a screen shot with the standard color scheme so that it will reproduce well in the book.

The final consideration for screen shots is the file name. Although this might seem like a trivial issue, the layout designers and editorial staff at the publisher are used to seeing the figure names a certain way. If for any reason your names don't match the names that they are used to, it will slow them down. You'll want to make sure that you name the file as the publisher has outlined in the guidelines. They've been known to make authors rename files when they weren't submitted with the correct naming format.

Line Art

Any figure that isn't a screen shot is line art. Line art can be a hand-drawn sketch of how a process works or a graphic representation of the different levels in an architecture. Most publishers provide graphic artists to translate your work into high-quality line art. You provide a hand-drawn sketch and they reproduce it so that it looks like it was done by a professional artist – because it was.

For the most part, submitting line art is much easier than turning in screen shots because there's not tight control on how it must be turned in. The only concern is that you are able to provide a format that the graphic designer can reproduce.

The one concern that you have with line art figures that you don't have with screen shots is that you must review them closely when they come back, because sometimes illustrators make minor adaptations, or errors, that make the figure incorrect.

Formatting

Most publishers have guidelines regarding how they want the text to be formatted when they get it. These guidelines help their editors be more effective by keeping the fonts and sizes of the text and headings consistent. This improves the editors' speed at reading and recognizing headings.

The first thing when starting a project with a publisher is to ask for a copy of their manuscript template. Most of the time this won't contain any text. It will contain only the styles into which you'll format text. Normally they also send along a sample document that shows you how the template is supposed to be used.

Styles are a mechanism in Word where all the formatting information is bundled up and associated with a name. When you set text to a style, it automatically takes on the attributes (font, size, and so forth) associated with that style. Styles are always used when formatting for a publisher for three reasons:

- **Consistency.** If you always use styles, and not individual text attributes, you can be sure that all text of the same type is formatted consistently.
- **Tables of Contents.** Often tables of contents are added to the top or the bottom of the file for reference. This can be accomplished quickly, easily, and accurately, if all the headings are formatted with the appropriate styles.
- **Conversion.** By specifying the formatting by styles rather than by individual text attribute, the conversion programs can be used to translate the Word file into the page layout program

Most publishers have formatting guidelines in their author guidelines that tell you what styles to use for each type of heading, and for each type of text. If they didn't provide you with a sample when you started, you can ask for a sample chapter and use it as a guideline for how you're supposed to format text.

Note
Try to get the publisher to send you a properly formatted chapter from a book in the same series. Different series of books use different styles. You'll want to get a sample that is as close to what you'll be asked to produce as possible. Almost every time that I begin work with a new publisher, there's something that's been left out of their sample chapter, or something wrong in the sample chapter. Learn to expect it.

Permissions

Sometimes in the development of a book you'll want to use material from another source. Obviously, you must have permission to use this material from its author. Whether the material is a worksheet, photo, or diagram, you need the written permission to cover your own interests and to make the publisher comfortable.

Most publishers can provide you with a permission template form on which you can gather author approval. Although this is not a major issue for most books, it can be an issue if you're attempting to distribute a lot of third-party software on the CD accompanying the book. Almost universally, you'll be responsible for getting permission for any material you want to use in the book itself. Sometimes permissions for the CD are handled for you by the publisher, and other times it's your responsibility to gather the permission forms.

CD and Web Content

Many years ago publishers began including floppy disks with their books to help improve the appeal of them over their competition. Although floppy disks are no longer included, it is still very popular to have a CD accompany the book. The perception in the publishing industry is that this will influence someone's desire to purchase their book over another book, presumably without a CD.

Although it's questionable whether this presumption holds true, it's certain that putting together the CD for the back of the book is something that is another time-consuming task. The extent of how time consuming, is determined by the kind of CD being produced.

An enclosed CD that contains only an electronic copy of the book is not, frankly, all that difficult. The persons laying out the book just output a PDF file of the pages that they are going to submit to the printer. Those are collected and assembled into one file, or a table of contents file is put together, and voila.

If, on the other hand, the CD is supposed to contain other material, such as other electronic books or shareware programs, the process becomes quite time consuming. First, including material that's not created by the author means securing permission forms for everything that will be included. Then an installer or browser program must be created to allow the book's reader to browse or install all the applications on the accompanying CD. Luckily those publishers that are doing CDs with other content are mostly handling this with internal software specialists who do all this work for you.

An adaptation to the inclusion of a CD has been the development of book-related web sites. These sites eliminate the additional cost of putting a CD in the book, and are starting to be used because they are beginning to be seen as just as good a value as having a CD with less cost. Additionally it helps reduce the timeline for the book, because the web site can be developed while the book is at the printer.

Although web sites differ, they often include some of the files used in the book, and links to shareware of value. Sometimes web sites include feedback and discussion forums that the author is expected to check periodically. Because this is a major hassle, you'll want to check to see how your publisher sets up web sites, and what they expect out of you, before signing a contract for a book with an associated web site.

Front Matter and Back Matter

There's a tendency to finish the last chapter of a book and begin to immediately party. And it's often not one of those have-a-few-beers kind of party, it's a raucous all-out, call-the-police kind of party. Months of work have been completed. There is an enormous sense of relief at the completion.

Okay, maybe it's not quite like that, maybe the party is more a private one. However, the idea of doing more writing for the book is something akin to pulling out your toenails. It's not something that you want to do, but one of the very last things to be done, for most books, is what is considered the front and back matter.

Although what is in front and back matter will change by title, here are a few things that you should be prepared to produce, or submit to the publisher:

- Author bio
- Dedication
- Acknowledgements
- Introduction
- Tearcards

As soon as you start the project, ask your Acquisitions Editor what miscellaneous elements you are expected to provide.

The Process

In technical publishing, everything flows through a process. Because publishers deal with so much material, they establish processes so that they can process material effectively, and hopefully prevent material from getting lost.

Magazine

Writing for a magazine is generally a two-step process: You get assigned the contract, you write the article. When you submit the article to the magazine, they will edit it and get it ready for inclusion in the magazine. You rarely see the article again or have to worry about it.

Web

Writing for the web is much like writing for a magazine in that you're unlikely to see what you submit back after the web site editor edits it and prepares it for posting. There are, however, other pieces to web publishing.

As mentioned previously, publishing for the web means a variable publication schedule. You might not know exactly when an article is going to go up on the site. This differs from magazine publishing in that you often know what magazine issue the article will appear in when you submit the article. From a process perspective, this means that you need to maintain contact with the editor after you've submitted the article to know when it gets posted online.

The other difference to web publishing is that there is often a feedback area for users to comment on the article. So it's something that you'll need to plan on checking at least for the first few weeks after the article is posted.

Book

The writing part of creating a book is quite a process. The processes that the publishers use govern how material flows and who sees what and when. Although the process is much more complex than the process for publishing for a magazine or for the web, it's certainly a workable process, and one that you only have to support in a few places.

The following sections cover some of the parts of the publishing process and why these steps are important to you and to the development of the material. Only the submission, author review, and page review require your direct involvement as an author; all the other processes are done by other people to improve the book.

Although one order is shown here, this isn't always the order that the process happens in. Each publisher, and sometimes each series, has its own process, which generally contains most of the steps below but not always in the same order. If you're curious about the specific process used by the publisher you're working with, ask them.

Submission

The first step of the process is to develop the material to be edited. This is what most people think about when they think of the writing process. It's the part where you start with a blank sheet of paper, or a blank Word document, and start writing until you're finished.

Formatting

Some publishers include a step where the material is formatted to meet their guidelines. This takes any styles that you didn't implement in your writing and implements them for you. Although most publishers are moving away from this step, you might find it from time to time.

Development Edit

Most of the time, the next step is for the material to be routed to a Development Editor. The Development Editor is a gate. They may reject the material back to you after some editing if they feel that it can't be sufficiently edited to be made right during the process. Frequently this happens for the first chapter or two until the author (you) gets used to writing for technical publication.

As mentioned earlier, it's the Development Editor's responsibility to identify unclear language and organizational problems that might adversely impact the readers' ability to understand the information the author is presenting.

When the Development Editor finishes her work, she sends the material off to one or more Technical Editors and waits for the material's return to her. She will then approve and integrate the Technical Editor's comments into the material.

Tech Edit

When the Development Editor sends the material out to the Technical Editor, she expects that the Technical Editor will identify any areas where the author has misstated a technical issue, missed an important technical point, or where there language may confuse the reader.

To some extent, there's overlap between what the Technical Editor looks for and what the Development Editor looks for. Both try to ensure that the delivery of the material is clear.

When the Technical Editor has finished with the material, he sends the material back to the Development Editor. The Development Editor integrates the comments from multiple Technical Editors and screens the comments to make sure they are appropriate.

Copy Edit

The next step in the process is the Copy Editor, where all the author's bad English is wiped away. The Copy Editor corrects things such as punctuation and grammar. Although they've been known to correct spelling, most Copy Editors are much happier if you run a spell checker on your material before submitting it.

The copy edit is done before you see the material so that you can confirm that the changes that the Copy Editor makes don't change your meaning, or intent. In most cases, you need not worry about reading every edit the Copy Editor makes. If they are concerned that they have changed your meaning, they will generally flag you to ask you to verify the edits.

Note
Some authors get quite particular about the types of language that they want to use. I've seen them argue with the Copy Editors about how something should be written or stated. I'd advise against strong disagreements with the Copy Editors. They know their jobs and are good at it. Although occasionally they'll make a mistake, or edit something incorrectly, by and large their edits will be right. If their edits don't materially misstate your intent, you are best advised to leave their edits alone.

Production Edit

The final step before coming back to you is the Production Editor. They are responsible for addressing any internal issues, and making sure that the figures are all readable, and that all the pieces are ready to go to production. They will sometimes address some Copy Editor queries about stylistic guidelines and other issues that aren't directly related to the material.

Author Review

In some processes, author review is the first and last time you'll see the material after the editors have worked on it. As I will discuss later, you need to put your ego away for this phase of the writing process. Editors are often brutally honest and direct because they are supposed to be. Rarely is it the intention of the editor to mean or derogatory to you.

Your goal in author review is to at least respond to every comment put in by the editors and when appropriate you should incorporate the changes suggested by the editors. A balance has to be struck between the suggestions that the editors make and your own opinions. When possible, try to err on the side of addressing the editors' concerns. There are three reasons for this.

First, these people have a lot of experience with developing technical books. Although they are not infallible, they are a part of the process to help make the material better. The more you resist their assistance, the harder it will be to create a good book.

Second, in some publishers the Production Editors and Development Editors have the final say over the material, not the author. Although they don't exercise this power often, they will do it if the author seems to be unwilling to address any editor query.

Third, in severe cases in which the author is uncooperative with the editorial process, the author will not be given a chance to perform author review. It will be assigned to another author, and the costs associated with this will be deducted from the royalties that you're entitled to on the book.

As a final note, author review is a time to address editor concerns, not to add new material. Although it's sometimes acceptable to indicate during submission that there will have to be a little bit of new material at author review, don't use author review as an opportunity to write more on the topic.

Development and Production Editor Review

The next step is for the Develop Editor and Production Editor to remove the queries that you've addressed from the chapter file, and make sure that all your edits are consistent with the comments that the editors made.

This is sometimes handled by the Production Editor, particularly if the comments were light, but may also be addressed by the Development Editor. This is always the case when the author disagrees with the Technical Editor on a technical issue, or concerns arise which the Production Editor isn't comfortable handling.

If substantial new material was added at author review, the chapter may go through the entire cycle again, to ensure that the additional material makes sense, is accurate, and adheres to grammatical rules.

Layout

Once all the comments have been removed and the material is essentially done, it is sent to the production department to be laid out into pages. This process converts the material from Word into the page layout program used by the publisher. Once the material is laid out on pages, it becomes very difficult to make changes, so the presumption is that most of the errors have been removed.

Page Review

Sometimes publishers have the author review pages, other times this process is done only by internal staff. This is the final check to make sure that everything is right. Not only do the reviewers look for typos that may have been inadvertently added to the document, but they also look for any headings or special elements that didn't translate correctly.

The goal at page review is only critical things because of the cost to make the changes. As a result, no material should be added. The goal is to identify problems so important that they must be fixed.

Indexing

After the pages have been reviewed, an index is created. This process involves a reviewer identifying all the words that should be indexed and recording where they are used. This process is necessary to create the index for the book and to have it accurately reflect the pages on which the terms are used. This is, in essence, the final step of the production process.

Printing

The last thing that happens to the book is it is printed. The printer of the book may take three to four weeks to convert the final production files they are given into the printed books that are seen in the store. This final part of the book-making process is usually very painful for the author because they've been working for months to put together a book, and they want to see it as soon as possible. Publishers can buy a shorter schedule, by either rearranging their own titles' priorities at the printer, or more often by paying the printer more money to expedite the printing. This fee essentially goes to pay for overtime.

Tips and Techniques for Writing

"Okay, you've got the contract, you know what's going to happen, start writing." That's essentially the advice you get from your Acquisitions Editor. Although well-meaning, if you've never written before, you might be just as lost as a pilgrim in an airplane cockpit

Start with a Quiet Space

A good place to start is to just find a quiet space to write. The goal is just to eliminate all possible distractions. Writing is hard enough to start; you certainly don't want distractions interrupting you after you do get started.

Some authors (like myself) prefer to write with music in the background; however, I rarely use the radio, and I don't use music that is too distracting. Ultimately I use it to cover all the noises that you can't stop from happening, and to help set a pace.

Make an Outline, Then Make It More Detailed

When you were working with the Acquisitions Editor to negotiate the book, you developed an outline. That outline was a guide to your discussions; you could refer to it and talk about how the book might look given the outline. Although the outline probably served its purpose for getting the contract, you'll want to consider spending more time "fleshing it out." The goal is to get all the important points that you need to make within the book into a spot in the outline.

Sometimes you can take the first chapter and start to identify all the points that you want to make within the chapter. If the first chapter is "An Introduction to Computer Networking," for example, you might want to talk about what there was before computer networks (mainframe computers and the like). You might then want to talk about the basic types of connectivity that can be used in a network (local connections and long-distance connections, for instance). Once you've identified all the topics you want to cover, you can go back to the bottom level of the outline and start to list the advantages and disadvantages of the topic. Perhaps you might include sublevels that define where it is used and not used.

As you continue to break down the outline into smaller and smaller topics and ideas, you'll eventually end up with an outline that represents most of what you'll include in the chapter. You can then take the outline and rework it into text that connects the different ideas for the reader.

Although this might seem like a painfully slow and tedious process, it's one that's quite effective at getting authors writing. Most people don't have trouble once they get started. It's just a daunting task to start.

Just Write Anything, Then Edit

The biggest key with writing is just writing. Most of us take pride in our work, and want to take particular pride in the book that we're writing. Often that causes us to struggle to find the exact right words. Somehow we've been taught that the first few words make the book. As if all of Dickens work in *A Tale of Two Cities* could be summed up in the opening words "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." Sure that's

a pretty compelling way to start a book, but it's certainly not why the book is considered a classic, it's just the beginning.

Try to remember that your words don't have to be perfect, they have to convey the meaning. You are free to, and should, edit your own work when you're done writing it. Go back through the document and fine-tune the language that you used when you initially wrote it. Authors are often much better at cleaning up the words once the idea is in place than they are when they have the pressure of communicating an idea and selecting the "perfect" words at the same time.

You should consider two other things: First, it's much easier to continue writing than it is to start. Even if you just get started and then have to delete a paragraph or two, you're better off than staring at a blank document. Second, you have a whole staff of talented editors who will help you find the "perfect" words for your book. It's not something that you must take upon yourself.

Dealing with Yourself

Strangely enough, for most people the hardest part of the writing process is dealing with themselves. Writing is a greatly introspective process that asks your brain to behave in ways that most brains are not used to behaving. Couple this with the lack of sleep that writing a book normally leads to and you have a recipe for some real fun.

Understanding Personality Types

The first thing to recognize when working on a book is who you are. By that, I mean you need to evaluate whether you're a social person or if you like solitude. You'll also need to know whether you're a person who likes working through all the details or would rather create a vision and let someone else do the detail work. Finally, you need to understand what is motivating you to write the book in the first place.

Determining Whether You're a Social Animal

The first thing is to determine whether you're a social animal, or a hermit. Neither is bad, but you'll probably find that working on a book will be easier for you if you're a hermit. That's because for the most part writing is a very solitary introverted task. It is a task well suited to someone who doesn't have to be the life of the party.

That doesn't mean that you should give up hope if you like to be the life of the party or if you are somewhere in between these two extremes. It just means that you'll have to recognize what may happen to you as you begin writing the book. Because the process is so solitary and introverted, you'll probably get more than a little bit restless. It's your brains way of telling you that you're doing something that it's not entirely comfortable with.

The solution is relatively easy — go socialize. Of course, that's going to mean you're not writing, so you'll have to make judicious use of your time. Here are a few suggestions that might help you address your needs to be social, and won't take up a lot of time:

- **Schedule lunch out every day.** If you are working exclusively on the book, schedule yourself away from your home or office. Go meet with your friends and family. Make it a point to do this every day. Your friends and family will probably have to get back to their lives, so the time you spend out will be minimized.

- **Go to noisy places.** You can sometimes fool your brain into thinking that you've been around more people if you go to places that are noisy. If you have the choice between a restaurant that is quiet and private, and one that is loud and wild, choose the loud and wild one. Of course you can't do this all the time, but try to gravitate to these types of places.

- **Turn the music up loud, if you must.** If you're listening to music while writing, turn the volume up a little; again you'll trick your brain into thinking there are more people around. Obviously this may impact your concentration, but it's better than not being able to write because you feel weird and can't explain it.

- **Turn on multiple different sources of sounds, if you must.** Multiple different sources of sound sometimes confuses the brain into thinking there are people with you. As with turning the music up, you'll have to weigh the impact this has on your concentration.
- **Talk to family and friends while driving.** Of course you'll have to have a cellular phone, and you'll want to make sure that you're being safe while driving, but talking to someone while driving can help make you feel more connected.

If you find that you're still having trouble and you think that it's because you're not spending enough time out, ask your Acquisitions Editor for her thoughts. She might have some good ideas for you.

Ultimately you'll want to work into the schedule the kinds of breaks that you need to be happy and healthy. The suggestions above are to help you through a project you've already committed to; I don't recommend using them for every project.

Visionary or Detail-Oriented Person

Every person has his preference — whether he would rather be the person flipping the switches, or the person telling someone what switches to flip. Although this is a gross overgeneralization, we do all have a preference. If you've been in a position that's had supervisor or senior in the title, you're probably someone who is a detail-oriented person. You've stayed involved in the details of how things are done, and you've been recognized because you're good at it. On the other hand, if your job title has chief, president, director, or manager in it, it's likely that you're more into putting together strategies and less into managing the details.

As with being an introverted or extroverted person, neither is good nor bad, just different from one another. Although detail-oriented people tend to be perfectionists looking to make things absolutely right, visionary people sometimes have trouble completing the details to make things happen.

If you're a detail-oriented person, you'll have to fight your desire to make the book perfect. If you think about the process from the perspective that you're trying to communicate information to people and that the information that you're trying to communicate is constantly changing, you'll see that making a perfect book is impossible.

Another approach is to remember the 80-20 rule. Only 20% of the work is required to get something to the 80% level. The other 80% of the effort is getting that last 20%. Although you'll probably want to get above the 80% level in the development of your book, you probably can't afford the time and energy it will take to make the book "perfect."

If you're a visionary, you'll do well to keep breaking down the outline and then fill in the text to tie the ideas together because this plays well with what you like to do. That is, creating an outline is much like creating a plan. In this case, the plan, when completed, will turn into the book. The true challenge will be to force yourself to truly review the material coming back on pages, or in some cases in author review.

Answering every comment and query from every editor might seem like it's going to take too much time, or is too inefficient, or a thousand other reasons that your brain will make up for not doing it, or not doing it quickly. Unfortunately, the author review is something that you absolutely have to do. It's something that only you are qualified to do, because you are the author and they do call it **author** review for a reason.

If you're asked to review pages and you're a visionary kind of person, you should decline. This may initially offend your Project Editor or Acquisitions Editor because they will be put off by your perceived lack of interest. However, you should explain that you don't want to delay the process and you trust that the editors will have done a good job, and that the proofreaders will catch anything that they missed.

It's important that you let them know that you trust them, and that you think you'll only delay the process. If you continue to get pressure to see the page files, and it's unlikely that you will, you can tell them that you're concerned that it may be too detailed a task for you to do and continue to do the writing and author review that you have left.

You may also want to be open with your Acquisitions Editor to help her understand that you might need her prompting to finish little details that are important, but that you might overlook. Most Acquisitions Editors will modify your schedule for you to include the other little details needed. (Or they'll tell you to do it.)

Understanding Your Motivations

You won't make it out of your first writing project without doing at least some soul searching. There will almost certainly be a time during the middle of the project where you wonder why you're doing this. And if it doesn't come during the middle of the process, it certainly will while you are waiting on the printer.

My suggestion is have an answer to this soul searching before it begins. Before you start writing, make sure that you know that the reasons are for writing the book. It's rarely one single reason that causes people to want to write; conversely, there is normally one **primary** reason, and the other reasons are really just rationalizations of why it makes sense.

When you ask yourself why you're writing the book, you consider some of the following factors:

- **Recognition of Knowledge.** I want others to know what I know.
- **Community.** The world needs this book.
- **Teaching.** I want to share what I know with others.
- **Prestige.** How many people can say they've written a book?
- **Money.** Is there anyone who doesn't like money?
- **Career Advancement.** It will look good on my resume.

For most people, there will be one reason that sticks out as the primary reason for writing. Whatever your reason is, try to hold on to it as you get into the middle of the writing process and you wonder if you'll ever finish.

Although I've been careful not to offer value judgments throughout this eBook, I do want to spend a moment and share with you that you'll find that you are much more successful when you can truly say that your reason for writing is to teach others. A favorite quote of mine is this:

> But where's the man who counsel can bestow, Still pleased to teach, and yet not proud to know?
> —Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, 1711

Although there's no escaping your primary reason for doing the book, I suggest that you consider that you may want to make your primary reason for writing the book to teach. It's a noble purpose, and one that will allow you to keep your reader in mind. In my experience, this leads to a much better book in the end.

Recognizing and Dealing with Burnout

Whenever you apply stress to your life, you have to deal with the possibility that you'll lead yourself to burnout. Although stress often comes from external factors, we have our own way of dealing with it (and sometimes adding to it). If you've never written a book before, expect that you've added a great deal of stress to your life.

Add that to other stress in your life, such as a marriage, kids, a job, and so on, and you might find yourself enveloped in stress to the point where it completely exhausts you or debilitates you. The goal in this section is to help you identify it and attempt to compensate for burnout, until you can make more permanent changes.

When I sat down to write this section I thought that I wouldn't have any problem describing what burnout is, and how to identify it. However, I realized that each time that burnout has happened to me, it is a little different. Yes, I still find myself dealing with burnout from time to time.

My suggestion to you is that if any of the following rings true to you, do some research. There are web sites on the Internet and books available that deal with burnout. They have a more comprehensive approach to burnout, and many of them are written by trained counselors.

The First Signs

Burnout doesn't normally happen all at once. It's something that slowly slips up on you, and eventually surrounds you. There's an old story related in many business books that speaks of a frog. The frog placed in boiling hot water will immediately attempt to jump out. He quickly recognizes that the boiling water is a threat to his survival. However, take the same frog and put him in a pot of lukewarm water and slowly turn up the heat and the frog will sit patiently in the pot until he is boiled to death.

This story is related to help you understand that most species, including humans, have a hard time detecting slowly changing trends. Burnout, because it doesn't happen all at once, is something that's often hard to identify.

For most people, recognizing that they are burning out is difficult. In addition to the process being a slow, gradual process that is in and of itself hard to spot, there is the added complication that the burnout is happening to them.

Most people have difficulty recognizing things happening to them. Most of us can notice that our friends are having difficulty, or that our spouse is been moody; however, we rarely notice those things in ourselves. If you're concerned that you might be experiencing burnout, you should consider asking your friends and family to let you know if they've noticed any signs of burnout in you.

The following are some of the signs that you are looking for:

- **Apathy and Disassociation.** One of the first things that happens in burnout is people begin to care less about the things that were important to them. Often they start to disassociate with their surroundings, withdrawing from friends and family.
- **Restlessness.** Often there's a struggle that happens between the perceived need to be productive, and the inability to focus. This struggle creates more stress, and often makes things worse. Sometimes it's seen first as an inability to sleep. Other times it's seen as a persistent attempt to be productive long after it's clear that you can't be.
- **Dramatically Sliding Standards.** Although all of us adjust our standards to fit the situations that we're in, a rapid change in standards often indicates that burnout has set in. Often this is a manifestation of the apathy described above. It may result in work that you would have previously never accepted as adequate being submitted for others' review.
- **Lack of Self-Confidence.** Sometimes burnout is a disconcerting thing. It has a way of making you feel "off." Sometimes that leads to a lack of self-confidence. Although some self-doubt is healthy, the lack of self-confidence isn't. The difference between self-doubt and a lack of self-confidence is that people with self-doubt approach the problem as a temporary limitation that they can and will overcome. A lack of self-confidence is seen as an attribute that cannot be changed.

Of course, this isn't an exhaustive list of possible signs; however, it's a list that will cover some of the signs that may happen to you. As a parting note, it's important to realize that burnout will rear its head differently every time. One time you might have a self-confidence problem, and the next time you might find yourself restless, and the next time you might just quit caring.

Communication

Once you've determined that you're experiencing burnout, the first thing to do is to communicate. Communicate with your family, friends, and your Acquisitions Editor. This isn't for the purposes of extracting sympathy or pity, it's for the purposes of making them aware so they can help you out of the problem.

Many people don't ask for help for fear that others will think them weak, or that allowing other people to know that they are experiencing burnout will somehow make them think less of you. Although I suppose there

is some bit of truth in that, most people that I know have experienced the same feelings at one time or another and suffer through it without getting help — and wish they would have asked.

Another way to look at this problem is to think about someone who has a broken arm. Oh sure it's possible for him to "tough it out" without going to a doctor to get help, but ultimately this is going to lead to bigger problems down the road when the arm doesn't heal right. Just because it is possible to survive burnout without getting help from anyone, that doesn't mean you should.

Techniques for Getting Out of It

There are no quick fixes for burnout; no magic pills that can be taken, and no medical procedures that will make it go away immediately. It's a condition that's developed over a period of time, and one that will take a period of time to get over.

That isn't to say that there can't be some relief from the symptoms while you're trying to address the larger issues that lead you to burnout in the first place. There are things that you can do quickly to make the symptoms disappear; however, they are temporary solutions. They are much like a cough drop. They help alleviate the symptom of a cold, but they don't do anything to help make you well.

The first thing you can do when managing burnout is to admit it. Because every form of stress contributes to burnout, even the stress of admitting that you're feeling burnt out or not adds to the problem. By communicating that you feel like you're burnt out, you have relieved at least one stress factor from your life.

One of the next things to do is look for efficiencies that you can pick up in the things that you're doing. If you watch the local news each night for half an hour, for instance, you might consider saving a bit of time by going to their web site each day and spending 5–10 minutes reading the headlines. You could spend 5 minutes on a weather site getting the weather forecast, or even better yet set your Internet home page to one that offers customized weather.

This, as with most suggestions, can be a double-edged sword. First you're changing your routine, so you may feel a little uncomfortable, and second it may take time to settle into the changes. The first few days of trying to get your news from the web may actually take you longer than the 30 minutes you would take to watch the evening news. Admittedly you are much more likely to enjoy the time, and might think that it's more rewarding because you're getting news that is truly interesting to you, and in most cases you're getting it much faster than you would if you were sitting down to watch the evening news.

Another way to pick up efficiencies is to start to take advantage of all the little "scraps" of time that our lives are filled with. While you're waiting your turn for the bathroom in the morning, you can find activities that you would have to do anyway, but ones that you wouldn't normally tackle. If you're going to have to take the trash out one particular morning, and your spouse or family is going to be in the bathroom for a few minutes, for instance, throw on some sweats and take the trash out before you get ready for work.

If you have to "catch up" with employees or colleagues via telephone, do it while driving. Take your headset with you, dial up the person you need to speak to, and start driving. While driving, you'll have the opportunity to get something done that you want or need to do. The standard caution about not discussing anything that will take your attention away from the road applies here.

If necessary carry a notepad with you when you go to pick your children up from school, or when you go to meet a colleague for lunch. Take the few minutes you have there and organize the rest of your day, or do some thinking about the tasks you have to get done. Anything that you can do with these little scraps of time will help you get back on track.

Do not start being obsessive about utilizing every moment of time. If you need a few minutes of peaceful meditation, do that. If you just need to "veg" out for a few minutes, you can do that too. Do, however, try to be conscious about the time you spend.

The next thing to do is determine what is truly important, and what is truly urgent in your life, and focus on those things that are both urgent and important. Although this might seem like an oversimplification, it's not. One of the core things about getting out of being burned out is getting "more time." Although some of this can be done by the techniques above — essentially making how you use the time that you do have more efficient — in most cases this won't be enough to break free from burnout.

Making decisions about what is truly important to you is a difficult thing. It's a set of decisions that I never like to approach, but one ultimately that I must face every few years or so. I love to learn. It's one of the things that I enjoy most in life. I am somewhat particular about what I want to learn, but I would spend my whole life learning if I could. Although learning itself is important to me, I often take interest in learning things that are of little value to me.

For instance, I have my Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer Certification that I got on NT 4 about 4 years ago. I got it because I was supporting both Novell networks and Microsoft networks for my clients. Since that time, I've moved into doing more software development, project management, and technical leadership activities. At the end of this year, I will lose my MCSE Certification because Microsoft is requiring that everyone upgrade their skills to Windows 2000.

As much as I would like to learn Windows 2000 and study to pass the exams to keep my certification current, it's just not important enough to what I do anymore. I can't justify the hundreds of hours it would take to keep the certification valid. As a result, it becomes something that is not important enough to me.

Another example of something that I had to drop, years ago, is digital video. It was a lot of fun to capture video and manipulate it, adding fancy transitions, subtitles, and sliding graphics and outputting a video that looked professional. As much fun as it was, it took way, way too much time. The process of capturing a video stream might take two or three times to get right. The process of laying out the tracks, adding all the effects, and preparing the sequence would add hours on top of that. And finally I'd have to let the computer process for what would seem to be endless hours only to have many more hours facing me if I needed to change anything that I had done.

For every minute of video I was producing, I was spending 10 or 20 minutes developing, and it just wasn't worth the effort to me to get the results I was getting. Sure it was still "fun" at some level, but it wasn't something that was fun enough for my investment in time.

A final example is one that I decided was too important to give up. I have earned my private pilot's license and am currently working on getting my instrument rating, which will hone my skills in using the aircraft's equipment to navigate. Although this is certainly a time-consuming and expensive process, it's something that helps me to feel better about myself because I consider it to be professional development, and something that I can honestly say that not many people do. Fewer than 1% of the U.S. citizens have a pilot's license, many less keep it current.

So despite the 2–3 hour per week investment, I continue to go to further my learning of how to fly safely, because it's important to me. Not in terms of paying the bills, but in terms of my being able to feel proud about the things that I am doing, and in terms of knowing that I'm striving to better myself and learn something new.

The reason for making the distinction earlier between urgent and important is because we often get the two confused. When someone comes in and asks us whether we can go help them for a moment, we are often inclined to go help. However, what we're reacting to may or may not be important. All we can say for sure is that it's urgent. There's some argument that helping others is important to you, so that makes it important. But that's more of a rationalization than it is a reason.

As you approach your day, and you get distracted by the phone ringing, remember that the phone ringing is definitely urgent, but not necessarily important. You can, if you choose, let the phone ring. If it's important, they will leave a message, and you will be able to deal with it later.

If you feel like you've tried these suggestions and you're slipping deeper into burnout, seek professional help. Again, don't worry about what people will think of you. Think about as if you have a broken arm that you're going to a trained professional to fix. Besides you don't have to tell anyone whom you don't want to tell.

Error! Bookmark not defined.Managing Your Ego

The more that I live my life, the more I recognize success is driven more by internal factors than the motions that you make in the world. Great leaders don't become great leaders by their dedication to their work, or their particular skill. They become great leaders because they have an inner confidence that enables them to face the challenges that others cannot face.

Some call the undercurrent that runs through this section "inner game" — in other words, the games we play on the inside. Others call it confidence. Still others call it self-esteem. No matter what you call it, there's a certain magic to how you feel about yourself, and your purpose.

I invite you to take a look deep inside yourself to understand what drives you and what makes you feel good. I invite you to explore the space that exists between your ears, and to become comfortable with it. Ultimately, how you manage your thoughts and how you react to the world around you will change your success in life, not just technical publishing, more than any skill or technique discussed here.

Confidence, Not Arrogance

Many years ago, I was approached by someone whom I had met only a few times and was asked of my potential interest in a job. Although the group that we were at had specific rules about not recruiting, he was interested enough in the conversations that we had been having in the group, that he wanted to pursue the idea of my coming to work for him.

During the course of that conversation, I asked why he was so interested, because I felt like my skills in the AS/400 arena were not complete by any stretch of the imagination. (His consulting organization specialized in AS/400 software and support.) The answer I got was that I was "confident." He openly admitted that some with whom he had spoken thought I was "arrogant." His assessment differed, I believe, because he was more confident and comfortable with himself than were the people to whom he had been speaking.

As we began to talk on this point, I came to an interesting realization. There is a fine line between confidence and arrogance and, more importantly, that line is placed different places by different people. What one person sees as arrogance, another may see as confidence.

Confidence is being self assured — knowing that eventually you will succeed. Arrogance is feeling self-important – feeling that you are better than others are. The rub of this is that many people don't feel like they have what it takes to succeed. They feel like they will continue to live their lives without having any great success or great failure. To those people, it's very possible to perceive someone who is confident that they will have great success as someone who is being arrogant.

The reason why the distinction between confidence and arrogance is so important is that confident people are trusted and respected. Arrogant people annoy the people around them. Portraying confidence can help others feel more comfortable with you. If they feel like you're being arrogant, however, you'll do much more harm than having said nothing at all.

My suggestion for how you should think about confidence and arrogance is to believe that you will succeed because you are committed to your success. However, do not believe that no one else will be capable of the same success as you. History has proven over and over that after someone has done something once, others will follow.

I also suggest that if someone compliments you that you accept the comment graciously and respond with a statement that lets the person know that you know that you're not the only one who could have done such

a thing. For instance, "Rob, your class was the best class I've ever had" might garner a response such as, "Thank you, however, I don't think that I did any better than anyone else could have done with the same topic." Of course you have to be sincere, but if you can say this and can be sincere, you shouldn't have any problem with your confidence or most people perceiving it as arrogance.

Accepting Criticism

For many authors, the hardest thing is dealing with the criticism. You get criticism from the Copy Editor, the Development Editor, and the Technical Editor. Some of the criticism is neatly hidden in questions, some of it is point blank telling you you're wrong, and still other criticism comes in the form of carefully worded comments.

One of the challenges is to convince yourself that the criticism is constructive. That is, the criticism is given for the purposes of improving, not just complaining. Although it's easy to reason through the process and understand that the goal of all the edits by all the parties involved with a book project is to improve the material, it's all too easy to get wrapped up in the comments and want to strike out.

The first step in accepting criticism is to decide what of the criticism you're going to accept. In other words, how much weight do you want to give the criticism. This is going to be based on a number of factors. First, what you feel the intent of the source was — that is, whether the intent was to help you become better or just tear you down. Second, how much you trust the source. Unfortunately in the case of technical publishing, you rarely know the source of the criticism to identify whether you should value the person's criticism. The third and final consideration is the nature of the comment itself. Although the intent may be to help write better material, a comment that is clearly a personal attack may not be something that you want to put a lot of stock in.

Ultimately the key to accepting criticism is evaluating it. The trick is in not becoming immediately defensive. This might be difficult to do, particularly if you begin to feel that you're getting good at writing. However, I beg you to remember that everything takes practice, and none of us is perfect. I still get tons of criticism on my writing, after 10 years. Some of it is valid. Some of it is even insightful. The rest of the criticism is of less value. If you remember that criticism is to be expected, you should be able to accept criticism when it comes.

Learning Patience

One of my favorite ways to describe my patience is that "I can get impatient waiting on minute rice in a microwave." Although that may not be true today, it's certainly how I feel some days. Patience is not one of the gifts that God blessed me with. It's something that I have to work on.

People who have drive, who want to do new things, who want to adventure into uncharted territories are generally people who are quite driven. Driven people are people who most often have trouble with patience. Because they have a "fire in their belly" to get things done, they expect, incorrectly, that the rest of the world will too.

The reason that you have to learn patience in publishing is because there are a lot of hands involved in the process, each one with their step to complete, and each one adds time before you'll get feedback (criticism) and before you'll see the completed product. For instance, the typical time between seeing the last of the material to when the book is printed and available for distribution is four weeks. That's a long time to wait on something you've spent so much time on.

My best suggestion for learning patience is keep yourself busy. Maybe on the next book project, or maybe on something totally different. You'll find that the busier you are, the less time you'll have to think about things not being done by other people. Even if the work that you create for yourself is artificial, it will help you to keep from thinking about it.

Problems and Resolutions

Problems are inevitable. Solutions are necessary. Most people think of prevention when we talk about problems. They don't want to be the source (or a part) of a problem in the publishing process. Although this is a good first step in making the process as smooth as possible, it's not the only answer.

No one should try to create problems; however, sometimes working through problems strengthens the approval of an individual. We all realize that we're going to have problems. The people we want to work with are the people who will solve those problems.

This section identifies common problems in the publishing process and looks at ways to resolve them (or at least minimize their effect).

Schedule Slippage

Essentially the development of each book is its own project. It has a start date, and end date, resources, and deliverables. As a result, book projects suffer from the same problems at any other project might run into. Schedule and cost overruns are unfortunately all too common in project management, and in book development.

Two basic problems can occur to a schedule. The first is a production problem. The resources for the project aren't able to complete the work in the amount of time they have been given. This is almost universally that the author can't write to the schedule to which he agreed.

The other type of schedule slippage is a schedule conflict — in other words, when a resource is needed, it is unavailable. The best example of this is that the author finishes writing the book and goes on vacation — when he should be doing author review. This has the potential to throw the whole book off schedule until the resource is available again. I've been personally involved in two situations where the author(s) left for a two-week vacation after finishing the writing portion of his work.

Being Proactive

The best way to handle schedule problems is to be proactive. There's a tendency when you're in the middle of a project to ignore the fact that you're a day or so late on the first deadline, and a little more, perhaps two days late, on the second deadline, and so on. Because the deadlines aren't missed by much, we tend to think that we'll be able to catch up.

Unfortunately, it's more likely that we'll get more and more off track because our estimates for the amount of time that it will take to complete the material are off. The problem gets larger and larger the longer it's ignored.

Like the author who plans a vacation without talking to the Acquisitions Editor, and springs it on them a week before going on leave, ignoring small deadline slips can mean an unwelcome surprise.

The biggest part of being proactive is communicating. By communicating you allow for plans to be changed in an ordered way, rather than the knee-jerk reactions that tend to happen if you allow things to progress until they are a big problem.

As soon as you start to realize there will be a problem, or start to plan things that might cause problems for the schedule of the book, take the time to communicate your concerns with your Acquisitions Editor. It might be that it's not time to act yet, but at least the problems won't be a surprise.

Getting and Organizing Help

When there are schedule problems, the biggest difficulty that most authors face is understanding how their role will change. When the schedule starts to slip, and if the end dates must stay the same, additional

resources will be added to the project. The author's goal should be to organize these resources so that they are effective in helping the author meet his goals.

This means that the author has to turn over detailed outlines to the authors brought in to take on a few chapters. It means selecting the chapters to keep that the author feels most comfortable with, and feels like they can write the quickest. In some cases it might mean turning over author review to someone else so that the original author can focus on more writing.

Whatever the decision, it's important that the author realize that he is now coordinating a symphony more than playing a single instrument. When playing a single instrument, it's possible to make good music without much planning or organization. When playing an instrument, you can pick up the instrument and start playing. When you're orchestrating a larger group of people, however, you have to spend more time preparing things to make them work.

One caution should be noted: It will necessarily take more resources to complete a book when more are added at the last minute; however, the goal should be to minimize the increase in effort. When the effort to add another person becomes greater than the effort to do the work that the person would do, it's time to quit adding people and just get the job done.

Problems with the Team

If someone were writing a recipe for disaster in interpersonal relations, it might read something like . . . "Ingredients: Several unfamiliar but passionate people. Tight deadlines. Limited communications channels." Unfortunately that's what we have when publishing a book. We have people who don't know each other, and haven't learned to trust each other.

We also generally have tight deadlines. Most technical publishing is tied to the technologies that are constantly changing. Some publishers want books written in less than a month. Others let you sleep and call it two months.

Finally, most of the communication that you do with the team will be done via email, which is notorious for not being personal, making it hard to build rapport. This is in no small way caused by the lack of intonations that the human voice contains, and the lack of those in email. Although some communication is handled via telephone calls, particularly between the Acquisitions Editor and the author, this is rarely the case with the other members of the team.

Tempers will flare. Feelings will be hurt. Authority will be questioned. It might not happen on every project, but it does happen on quite a few. Be ready for it. Try to understand and expect it.

This section is intended to help you understand the pressures being exerted on each member of the team in hopes that it will make working with them easier.

Understanding Intent

Earlier when discussing accepting criticism, the point was made that you need to understand the source of the criticism's intent. In the case of the team working with you on a book project, their intent is to make a good product — one that makes you all proud. Their feeling of pride in their work is tied to the idea that they created something good.

The unfortunate side effect of having the intent to create something good is that not everyone agrees on what "good" is. When you're working with the team and are struggling to understand why they are being difficult, ask yourself what their definition of a good final product is. Once you think you know, ask them what it really is that they think will be a good product. Ask them why they feel like they do. You'll often be able to locate the source of the problem. Sometimes it's something easy to clarify and agree on. Other times just knowing exactly "where they are coming from" will help make working with them easier.

In one recent project I was writing about various operating systems, including Linux. My Technical Editor was a big Linux fan. At some point in the book, I made a few comments about how the fact that Linux didn't have service packs was a huge disadvantage. My Tech Editor violently disagreed. Patches meant you could apply whatever you needed when you needed it. My argument that it took longer and was more complicated to apply individual patches was met with an argument about it not taking too much longer.

I then laid out for him an image of 1,000 servers, and updating 1,000 servers every time a new patch came out. All of a sudden, my view that having a simplified service pack that can be automatically installed with few worries became quite valid.

He and I could have argued for decades about who was right. However, the goal was to produce a book that accurately represented the viewpoint of the administrator who was dealing with multiple servers every day. When we both shared a single vision of how that person would approach the problem of patches, the issues about whether I was being fair to Linux slowly disappeared.

Understanding the Pressures

A favorite motivational saying seems to be "pressure makes diamonds." My response to this kind of thinking is "rarely." Although pressure is a good thing, a necessary thing, it often leads to things, and people, breaking. Whereas some pressures might be obvious when you think about it, others might not be things that you're even aware of.

All of us understand the desire to keep our jobs. Even if you're planning on making authoring a full-time job, there certainly was a time in your life when you worked for someone else, and a time when you were afraid for your job.

From time to time, the publishing market goes through a cycle of layoffs. Although some of the people whom you work with are able to tolerate this quite well, others get quite rattled by the fact that their friend lost their job due to layoffs, and they wonder whether they will be next.

Then there are those things that you'll probably never hear about. They are having a difficult time in their personal life and they feel pressured to just "keep things together" at work, so they don't feel like they are a complete failure. Or the conversations with their boss that amounts to "shape up or ship out." There's a classic story about understanding that I want to relate here, because it's a classic example of how unseen pressures can impact a situation, and how they can explain some inexplicable behavior.

A man was riding a train in New York city and when the train stopped for the first time another man and four children got on. For the next several stops, the man sat quietly as the children got more and more loud and bothersome to the other passengers. The first man watched as the children knocked some papers out of a businessman's hands, and was amazed that their father wasn't controlling them. Finally the first man leaned over to the second and said, "Sir, why don't you control your children? They are bothering the other passengers."

The man picked his head out of his hands and said, "Oh, yea. I guess you're right. I didn't notice. You see we just left the funeral home. Their mother died, and I'm just not sure what to do."

Things will rarely be this extreme; however, the point is the same. Try to take a moment and understand that there may be things going on that you might not be aware of, that might completely change your opinion of the situation.

Part 3: Promoting and Using Your Work

Most people are exhausted at the end of their first book project. No mater how prepared you are when you start a book project, the process of writing it is much more than you bargained for. The last thing that most people want to do is look for more work to make the book a success.

Unfortunately, there's more work to be done, if you're up for it. The job of marketing a book is something that almost has to be done by the author himself. Although it's possible for a publisher to promote your book through advertising, ultimately the thing that is going to convince a reader to buy your book over another isn't advertising, it's a glimpse of your experience and talent.

Before we start with the things that you can do, let's set the correct expectation with regard to the publisher's work to promote your book.

The Publisher's Marketing

If you were to sneak a peek at the publisher's marketing budget, you might feel like you're in hog heaven. Literally hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent each year promoting books. Unfortunately, there are many, many books across which those dollars must be spent. The end result is that there may be little or no money to promote your book.

Suppose for a moment that there is money available to promote your book. How is it that the publisher's marketing department will even know about your book out of the hundreds of books that the publisher will publish in any given year? The answer is, they won't. The solution is to call and tell them. That said, calls from your Acquisitions Editor to the marketing department, or calls from you to the marketing department, are often treated as more of an annoyance than a help.

Most of the marketing that the publisher will do will go to buy spots in the book retailers. There will be the occasional ad in a magazine, and even some web banner ads to pull readers into the publisher's web site.

Very little of the marketing that is done by the publisher is done for a specific book. Most of the marketing is done for the publisher's brand, or a series, or to help establish the publisher's presence in a market.

Why Promotion Is Your Job

So by now I've hopefully convinced you that the chances that your book will be marketed directly by the publisher are pretty slim. What I haven't talked about yet is why you're a better promoter for your material than any amount of marketing that they can do.

For a moment, think about how a few books can really make a difference. You must first account for your advance; but after that, each book starts generating money. Even if the royalties don't give you much per book, any book sold is money in your pocket. In other words, even the little things add up.

"Grass-roots" marketing, or marketing through friends and associates, generally starts out small. It won't cause a huge impact in your sales initially, but it will help; and if your book isn't on a technology that is rapidly changing, the impact of grass-roots marketing can be non-trivial. You're the only one who can get a grass-roots campaign started.

The following sections discuss ways to get grass-roots marketing, and marketing that's more likely to increase your book sales.

Teach a Class

Authors have an instant credibility in the minds of most readers, a credibility that they may lose if they write poorly, or if their material isn't targeted correctly. However, it's something that authors start with in the mind of the reader. The same instant credibility is given to instructors.

Whether you're an instructor at a one-day seminar, or you teach at the local community college, being an instructor will establish your position of credibility in the minds of your students. You can use that credibility to increase the sales of your book in two ways.

The first way is to offer to sign copies of your book that the students purchase and bring to you. For most students, this will be a unique novelty. They will be able to tell their friends and family that they know an author, and will be able to show off your signature in the book. I'm sure that you know someone who's quite proud that he has a distant cousin who knows someone who knows someone important. Don't discount people's need to feel important — and their desire to become important by knowing someone important.

The second way that you can use this to your advantage is to mention that there are other topics that you are interested in and have written on. If you've done a good job of instructing them through the class, you might find that they are interested in looking into more of the things that you have done.

One word of caution, however, is that you should expose your students to your publishing work lightly. Respond to a question from class. Mention that you are an author in your introduction to the class — not at the end of every class. Your goal is to make them aware that you have written, not overwhelm them with it.

Maybe you're thinking that you don't need to worry about your students because they won't mean enough sales. However, the effect that these students can have in the local market can't be understated. Your students will tell their friends and colleagues, they will tell their friends and colleagues, and the numbers will become real.

Write More

For most people, the last thing they want to do after writing a long book is write more. Being exhausted with writing is a normal thing, but it's something that you might want to combat. Writing other things, even more books, can help the sales of the book you've just finished.

Write Another Book

In the Internet age in which we live, writing more books means that people will be able to find your name on one of the online booksellers and look at everything that you've written. The more books you write, the more likely it is that the reader will look your name up and find one of the other books that you've done.

If you keep it up, you'll start to build name recognition, beyond just their ability to look your name up. As they scan the bookshelves at the local bookstore, they'll begin to want to pick up your book based on the simple fact that it has your name on it. They'll give it extra consideration they wouldn't normally give it. Although you can't expect that your second book will start to add name recognition, it's certainly something you can keep working on.

Writing Web and Magazine Articles on Similar Topics

If you're burned out on writing, there may be a more palatable alternative to writing another book. Writing for periodicals (magazines) and web sites enables you to write much less material and get a higher return, in terms of the number of people that see your name and the number of people who learn that you've written your book.

Writing for magazines or web sites is very high-return work. As noted earlier, it's generally very high pay with minimal involvement, but it's often difficult to get right away. After your first book, however, things change. Suddenly you have credibility that you didn't have before. It's credibility as a writer, and as a subject-matter expert.

The best kind of article to write is one that is closely related to the book's topic, or even part of what is covered in a chapter of the book. This is the best kind of article to write because those who read the article are probably interested in the subject and therefore will probably have an interest in your book. Don't forget to mention the book in your signature.

Given that the topic is similar to the topic of your book, you might be wondering whether you can excerpt part of your book and use it for an article. Generally speaking, the answer is yes. Most publishers recognize that magazine articles are good advertising, and will help the book's sales. The publishers are frequently offering a chapter of the book online as a sample now, so they view a magazine article very similarly. It's a way for potential readers to see your writing and your command of the subject. The magazine or web site pays for the distribution. It's almost perfect.

The negative is that you will find that excerpting from your book will be harder to do than it seems. The first key to this is that most chapters are longer than a typical magazine article, so the material will have to be condensed. The second key to this problem is that when writing a book, your can build upon knowledge that you've conveyed to the reader in previous chapters. Because you don't have this luxury when writing an article, you'll need to rework some material so that it briefly covers any background material that the reader needs to know. As a result of the additional background, your article is likely to get even longer.

The topic you choose will have to be a small one. This will more than likely be a small part, or section, within a chapter. If you're searching for the perfect topic, look for something that you covered on fewer than four pages and something that is particularly exciting in the market today. Find something that the web site or magazine will have readers clamoring for.

Getting Reviewed

One of the other details that you should plan on handling yourself is getting the book reviewed. Although the marketing departments within the publisher will routinely send out copies of your book to magazines and web site that they think are appropriate, they often are ignored because they send out so many books.

However, you can get the book looked at. First, locate publications and web sites that you think might be interested in doing a review of your book. Then send them personal emails to find out whether they have any interest in doing a review. The personal emails will often garner a response when a mass email won't get a response, or even interest.

You'll spend a few dollars and several of your author copies of the book getting copies of the book to the reviewers, but you'll be rewarded with reviews of your book, which will drive awareness of it. The first step to sales, to increasing the sales of your book, is to make your audience aware of it.

Involvement

The final component to your publishing success is staying involved with the industry, with the technologies that you have written about. This is due in part to the anticipation of revision of your book, and the skills you'll need to update it, and partially so that you can continue to look for other ideas.

Local/Regional Users Groups

Perhaps the best place to get differing views on technologies, and where things are headed, is to attend your local users group(s). These groups are generally not-for-profit organizations that are supported through user fees and uncompensated donation of time from its board of directors. Most users groups are happy to have involvement from their members and encourage people to run for board positions.

This is a great place to meet people with diverse backgrounds who are solving problems with the very technology or technologies that you are writing about. They are also a good "thermometer" to determine what level of interest the topics that you want to write about will get in the market. Although asking a few people whether they would be interested in your next project isn't a scientific prediction of how well your book will do, it will help you "get a feel" for how much interest there is.

Your Web Site

If you have a web site, you should put up a page or a section to support your writing efforts and if possible get your publisher to link their page for the book to it. By putting a page, or section, on your web site to support your writing, you're indicating your desire to support the endeavor.

If you have some web programming skills, you might even put together a forum for the readers of the book to talk about the topics that you discussed, or talk about things that weren't covered in the book. This will give you a great foundation for any revisions that you need to make to the book, and might give you ideas for another book that the market needs.

As with searches done on the online retailers, having a spot for all your publishing will help readers find other topics you've written about. Readers are funny in that they will often buy books by authors that they have read before and liked; so whatever you can do to make the reader feel more comfortable will help.

Respond to Reader Comments

Readers are funny. On the one hand, readers don't expect to get a response from an author because the author is some sort of a minor celebrity. On the other hand, they often expect an answer to their question(s), even when posed to the author. There's a tendency to ignore reader comments and questions, either because you're busy or because you feel like the reader should have understood something if they had read the article, or the book that you've written.

If you look at anyone's life today, you're more likely than not to say that they are too busy. We've become a society of people who are constantly busy. However, that's no excuse for not getting back to readers who ask questions or post comments. I'm not advocating a four-hour response time to reader questions or comments; however, I am advocating that you take some time, within a week of receiving a message, to acknowledge the message.

If you can, respond immediately. If not immediately, make certain that your answer is accurate and thorough, even great, when you do respond. The courtesy of letting the readers know that you have received their questions and will respond when you can is normally enough for most people. They most likely have a busy life too and understand that you might not have the time to respond immediately.

When possible, respond to readers with references to your writings, using links for articles that are posted online if you need to. The goal here is twofold. First, you want to address the reader's concern as quickly as possible without investing a huge amount of time. Second, you want to reinforce your credibility.

Monitor Online Retailers

For an author, online retailers are both a blessing and a curse. They are a blessing in that they enable you to receive feedback on your book from real readers, rather than just reviewers. This is a blessing in that it allows you to get some positive feedback about the book that you've worked so hard on.

It's a curse because you'll get to see the negative comments too — often ones that don't make any sense. For instance, one of my most recent titles was on CompTIA's Server+ certification. One reviewer blasted me for not enough detail on the "core" concepts of the exam. He cited, incorrectly, the number of pages discussing SCSI connectivity. Initially I was very frustrated by this because all the content was there. However, a little research on the competitive titles showed that the same person had stated the one real competitive title had way too much detail. I've learned that it doesn't take any special work to have an opinion, and all it takes to write a review is an opinion.

Your work in monitoring the online retailer is twofold. First, you're again looking for new opportunities and holes in the material for the revision. Second, you're looking for opportunities to allay reader concerns online. You might be able to allay concerns that relate to the book's lack of a CD or other considerations that can be simply solved.

Like it or not, the rating that a book gets will influence its sales. It's your job to do what you can to maintain a positive "spin" about your book — without accosting those who publish reviews.

Summary

Technical publishing can be a very rewarding experience, one that you'll "be able to tell your grandchildren about." However, it's also a process that requires a lot of understanding and hard work.

This eBook has discussed ways to become involved with the publishing process, and some techniques for surviving it. Although the information covered is certainly not exhaustive, it's a good foundation from which to build your technical publishing career.