

Write a How-To First by Patricia L. Fry

Are you eager to write a novel, a memoir or a children's book, but you are intimidated by the enormity of the task? If you've done your research, you know that publishing is a daunting undertaking. And there are no guarantees that your book will be successful.

Countless people become authors without knowing the ropes. And many of them fail.

That's why I suggest to clients and SPAWN members that they start by publishing a sure thing. A *sure thing* in publishing, you scoff? Absolutely. Produce a how-to book or booklet on a topic that you know well. Self-publish it and distribute it through familiar channels.

Let's say that you grow kitchen herbs. First, do some research to see if there is a need for a pamphlet or booklet on how to grow a kitchen garden, how to cook with herbs, simple medicinal products you can mix at home or 10 crafts you can make using lavender.

Maybe you have small children. You could put together a booklet featuring rainy day activities for kids, local day trips for families or teaching tips for keeping your kids minds sharp during the summer break.

If you raise goats, respond to letters to Santa, collect vintage clothing, love to ride roller coasters, have patented an item, love gardening, have a disabled child, work with the blind or rescue injured birds, you have information that others don't have and possibly need or want. Producing a pamphlet or booklet is an excellent way to share your knowledge while learning the publishing ropes.

What if you don't have a particular skill, talent or area of interest? Choose a subject you'd like to know more about, do the research, conduct interviews and write about it. I've written about numerous topics in which I didn't have vast experience, including chain letters, journal-keeping, long-distance grandparenting, intuition, scrapbooking, therapeutic gardening and how to work with an irate customer, for example.

Once you've chosen your subject for your booklet, determine whether or not you have an audience and outlets. In the case of a booklet on herbs, perhaps you belong to an organization related to herbs, have a Web site featuring herbs, produce a newsletter for herb enthusiasts and love to visit other herb groups when you travel. Plan to use these means to promote and sell your booklet.

Promotional opportunities for the rainy day activities booklet might include a point of purchase display at local toy stores and children's shops. You could

design and write a column for a new regional parenting magazine. Obtain a mailing list of young parents and offer your booklet through mail order.

Your 20-50-page booklet could become a home-grown product with you doing the cover design, page layout, printing and assembly, for example. Or pay a local business center to print and saddle-stitch the book.

While no two projects are the same, the publishing experience will provide you with the skills and tools you need for future projects. And it will give you the confidence to proceed with the book of your dreams.

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