

# What do I do special as a writing coach?

I just woke up to a question/discussion on LinkedIn's Promocave:

Carrie Golden, Citizen Journalist/Poetry Consultant to filmmakers at Motionpoems, Inc., asked:

*Writing coach...*

*Not sure if this group [Promocave] is the right place to post this question but...what exactly does a writing coach do to help writers?*

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I wear two hats (on one head): (1) **"court-of-last-resort" editor**, providing a last-chance no-nonsense review of what the writer is about to submit (the final final draft) for book publication and (2) a **first-step writing coach** (before much writing). So here was my contribution to the discussion that defines my view of what different do I offer as a writing coach—and why.

*[As a writing coach] I think of myself as a nonfiction "what" coach. I prod the souls [rather deeply] through six or so what's (?), then the "how's" make sense (and cents). I'm there if they need me later, more as an action guide and (sometimes) a silent co-planner of their future empire.*

**Here's a longer explanation of (2)**, if you are interested and it helps you (*sans me*) do your own early nonfiction book planning, writing, and publishing.

There's not much mystery about the steps a nonfiction writer can and usually takes to prep and submit a book for

publication. See a hundred books in libraries worldwide that address that, and I have two books that address it too: [How to Get Your Book Published in Minutes and Marketed Worldwide in Days](#) and [How to Pick the Right Kind of Publisher](#).

What distresses me most is the number of smart, organized, diligent would-be book writers who wander about, with perfectly good words and spelling, looking for something to say and, mostly, a reason to say it. Bewildered souls with hundreds of pages (at least it reads that way) of “what’s that?” copy that has no clear (or any) purpose (or buyers) presented in sweet-reading, grammatically correct prose. Their command of English is strong. (It’s worse if it’s not.) What’s missing is their grasp of elementary common sense about what a book must do to become a book...

The saddest thing is how easily that could have been prevented if they hadn’t been in such a damn hurry to see themselves and their brilliance in print (everywhere), with assumedly a fat advance almost in hand and many years of fatter royalties following assuredly behind.

**About six questions** will create the structure and map, plus point the writer to the most likely reader, why they would read it, what they would do with it, and how they just saved themselves about 75% in misdirected (or undirected) research, “what’s that?” writing, and the one thing they can’t get back, wasted time. Of course each question leads to deeper, related sub-questions which, in turn, lead to a dozen related books written (or waiting for you to write) that, combined with speaking, consulting, focus book series, perhaps audiobooks, and so on, can rather quickly create an empire based on their acquired expertise (which began with book one and is further proven and strengthened in subsequent products.)

So I guess that really makes me a **pre-writing and empire-building coach** (if being an emperor or empress is your thing).

That's the longer overview of what my kind of writing coach does. (Most of the others start when the writing itself appears. Bless them.)

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

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## How to make your friends smile gratefully all day long...

If this were addressed to you, how would you feel if it arrived unexpectedly in your email box ?

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This year (2016), I've decided to send one email each day thanking someone who has enriched my life.

It could be someone who is close to me, like a family member or a friend.

It could be someone I have only met once or perhaps admired from afar.

It could be someone I have known for a long time or only momentarily.

**TODAY YOU ARE THAT PERSON.  
I APPRECIATE YOUR BEING IN MY LIFE.**

Allen

*P.S. Please know that there is no hierarchy here. In the past few days, your name and who you are in the world came to mind. When that happened I realized that I wanted to honor and thank you for enriching my life.*

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My reaction was delight and total surprise. So rarely is unsought, free kindness sent our way! If you want to use this model or concept, just do it. Change the names, of course. There are no copyrights or restrictions at all.

If your curiosity is stirred, here's a pinch of background. Allen Klein and I are veteran writers/speakers who have met, mostly in passing at presentations, for years. He's very funny and has written many books that I have enjoyed and shared, so I was indeed honored—and quite surprised—when it arrived. The next day it occurred to me that others may want to say the same or something similar to those they know. So I emailed Allen, thanked him for the thoughtfulness, and asked if my sharing the idea with others would be okay. His reply, almost immediate, was “Yes, please *do* share it. Imagine if we all did this! What a great world this would be.”

**So now it's in your hands to use as or if you wish!**

(Allen Klein's most recent book is *You Can't Ruin My Day*. See more at [humor@allenklein.com](mailto:humor@allenklein.com).)

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

[www.gordonburgett.com](http://www.gordonburgett.com)

Name(required)   
Email(required)   
Website   
Comment(required)  
Submit

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## **The most important / most profitable reason to self-publish**

I enjoy and learn a lot from Bob Bly's frequent missives. (See [www.bly.com](http://www.bly.com)). We sort of walk and work the same side of the street regarding professional writing and publishing, and we both agree on the importance of strategizing first, then following up with processes that work.

So the other day when Bob offered five reasons or situations where self-publishing should seriously be considered, I found myself nodding and uttered an aging "yep" at every point.

Alas, I had an extra "yep" unuttered, so I thought it fair in this blog to add number six to the list. We agree that self-publishing (1) can be a means of getting your words in print, (2) it will let you can control your tome's contents and design, (3) if you can market well, by self-publishing you can sidestep the big-house foot-dragging, (4) when your book is complementary to your greater purpose of displaying your expertise (as, for example, using your book to secure related speaking engagements), or (5) when self-publishing is the best (and perhaps only) way to get your words and ideas past the older, established houses so potential readers and buyers have a chance to see and decide about the merits of your

independent offering.

The missing reason—the unuttered “yep”—for me trumps the other five. I think that **self-publishing** and **niche publishing** are potentially the two halves of a **golden egg**.

In fact, they have walked hand in hand long before “open” publishing made it possible for any writer to ignore the major houses and see their work in print. Many did profitably self-publish long ago, like Dickens, Twain, and General Roberts (of *Roberts’ Rules of Order*). But when the focus swung from books for general markets (risky indeed) to tightly targeted or niche markets, and pre-testing (usually through direct mail testing) allowed the publisher to define the specific buyer demand, then self-publishing let the niche publisher create publications with finely honed titles tailored to pin-point targets. It became a potentially risk-free investment since the publisher would then be able to print the number of books needed to satisfy that predetermined need.

We’re not in disagreement here since Bob sells solid products about niche publishing and my [Niche Publishing—Publish Profitably Every Time](#) also extols (and explains) the “how’s” of niching and pre-testing. I simply wanted to remind my readers that niche publishing continues to be a lucrative path (I think *the* most lucrative) in the grove of self-publishing.

Incidentally, blogs being structured as they are, I probably have 40 or 50 related blogs about “niche publishing” hiding right behind these words for further perusal, if interested. Just type “niche” or “niche publishing” (no quote marks) in the SEARCH box above and Word Press will kindly stack them up for you to read. (Since in my mind niche publishing and **empire building** can be almost synonymous, you are invited to check “empire building” too!)

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

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# How can I make my self-published memoir a big seller?

It's doable but very hard. It takes a combination of good things, some not much in your control.

A starting definition is required: what is a "big seller"? Almost everybody will agree that if your book has "many, many thousands of sales; royalties in six-plus figures; a book-based movie, and spin-offs of book fame like Charlie Rose, the morning shows, and widespread name recognition, that's a big seller.

All of that can happen, despite the self-publishing (which too often is linked to poor production and artwork, weak marketing, little or no selling pre-prep, and reluctance by book distributors to keep the book in stock and sight).

Your book is most likely to break out big if you are well known or you say things that lots of book buyers want to read—and repeat to their friends. Those sales can be quickly magnified if the timing is right—the topic excites readers eager to know more about what you are saying. (I'm presuming your prose is tight, true, and flawlessly professional.)

I think I heard you say, "Fat chance! No way my message will hit the headlines—and what would Charlie Rose, or even Tokyo Rose, ask me even if they could find me?"

Yet there are self-publishers who define being a "big seller" differently, though they'd be happy to be "found" if the world started spinning in reverse. They have already sold a few

thousand copies, pushed through Kindle and CreateSpace. One suspects they are about as happy as they'd be if they'd won a Noble and Pulitzer Prize and Miss Spenser, the senior literature class teacher, had given them a posthumous "A." Their books are well written, to the point, and spotlessly proofed. But the covers aren't bookstore stuff: free artwork, Arial type, more cartoonish than befitting a true big-house tome.

They all did pretty much the same thing. They told stories, about themselves, their families, some friends. One book was sad. It was a true story. It was patched together with such gentleness and determination that it was hard to put down. A book you gave your spouse or your aunt even though none of you know the author. Or like your friend who told you to buy it—"you've got to read this."

The other two popped with humor. Both worked because the dialog sounded true—and was funny; it was how men, the key protagonists, talk—one book, three brothers and an older sister in a tense, disintegrating family all sliding apart on strings of love; the other, a loose tale of a not-so-good magician working the subway, the bus station, and a bewildering corporate bachelor party, realizing that the weaker his magic was, the funnier was his patter.

Those are also paths to "best sellerdom" for the unchosen. There are as many, or more, winning paths in non-fiction too. I suspect there are thousands of writers of wee books who are puffing with pride just having the best they can do available digitally or in paperback. They'd take the fame and chat with Charlie but in the meantime they can scarcely hide their smile when somebody whispers, "I read your book. It was great."

And what happens if only a handful of people buy or read your book. Don't brag too loudly about your fan club. There's no reason to say anything. Keep that book in your goods box to give your grandkids. You wrote and published a book. How many



others in your family are in print? Or your friends? You count.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

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## **Also use Nook Press to publish your own book—free!**

I've been selling my e-books through Nook Press for four years and it's a **good way to get your book posted for sale at Barnes and Noble**, which runs it. (Its platform was earlier known as Pubit!)

It's probably **the easiest free ebook press site to use**. (The others most used are Kindle and Smashwords.) Simply go to Nook Press.com and there are three choices: E-Book Publishing, Print Books, and Help Services. If you want to publish and sell your books through them, go to the first. If you just want them to print your books, the second, and if you need help putting the book together, the third.

Just follow the submission directions in the publishing section, (My book, [How to Get Your Book Published Free in Minutes and Marketed Worldwide in Days](#), will ease your march through the steps, if needed.)

There are usually **two perplexing areas** in the free publishing formats: (1) **who you can talk to**—actually talk to, or at least type to and have them immediately type an answer back, and (2) **how many copies have you sold**, when, and when will those royalties be paid.

(1) **Live assistance is great at Nook Press.** If you have questions it will tell you where to go and how to do it immediately.

(2) **Easy enough here too,** if you remember that you get paid 60 days after sale and you are paid for all of that month's total sales. For example, if you sold a book in March, you will be paid at the end of May. (They will send you an email telling you it is en route [to your bank account] at that time.) So if you sold \$42 worth (say six books) in March, you will be paid the \$42 at the end of May. Go to the SALES button and it will tell you the number of books sold the present month, how many were sold last month, and you can go down a list of previous months and it will tell you specifically which books were sold during those earlier 30-day periods. (There's also a graph on the SALES page telling the number of books sold each of the past six months.)

I need that by-the-month information (in our example, for April) because it tells me exactly which six books were bought that month. That's important to you if you have more than one ebook published by Nook Press. For me, I own a publishing company and I submit the books written by my five authors (see [www.meetingk-12needs.com](http://www.meetingk-12needs.com)), plus me. So I need to know which books by which authors (and the royalty for each) they are paying. That's so I can pass that royalty on to them.

That's it. **Consider adding Nook Press to your selling force.** If nothing more, it's another publisher in your growing in-print domain. **Your kids will shriek with delight.** So will your spouse when those additional royalties get heavy in your account!

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

P.S. If you want to **read other comments**, usually how-to, in the 400 or so blogs at this site about any of the "open

publishing” sites, go to the **SEARCH** box at the top, right, of the first page of this blog and type in the publisher’s name (one at a time). The blogs will be lined up for you to read! What are the other related publishing outlets you might want to know about? Try Nook, Kindle, Smashwords, BookBaby, Create Space, Amazon, Lightning Source, Lulu, Scribd, Blurb, iBooks, and Kobo.

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## **Multiply your book’s sales by turning your book into 6**

Here’s how that works.

Let’s say that you have written a book that is 240 body-copy pages long, excluding the front matter, table of contents, bio, and index.

Let’s also say that before you wrote the book you created an outline. That outline included an intro/explanation chapter, four systems chapters (each including a different concept and example), and a roll-out chapter that took the four concepts and told how they would work with other information dissemination means, either individually or by working together.

**That sounds kind of vague, doesn’t it?** Here’s an example that might be easier to envision. (I plan my books first, then write.) Its title is **How to Sell 75+ of Your Freelance Writing Almost All of the Time.**

While the book’s contents aren’t related to this blog, its Table of Contents below shows **where the six ebooks might come from.** It also shows how all of the book(s)—a major paperback

of 240+ pages and six ebooks, each from a chapter or section of that paperback—should multiply your total earning power with only about 50-75% more time spent in the ebooks' preparation, rather than 600% that six books might suggest.

Here's a tentative Table of Contents of my coming book:

## **How to Sell 75+ of Your Freelance Writing Almost All of the Time**

Introduction

1. Why just sell your writing (idea) once? Why not sell it again and again, then once more—and once again...?
2. Magazines and Newspapers: two magic systems with lots of sales in each
3. Books: sell the original in 11 different formats and each of those in six ebooks
4. Niche Publishing: where the gold is hiding in book publishing
5. Topic-spoking: one idea exploded, then filtered through the hungriest buyers
6. The roll-out: once the copy exists, why not make a lot more money from the idea by six other non-print information dissemination means?

It never happens that the 240 pages of your paperback's content are evenly divided into six equal sections of 40 pages each. But my first thought is six books of 40 pages each. (I call these shorties wee ebooks.)

Still, 40 pages to me seems small, and once the six topics are separated from each other and pulled apart, they could easily be expanded into 50 or 60 pages apiece (perhaps by adding an additional example or two in each book). It's your choice. You can make your wee ebooks as long as you want; they are your books and length isn't anti-environmental or anti-anything, as long as the copy and concepts are tight and professional.

You might take the six chapters in my book above, extract

each, and massage it into a stand-alone small book. **It can include** the same examples (or different ones) and **almost the same prose as the original book**. Just prune out links, references, and extraneous resources if they aren't about this specific topic. Refer to the big book a couple of times, where appropriate, just as you would other books or support data. Also, include information about the big book and all of the other five wee ebooks on a page or so in or near the resources in the back.

After all, you're publishing this wee ebook in part to direct its readers to good, related information and guidance in your big (or mother) book. So make its existence obvious, but don't overdo it. **The other reasons you are making it available are** that (1) it confines itself to a specific subject offered in an easy-to-use, inexpensive edition, (2) it puts more published books in your featherchest, which can be very important if you wish to display your expertise in the topic and to speak about it, (3) it pays you additional money for your having shared clear, usable information—without huge amounts of energy and for very little additional expense.

How might this multiply your earnings? You will promote the big book, so it will bring in an usual book's expected sales income. You can also promote the other five wee ebooks at the same time (since each book's title must be different or you will drive sellers and buyers nuts), and that will pick up more buyers. The two books will excite different clientele at different buy levels.

Let's say that you will sell your paperback at \$17.95 (also test \$19.95 and \$24.95). And that you will sell each of the six wee ebooks at \$3.99 each (though run it as a special now and then at \$2.99). And, as mentioned, you will also promote the other six books in each of these books. So, for example, if you sell the wee ebook about Magazine and Newspaper selling, its readers may also be interested in another wee ebook, say about Books. And if they see that they now have a

third (two slightly modified chapters) of the big book, they may well then buy the big book too—or recommend it to friends based on the solid content and writing quality of the wee books they have already read.

Another point: consider issuing the wee book as both an ebook and a paperback. Or test just one in both formats to see if there is more interest in having it in one form or the other. (In my field I find that writers usually want print-on-paper books rather than ebooks, so it would indeed be worth my testing both formats.)

And also that you will focus on the social media to promote the wee ebooks as much as the big book, plus of course list all of the books as widely as you can through the “open” publishers.

That’s it.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

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## **4 proven ways to sell 75%+ of your freelance writing**

### **MAGAZINES and NEWSPAPERS**

1. Here is the two-item formula for selling nonfiction copy to **magazines** and **newspapers**: (a) You sell more than 75% of your

freelance writing by writing *only* when you have better than a 50% chance of a sale, and (b) You have better than a 50% chance of a sale by either querying your prospective market, and writing *after* you receive a positive reply, or by writing to markets where you can simultaneously submit the same manuscript.

2. You can also increase your sales percentage and income by simultaneously selling **reprints** or **rewrites** of the published material—or **reprints of the rewrites**[[Reprints, Rewrites, Reprints of Rewrites, and Resales](#)].

3. **Fiction** is excluded from this 75% claim in magazines, newspapers, and books. Nonetheless, if points made on these pages seem appropriate to selling your fiction, try them, but know that the selling ratio in fiction is very low.

4. The most important tool for selling to magazines is the **query letter**. [[25 Professional Query and Cover Letters](#)] You do not query to newspapers (except to their magazines); you need **cover letters** to sell to them. If you are selling to big-house book publishers, at least a query letter is required. If you are niche publishing and pre-testing, you will need a sales letter, a small note, and a prepaid response mailer.

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Items in **orange** are explained in far greater detail in blogs from [blog.gordonburgett.com](http://blog.gordonburgett.com). Go to the blog and insert the highlighted word in the search box, upper right, title page. Often the search will bring up many blogs related to the topic or word you seek. For example, if you are looking for more information about “query letter” (a good thing to know about) and you type “query letter” in the box, it will probably bring up a five or ten full blogs, one after the other. Please use all of the information that applies.)

Items in **magenta** are the subject(s) of related products. The product title is in brackets after the reference. There is

more information at [www.gordonburgett.com/order3.htm](http://www.gordonburgett.com/order3.htm).

For more assistance, see [www.gordonburgett.com](http://www.gordonburgett.com) and [glburgett@aol.com](mailto:glburgett@aol.com).

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## NEWSPAPERS

5. Usually the copy (and accompanying photos) sold to newspapers will be about **travel** [[How to Sell 75% of Your Travel Writing](#)], editorial commentary, food, reviews, and (very rarely) **columns**. That's about all newspapers buy from freelancers. Mostly they buy travel.

6. You are more likely to sell to newspapers (particularly in travel) if your piece is **short** (600-1500 words; 1200 words is a good target) rather than long (to about 3000 words). The longer feature articles are usually written by the **section editor**, or one from another publication.

7. You can **simultaneously submit** the same material (copy and photos) to newspapers (unless they tell you no) if they are not "**national**" newspapers—like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Newsday*, where you submit to them one at a time—or where the newspapers overlap in prime circulation (usually within 100 miles of each other), where you submit to *only one* newspaper at a time in the **circulation radius**.

8. Study others' in-print newspaper articles in your target selections and write (and punctuate) like the original writers did to get in print. Focus on the **topics** [[Finding Topics That Make Your Articles Indispensable](#)], conciseness, **quotes**, timeliness, length of paragraphs, and the **writing voice** of the articles. The voice means: first person, I; second person, you; third person, he/she/it. (You mostly write salable copy



in third person.)

9. Send your newspaper copy, ready to use, to the respective section editor with a cover note/page that tells the unique features in the copy, its timeliness, your **credits** (in a phrase: "I've sold 600 newspaper travel pieces"—don't lie, say nothing if it's nothing or very modest), any exceptional photos, how to get back to you—email and phone, and that you are marketing simultaneously (no nationals; to you solely within a 100-mile radius). If you are sending to a national newspaper, submit to one at a time (until bought). To national newspapers (or those few that insist), you are selling **first rights** to them only.

10. If you have the respective section editor's newspaper email address, send your submission digitally—the **cover note/page, text, and sample photos** or link to a sample photo page. If you don't, snail mail your submission to that editor, and include an SASE (stamped, self-address envelope). If that editor replies by email, you then have their email address. Remember to write out the full address to the photo links.

11. Assuming your **salable photos** are .jpegs, in your cover note (a) offer to send them if they want to review them, but you can briefly describe one or two extraordinary shot(s) in the note, (b) include a b/w or color page with samples of the best 6 or so with the note, or (c) post the best you have, very best first, on a cloud or website page where they can link and peruse. Let them pluck what they want to use and pay as the piece and art are published.

12. There is no firm **photo submission protocol**, so use the publication's guidelines—or common sense. (Sometimes the guidelines are listed in *Google*—or the editor will tell you if you ask.) Let the editors decide if they will use the shot(s) in b/w or color. With the camera, seek clarity, get bright colors, focus on key items you wrote about. Remember, in newspapers, particularly for shorter submissions, the text is

what they buy. (They might buy photo-first if you have an original shot of Napoleon—or something like that, or older.)

13. Newspapers pay from about \$100-225 for short items, \$200-500 for longer pieces. They pay after the submission is published. For photos, it may range from \$35-150. But some may pay less for the items above and some of the larger newspapers will pay more. You have no bargaining power here but if you sell often to the same newspaper, the editor sometimes increases the pay as your value to them increases.

14. **Do you see how selling simultaneously to newspapers lifts you well above the 75%+ goal?** If you send a sharp article to six cities all distant from each other and four buy it (some with photos), you have sold the article 400%! It's hard to top that sales ratio. What a shame that the articles themselves don't pay much more...

## MAGAZINES

15. Magazines do pay more. You usually know their **pay range** (several hundred to a thousand dollars and up) and the **size articles** they seek because most of the magazines that you will write for are found in the current-year **Writer's Market** (in print or online version). That and a ton more information is explained in **WM**, so you should have that source accessible where you write. Also, if you check *Writer's Digest Magazine* (in the library) it lists new markets every month—and updates current listings.

16. To get on the 75% magazine path find an idea you want to write about, then create a **feasibility study**. Think of the study as two boxes next to each other, both sharing the same idea. In one box you answer, "Is this topic feasible to write for X magazine?" In box two you answer "Is it feasible to sell

an article about this topic?" If it's a "yes" to both, you will write a query letter to the #1 market. (See "[How to Prepare and Market Magazine Articles That Sell.](#)") [[Travel Writer's Guide, ebook edition](#)]

17. There is no need for a feasibility study for newspaper direct submissions because you will know if it's feasible to write because you will, in fact, write it and send the prose to one or many markets simultaneously. And if it sells, that's your answer to the second box.

18. To answer box 1, see if and [where magazine articles appeared in print](#) about your topic. Find copies of those articles and study what they contain. (See "[How to Study a Printed Magazine Article.](#)") [[Travel Writer's Guide, ebook edition](#)] You will likely need updated information, new quotes, or new examples to add to the information already in print. See if you have or can get access to that new information. If nothing has been in print, study the topic and list what readers would want to read about it. This should take several hours, not weeks or years. If you have a strong sense that if you queried an editor about that topic knowing what you can provide that he/she would say "yes, then move on to box 2.

19. "Who would buy an article about this topic?" is the focus of box 2. See the many categories of publications in the [WM](#) table of contents and list those where your topic might appeal to its readers. Let's say there are six such categories; list all of them. Then go to the listed publications in each category and write down the magazine titles in that category where you think the reader's interest would be greatest. Let's say there are two magazines in each category, so you would end up with 12 possible magazines to query before you write.

20. Because you can only query one magazine at a time from your 12 possible candidates, you must [prioritize](#) the 12. Put the most likely first and the least likely last, and sort the rest in between. What criteria do you use to prioritize the

list?

21. If you want to top a 75% sales plateau, then when the editors of those magazines pay for articles is the most important criterion. So put all of those that “pay on acceptance” (this information is in the WM) at the top of the list. Paid freelancers only query editors who pay on acceptance since that means if they accept your manuscript, you will be paid right away or within a month (when they churn that month’s checks). The other editors “pay on publication,” which means your finished manuscript (and photos) will sit in that editor’s “to use” pile until it fits, and then you will be paid after it sees print, which means another additional 60 days to get your reward. Even worse, those that pay on publication usually pay less, and a rare few forget to pay at all.

22. So once you know when your 12 possible markets pay, list the pay on acceptance publications on top (say six of them), with the remaining six that pay on publication on the bottom. Now ask the second question, “How much do they pay?” The highest payer of the first six candidates goes to the top of the list, the lowest payer is #6. (Don’t worry about the last six on the list right now.)

23. There are two more criteria that could move your target markets up or down. One asks, “What percent of freelance material do they buy?” The other, “How many issues do they publish a year?” Clearly, you’d rather be considered by an editor that uses 95% freelance copy than, say, 5%. The same with a magazine that comes out weekly rather than annually—it buys 52 times more copy! Resort the top six into their most desirable order—for you.

24. Now you are ready to query. You will write a full-page letter asking the editor of the top magazine on your prioritized list if she would be interested in an article about \_\_\_\_\_. (The query letter will make the topic jump with

excitement and the editor jump with hope to get your writing genius on her pages.) If, in truth, the editor says “yes, let me see it,” that’s almost as good as putting the money in your bank because the “go-ahead (and write it)” is given seriously, with the expectation that you will provide ready-to-go copy that fits in the slot saved for you. But if the editor says “no,” however kindly, you will move to #2 on your list, read its write-up in the *WM*, and send its editor a query letter (often adjusted some to meet that new readership’s needs). You keep moving down the top six until you are out of “pay on acceptance” rejecters.

25. Why not just continue down the list of publication editors for this new article? It’s not worth the time for the risk involved. You will sell your reprints (or reprints of rewrites) to the bottom six. That’s what they often, sometimes only, buy. Better yet, you can sell reprints (or second rights) simultaneously as long as you tell the others that yours is a **second rights** sale.

26. A couple more points. Let’s say the first “acceptance” editor wants your article. Have you lost the buying potential of markets 2-6? No, just approach the topic from another slant or create another article idea from that topic, and query about that possible article. In other words, you can **rewrite that first topic** and query letter and start it down the selling ladder to those “pay on acceptance” editors that are still uncontacted. And what if you do that all six times and all six editors buy their own unique articles? Bingo, you just sold the same stretched idea 600%, rather than 75%. (And you’re still not done because each of those six articles can be sold as reprints of the rewrites! Heavens, you may get rich with just five or six different, fecund ideas!

27. But we are getting the cart in front of the horses. All we have done is have a kindly editor say that he/she wants to see our article—**on speculation**, which means, no obligation. So we still have to write one or many excellent articles that the

editor(s) must embrace, buy, and use. Still, a “go-ahead” from most editors means a sale as long as you provide (in the article) what you promised by the date agreed, and perhaps also with the promised photos.

28.. Which means enough late-night oil, **interviews**, **facts** found and verified, **anecdotes** generously inserted—whatever is needed to make the article hum in print. It also means close scrutiny of the target magazine to see what that editor wants on his/her pages before you write. Thus, if this query-led system is followed, **almost all magazine articles suggested and written will be sold** since you will not write them without a prior “go-ahead.” And with the reprint and rewrite fall-back sales, you should be **far ahead of your 75% goal**.

## **BOOKS**

29. It used to be that selling any percent of your freelance writing through book publishing was as likely as having your books come out of a cloud. Guess what? Now it’s simple to publish 100% of your freelance book writing—you can just do it yourself. And it can sit in a cloud to sell once it’s written and prepped. Who knew?

30. Less than a decade back the chances of the Big 8 or 5 or whatever the number was of the big-house publishing firms picking up a random freelance book was like 1:1000. Even with agents or even with a solid writing reputation. Then you sent query letters with attachments.. You may as well have been sending pick-up laundry chits.

31. These days it’s hard to figure any strong case for going first to the big houses (which simply aren’t so big anymore nor are they so appealing). They pay poorly, it can take months or years for the book to appear, and their bookstore

allure has faded as the bookstores themselves have disappeared. It's kind of upside down now. **Freelancers publish the book themselves** [[How to Get Your Book Published in Minutes and Marketed Worldwide in Days](#)] and they earn a fast and decent return. Then if it smells of success the big houses will get in line to pay for the product—and often all the additional products that writer/publisher can create. So why would a freelancer go back to the earlier days when a big-house sale meant a meager royalty, poor sales, payment a couple of times a year, and no control?

32. If we are talking sheer percentages, you write a book that others want to buy; get it **proofread**; hire artwork and covers and some selling postcards; **get the book designed**; print some in-house stock to sell directly; save the final copy in .pdf, and send it to **Create Space** and **LSI** to get it **POD** printed and sold commercially through their giant selling machines, like **Amazon** and **Ingram**. In the meantime, you convert the original text into .epub, modify the covers a bit, and you create an ebook to sell yourself, at **Kindle**, Nook, Kobo, **Smashwords**, and elsewhere. And all the while you worm your way into the social media world to churn up some fan interest.

33. There are two ways to sell 75%+ in the regular book world now. The new open publishing world I described in 29-32. And you can do it the old way too. You sell the book to the big houses or other publishers pretty much the old way: you send queries and packages and proposals, alone or agent-aided, and you don't write the final book until you are contract-protected, then you wait for the book to appear. **That's a 75%+ approach**. Hard to imagine 25% of the publishers wouldn't honor your contract.

34. But here's the problem, even if you freelance and produce one book and you have another produced by an established publisher under contract (which is 75%+ twice), there's no guarantee that any of that will make enough money to keep you fed, much less famous and prospering. So despite the fact that



you bat 100% selling the copy that you create, and you do it many times with paperback and digital versions, all sold by **six different publishers** (plus you), most of the self-published general market books don't make much money. They don't even do much to imprint a perception of your expertise. Stir in platform-building, branding, You-Tube, Facebook, and all the rest and can still be a big disappointment.

## **NICHE (BOOK) PUBLISHING**

### **and EMPIRE-BUILDING**

35. Let me share the **best way to sell 100% of your freelance book writing** and make reliable money **while you simultaneously build an empire** that will feed, clothe, and support you very well for a long time. It can be built around your book or books—or you may not have to write much copy at all. You might use others' expertise and writing, plus your editing, managing, and publishing skills, as the core of his **niche publishing**. [Niche Publishing: Publish Profitably Every Time]

36. It's not the writing or publishing, per se, that distinguish niche publishing. It's the existence of a **niche**, or tightly-linked group of people, that share common needs, interests, and lifestyle. For example, Chicago Cubs fans are a long-suffering niche. So are dentists, Norwegian ancestors in Wisconsin, and meat cutters. The niche often has a vocation, hobby, focus of interest, ethnic bond, social communality (like octogenarians or octogenarians in Tulsa), an ailment or cure (like prostate cancer survivors), or membership (in the Moose or in almost any thing or group.)

37. This might be easier to envision by using an example. To keep it simple, let's use ultramarathoners, and let's make



that nationwide. And let me invent typical components of a niche and ascribe them to the poor sore-legged ultramarathoners (who share in common long-distance running, longer than a marathon, often 50-mile or 100-mile runs). They can be done by either sex and any age, though it's not likely they are teens or under or very rarely 65 or older.

38. What makes niche publishing profitable is that members of the niche and supporters about the niche topic can be easily contacted. Core ultras, let's say, are members of a national association (UOA, Ultramarathoners of America) and smaller associations in, say, 40 states (Minnesota UOA, etc.) The associations have a national convention, 18 have state conferences, and they informally gather at the dozen major races a year. They also have a national newsletter, office holders in the larger units, a **membership address list** (digital and standard direct mail) and a surprisingly large group of ultra aficionados and supporters who sell products and services (like special shoes, attire, diet and health additive programs, insurance, and much more. And as long as I am creating a model group, let's say there are 25,000 members and possibly 2,000 others who sell products and services to ultras, plus many thousands of marathoners who regularly show interest in expanding their own running challenge.

39. To show you what a niche published book might be like in this niched setting, let's say Bob has been an UOA member for 10 years—and, in vocation, he's a life-style nutritionist. Over the years he has created an ideal diet-supplement-training program that has been very enthusiastically used by a dozen of his local group members, plus it has become widely applied by marathoners in his region. Let's just call it the DST for Ultramarathoners (or DSTU).

40. Bob wants to write a book, sell it to ultras and marathoners nationwide (he calls it DSTM for marathoners), and he'd like to expand the book into **classes**, perhaps **podcast/video** components, a practice logbook and **workshops**,

speeches, and breakout sessions. He would also like to expand his product base to include distance-running shoes, attire, special caps, and related diet and supplement components.

41. His strategy is to create the book first, and in its distribution (and early promotion) he will quickly expand into making his video/podcast programs and logbooks available. From his niche book he will roll out his empire to include speaking widely once the book is printed and promoted, and from speaking spread into workshops and classes. As he creates his buyer contact base (mostly through free subscriptions to a bi-monthly ultra newsletter) he will promote his product base. His long-range goal is to expand these activities into the DSTM group, for marathoners nationwide (even perhaps worldwide).

42. An aside here. Bob in our example can both be the expert writing the key book that helps practitioners meet important needs or solve frustrations and then build his own empire from the expertise recognition that his book brings him. Or if Bob wants to create his own empire doing the other activities we've mentioned, including publishing the book, he can hire an expert to write the book (that Bob might also edit and distribute) that his new ultramarathoning publishing and product company can grow from. Thus Bob wouldn't really be using his running expertise—freeing any niche publisher to do the same about any topic. In fact, Bob could publish a string of ultra books using as many experts as members of his publishing family. How would the experts earn money? They would receive royalties (often 10% of the net received) plus they would get the speaking fees, and perhaps a special discount on their own books (or all the firm's ultra books) sold back-of-the-room at the programs. A last thought, he could run parallel publishing programs in the ultra and marathoning fields, allowing him to double or multiply his empire-building base while the experts create the core books.

43. But the most appealing element of a niche publishing book

is that it can be **pre-tested** (the format, price, contents, author, and **purpose**) on a sample list to guarantee its financial viability before any part of it is written or major production expenses are incurred. [[How to Test Your Niche \(Publishing\) Market First](#)]

44. Bob sees that the size of the ultra market (its contactable members) is 25,000, and that the three other ultra books have cost \$19.95, \$24.95, and \$49. He decides to conduct a direct mail pre-test with 210 Nth-selection addresses from the ultra association mailing list. He figures that the entire pre-test might cost him a maximum of \$700.

45. For the pre-test he needs a clean-looking **one-page information sheet** (with a reduced book cover on it) that includes the book's title, subtitle, table of contents, a small photo to accompany Bob's bio, an fact box (with ISBN, format [cloth bound], and the estimated number of pages and cost), and selling content copy that explains the book's purpose and its benefits to readers/users. He also prepares a **one-third page greeting note** and a **return postcard** with two key questions, each followed by yes or no: would the card receiver be interested in purchasing a book about... and if so, would he pay \$ X for the book. In this case X would be three different prices: 70 packets would have \$19.95 on their info sheet and on its mail-back postcard, 70 would say \$24.95, and 70 would say \$29.95). The postcards would be addressed back either to Bob or (better) the name of his new niche publishing firm (like Ultramarathoning Publishers of America). Bob would also prepare a #10 envelope for each packet, stamp them, and adhere the direct mail address to the outside of the packet.

46. So Bob mails all 210 packets and in 20 days he has almost all of the replies he will receive. By day 20 he has received the following responses from each of the three price levels sent 70 recipients: 13, 10, and 7. So the potential buy income would be, respectively: \$92,768, \$81,196, and \$74,875. (The calculating example in the 10-buyer case would be

$10/70=14.3\% \times \$24.95 \times 25,000 = \$81,196$ ).

47. The most profitable rate would be \$19.95 which would bring in \$92,768. Thus, if the preparation of the book and the mailing of the full 25,000 packets cost 50% of the gross income (here, \$92,768) this book would result in a profit of \$46,384.

48. It would be a modest empire with a kitty of \$40,000 or so. But remember that Bob intends to expand into classes, videos, logbooks, workshops and speeches, ultra accoutrement, and diet and health additive programs. Plus a **free digital newsletter** to control his customer list and for bi-monthly promotion.

49. But what isn't visible here is a huge market sitting right below the ultras: the U.S. marathon market, where indeed his book might apply as is or rewritten, and the other items should also be salable. How big is the marathon market? There were 541,000 finishers in US marathons in 2013 (despite the terror attack at the Boston Marathon). And the average entry cost is \$75, but trending up to \$100. A determined niche publisher might tooth on the ultramarathoners to test the market and response, then quickly back into the marathon world—and keep both going if there are common themes.

50. That's it. **How you can sell 75%+ of your freelance writing.** At least three systems (or four, depending on how you count them) that will keep you off the no-income paths and close to where money can be earned and multiplied by wordsmithing. All of this stuff works—if you do!

My best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

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# Where self-publishing and ebooks stand in late 2014

(1) “Ebooks have grown exponentially and reached a healthy balance by 11/14,” says **Mark Coker**, head of [Smashwords](#) in a no-nonsense delivery at [BAIPA](#) (Bay Area Independent Publishers Assn) on Nov. 8. Here is a much-abbreviated summary of Mark’s very enjoyable 10-point presentation. When Mark began Smashwords, about 8 years ago, ebooks accounted for .5% of the books published. **Today they are 35% of the U.S. total. But in the last year that growth has held steady at about 35%.** That may represent a rough new balance between bound books and ebooks in the future.

(2) **“The stigma of self-publishing is disappearing,”** Mark feels. It’s no longer a sign of failure, a last resort, or a desperate “inch from evil.” The growth was led by romance writers, with Amanda Hawkins the pivotal figure, who first cracked the million-copy ebook threshold. “It’s best for all publishers if there’s a healthy selection of traditional and self-published books available for choice.” But Coker assured the audience that the indies have the flexibility to outsell, outcompete, and underprice the big traditional producers.

(3) **Writers earn a much healthier bite of the royalties by indie publishing,** 60-80% of the list price, versus about 25% net royalties (12-17% of the price) of the traditional houses.

(4) **“The big (traditional houses) just don’t understand self-publishing.”** They couldn’t make money from writers, so they had to fleece them. They turned to vanity press, like Author Solutions (bought by Penguin), and then give bad, over-priced service to those they otherwise wouldn’t let publish at the

top level. "They should just abandon the vanity approach," say Coker.

(5) **The democratization of the publishing tools is what freed the indies** from having to use the overpriced, underpaid, and tortugian-produced big-press book process. Indies today have full access to presses, have much freer and faster promotion venues, can change prices in minutes, and can play with pre-ordering, free copies, two-for-one, and many more means to put their printed products in others' hands.

(6) **"Keep your eye on the ebook subscription services,"** Mark advised, "like [Oyster](#) and [Scribd](#) where anybody can pay \$10 or so to read any book in their catalog—and those book publishers with the catalog products are paid as if the whole book was sold if a small percentage is actually read. Amazon also has a form of this through Kindle Unlimited but the model isn't very friendly because you must give them exclusivity of use and Kindle pays a much smaller percentage from a pool, which seems to be about \$1.50 a read.

(7) Mark discussed **the new court decision between Amazon and Hachette**. The decision revolves around the agency model. Let me pass on this because the decision is so new that the dust hasn't cleared sufficiently to see who won, who lost, and how it will affect indies (like us). See future blogs here and elsewhere for emerging clarifications.

(8) **Ebooks are going mobile**. Lots of selling abroad. Apple iBooks sell 45% of their eproducts overseas.

(9) Mark got a laugh when he said that he had read that "self-publishing creates a tsunami of dreck." He agreed that lots of self-publishing books are mediocre in appearance but he felt, overall, **there is "more high quality content in books than ever before."**

(10) Yet selling books is getting harder. Now there's a glut of high quality print and it is harder to reach readers. Add

to that that the growth in books is outstripping the readership, and folks read less in part because of the many other was to learn and be entertained. There are fewer major publishers, fewer agents, and lower advances in the traditional arena. “But don’t despair: ebooks are immortal, they sit there waiting to be found forever. And **right now there has never been a better time to publish, when there are more world readers than ever before.**”

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I must remind blog readers about an overlooked element of self-publishing that largely circumvents the usual paths but uses all the now-available presses—and can be pre-tested for title, author, theme, price, and format before a word is written or a page published. That is the [niche field](#), which is **always begging for more tightly-focused books** and where the selling price is largely determined by how well the book answers one critical question or defines a new process (or an old process done in a new way). As many of you know, this is my area of specialization so let me send you to a list of [related products](#) that might help you explore this indie and traditional field.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett