

SPECIAL REPORT FROM:



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FIVE SECRETS TO WRITING A BESTSELLER

By Marji Ross

Over the past 30 years, I have worked in two industries: direct marketing and publishing. When I joined Regnery Publishing in 1999, I wondered what the former could possibly have to do with the latter. Turns out: a lot. In fact, I believe taking a direct marketing approach to book publishing is the key to Regnery's success – and it can be to yours as well. The five secrets below explain how to start doing just that. Apply these to everything you write, and you'll be amazed at how much more effective your writing will be. And maybe, just maybe, you'll turn that writing and these secrets into a bestselling book.

SECRET #1: START BY ASKING: WHO IS YOUR READER AND WHY DOES HE CARE? When prospective authors come to me, I usually start by asking “who is your target market?” And then I give them this hint: “It's for everyone” is never the right answer. No book is for everyone, and when you cast your net too wide, all the fish will swim through the holes. The most important factor in writing a successful book is to know your reader. Picture him or her in your head. Imagine him going through his day: where does he live, what does he do in his spare time, where does he work, what are his hobbies, what kind of car does he drive, what kind of food does he like, what does he like to do for fun, where does he get his news, information and advice? Of course, you don't know this as fact, but you can construct your ideal reader in your imagination. Now you have one more task: imagine why this reader will care about the subject of your book. Is it because you are bringing him valuable new information that will help him be more successful in his job? Are you warning him of some serious threat to his health or his family? Are you talking about a hobby or activity he loves? Or are you commiserating with him over a pet peeve or concern he has? Only once you are able to state clearly WHOM the book is written for and WHY that reader cares about what you have to say will you truly be able to craft a bestselling book.

SECRET #2: TALK THEIR LANGUAGE. You know how awkward it is when a Grandfather tries to “sound cool” to his teenage grandson? The very thought of it makes you wince, right? That's often the problem with books that fall flat with their readers. It's one thing to know your reader

– it’s another thing to speak their language. The easiest way to ensure you get this right, as an author, is to write for people just like you – after all, you know how to talk to you, you’re a native speaker in you-speak. But how do you sound natural and at ease when talking to that ideal reader (see #1 above) who is different from you? The simple answer is: get to know them. Spend time with them. Read what they read, watch what they watch, listen to what they listen to. Just as you won’t really learn a foreign language until you immerse yourself in that foreign country, so you have to immerse yourself in your target market. And this is something you can’t fake. One false note will undermine your entire message, and the reader will tune you out (well, honestly, they’ll just stop reading).

SECRET #3: UNDERSTAND CLEARLY WHAT PROBLEM YOU ARE SOLVING. I believe that all good nonfiction books solve a problem for their readers. Most people assume this really only applies to “how-to” or “self-help” books, but I disagree. In my experience, it’s a very useful exercise to articulate your book’s premise as a problem you are helping the reader solve. Sometimes, the reader’s problem is as simple as: *I love history and can’t find an entertaining story to read.* Other times, it’s more specific, such as: *I am trapped in a dead-end job and need help finding a job I love without losing my financial security.* But, no matter what the book’s subject matter, you as the author must be clear about the specific problem a book solves. If you don’t properly articulate the problem, you cannot possibly provide an appealing solution in a compelling way.

SECRET #4: ENTERTAINMENT BEATS EDUCATION. Or, more plainly put, “don’t be boring.” *Well, sure, you say, of course I don’t intend to be boring, but I’m talking about serious stuff here.* Understood. But regardless of your subject matter, every book needs an element of entertainment. So here’s how you do that: ask yourself why someone will *want* to read your book. Not why they *need* your book, but why they *want* your book. Because they are convinced they will be worse off without it? Because everyone they know is reading it? Because they want to solve a problem – and you offer the solution? Imagine a group of friends at a bar, all of them meeting your description of your target market. If one of them were holding your book, what would make the others want it? What could the person holding the book say to make his friends really want a copy for themselves? Build *that* into your book.

SECRET #5: MAKE THE READER THE HERO. This is not an original idea (actually, NONE of this is original, and I am grateful to the many smart and savvy marketers and business builders I have learned from over the years), so you may have heard this before, but it bears repeating: in the end, your book has to be focused on the reader, not the writer. The goal of the book is not to show how smart you are, it's to make your reader feel smart. So, when you build the architecture of your book, have in mind the journey your reader will take, and make sure at the end he feels smarter, safer, stronger, better equipped, better prepared, better off than when he set off on the journey to begin with.

BONUS SECRET: A Reading list. I mentioned that I have learned most of the above from great marketers and business builders – and you can too. Here are some of the most valuable books I've read on powerful and effective communication and branding:

- a. Building a Story Brand, Donald Miller
- b. Marketing to the Affluent, Thomas Stanley
- c. The Long Tail, Chris Anderson
- d. How to Argue and Win, Gerry Spence
- e. Platform, Mike Hyatt
- f. The Sticking Point Solution, Jay Abraham
- g. Good to Great, Jim Collins