



## *Guide to writing a non-fiction book proposal*

This document is a guide to what publishers want from you, the author, to determine whether your book is right for their list and how you might generate sales (yes, they expect you to do this too). Your proposal needs to provide information on the following points but it doesn't need to be a book in itself! The most important element is the marketing plan.

This guide is an amalgamation of advice I was given by my publishers and also from agents I have spoken to.

There is an interesting interview with a literary agent in my blog archive that helps you to see the world from the view of the recipient of your manuscript – and it is full of good advice:

<http://www.tinabettisonarchives.co.uk/2011/09/the-view-from-the-literary-agents-desk/>

Even if you are self-publishing, this is a really good process to go through to plan your publishing and marketing strategy for your book or other published materials. It can really help focus the mind and ensure you have covered all the bases for your published project.

Here you go... your proposal should include:

Title and sub title of the book (and edition, if applicable)

Authors: List author name(s) plus contact details.

**The idea:**

What is the subject and how will it grab the attention of readers?

Provide a one-line, 'in a nutshell' description of your book that could be used for promotion.

Then give an overview. Overviews should be written like the back jacket blurb on a book. It can be one to four pages long. Start with a jacket-blurb style paragraph. Explain the background and topic area of your book (how you got the idea etc.) and why there is a need within this topic for a new book. What is new and different about your book? Why is your book interesting, relevant and important? Stories and anecdotes make for an interesting read.

**The market:**

Who will buy the book? How large is the potential market for it? How many books can you estimate you can sell? Specify the readership of the book in your opinion, and why the audience listed would buy your book.

*Comparable/competitive books:*

Who else is writing on this subject? What are the strengths and weakness of these books and what will your book add to the subject? Which books complement your proposed book?

*Potential spin-offs:*

What other avenues exist for publishing your material?

**Your qualifications to write the book:**

What makes you the best author of this book? What is your experience in this field? How wide is your network in this area? How have you solved problems or helped others in this field?

Do you already have a 'platform' (i.e. web presence, public speaking, a 'following')?

Details of your career and present position, including principal positions you have held, both professional and academic are useful to include, especially if you are pitching to business or academic publishers.

## Author Marketing Plan

Most publishers can reach a national and international audience and achieve great on-line and retail distribution for your book. However, their publicity support is often limited and they expect to **work with you, not for you**, on driving people towards purchasing your book. Your marketing of your book to your audience is critical to the book's success. Agents and publishers look for a strong marketing and promotion plan as part of the proposal. Even if the book idea is good, it may still get dumped if the marketing plan is weak.

Publishers look for authors who have a pre-existing audience of people who know and respect their work, and are likely to buy their book. If your book is successful with your core audience, it can reach a much larger audience. Just as an example, some well known publishers won't even consider you if your mailing list is less than 5000 people.

Your proposal should include a 1-2 page marketing plan describing how you would help spread the word about the book, including but not limited to, the following areas.

- Public speaking - often the single most effective driver of book sales. If you do public speaking, training or workshops include a speaking schedule for approximately the coming 6 months or the prior 12 months, including the dates, speaking topic, audience, and estimated size. About how many people would you address over the course of a year?
- Seminar work with related societies/associations? Do you write for any related trade magazines/learned journals? Supply details where relevant.
- What email marketing would you do to promote the book? What is the size of your list?
- If your company/organization/society will help market the book, give details of the activities it would undertake. If you or your company would buy copies of the book to resell, use in promotions, or sell or give away to clients, is there some number you would be willing to commit to purchasing from the first print run?
- Attach any press clippings or samples of media attention you have received, or that are directly relevant to the topic of your book.
- If you have published other books or content in any format, what were the titles, price points and sales of your bestsellers? How did you market them?

- Include any other author marketing initiatives that will help drive sales of the book.  
Roughly how many books do you think your clients, audiences and customers would buy from bookstores/online/etc as a result of your marketing efforts during the first year of publication?

### **Endorsements/testimonials**

Include comments from any of your contacts/clients/notables who have successfully used the techniques/methodologies/tools that you propose to outline in the book.

### **Details of content**

Include a proposed table of contents and a list of chapters to illustrate how you will develop the idea of your book; give an overview of what each chapter will cover.

Discuss any case studies that might be used to illustrate the book. Bear in mind that if you intend your book to appeal to an international audience, international case studies will need to be used. You also need permission from the subjects of your case studies.

Give an idea of the length of your proposed book, the number of illustrations (line drawings, black and white photographs, screen dumps etc.) and the timeframe within which you expect to complete your final manuscript.

If you plan to use art or photography in the book, say so and be sure to have the permissions necessary to do so. If there are legal or copyright issues involved (such as use of imagery, use of quotes etc.) make this known to the publisher and ensure you gain the right permissions of usage.

### **Sample material**

A sample chapter (usually up to three chapters) convinces the publisher that the book achieves its objective and it is going to be interesting. The standard formatting is simple font such as Times Roman or Arial, double-spaced paragraphs\* and pages sequentially numbered.

\* This paragraph is double-spaced. If you aren't sure where to find the line spacing options, it is this button in MS

Word. Select 2.0 

*BIG DOs: make sure you have checked out the website of the publisher you are pitching to for their submissions policy and follow it to the letter. They have a submissions policy for a reason. If they ask for three sample chapters give them three, and only three. If they ask for a single page synopsis, condense yours to one page.*

*BIG DON'Ts: ignore the publisher's submissions policy and go your own way. They will just ignore all your hard work, no matter how good it is and your proposal will go in the pile marked 'bin'. Don't send a proposal full of typos; get it proof-read before you send it off.*

If you get as far as negotiating a contract with a publisher – well done!! You might want to have a read of my resource notes *Before You Sign That Contract Read This!* – I give you the low down on my experience of being a 'published' author and what to look out for.

For further guidance email me at [tina@tinabettison.com](mailto:tina@tinabettison.com) with your question. I give a free 30 minute chat and after that my guidance fee is £125/hour.

*I can guide you in:*

- **Your publishing strategy** – is a book, is it a plane? Deciding which publishing channels would be most appropriate for you and your audience.
- **Who is your reader?** Creating an avatar of the person you are talking with. Publishing in whatever form is a conversation between author and reader – who are you in conversation with?
- **The Marketing Plan** – so how are you going to reach your readers? What options are available, which are most suited to you? Which are the ones you will stick with and what might the publisher expect of you that you will have to get comfortable with? The best marketing plan is a simple one that you will be able to execute so we focus on that.
- **Finding your voice.** More than likely you are not saying anything particularly new, but you are saying it with a different voice, which your reader is yearning to hear. Your avatar, let's call her Freya, needs to hear it from you, in your voice because it resonates for her, it's her voice too. She hears you and feels you by her side where others just don't reach her, or they bore her, or they patronise her or they are just too straight-forward or too airy fairy. So finding your voice is key.

- **Finding your flow** is about doing it your way, but doing it nevertheless. Every author has a different way of working. Some will be up at 5am and put in 2 hours before breakfast, everyday without exception. Others will be night birds. Some have a strict schedule, some use specific processes. Your flow will be quite different to my flow. Hence I do not have a specific programme or process for you to follow. I help you unearth the flow that works for you and then guide you to stick with it until the work is done.
- **Reviewing the contract** – when the day comes, it is all too easy to get very excited and sign all the rights away. Before you sign anything, I'll go through the contract with you and give guidance on what questions to ask.

Welcome to your publishing journey!

*Tina x*

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Published books:

100 Ways for a Horse to Train its Human (Hodder & Stoughton) \*

100 Ways to Love with a Horse Addict (Hodder & Stoughton)

100 Ways a Horse is Better than a Man (Hodder & Stoughton) \*

Rookies Guide to Social Media (Marshall Cavendish)

\* Amazon Bestsellers of their own making – i.e. I didn't do a big marketing push to get them ranked no 1 for 24 hrs. They hold this slot most years, not all the time, but especially around Christmas.

Self Published:

The Fizz Kit – a self-coaching guide for horse riders

Bombproof Your Human – a horse's guide to training the confident rider